

In Quest of Full Citizenship
George Beavers Interviewed by Ranford B. Hopkins

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None.

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Biographical Summary

Personal History:

Born: October 30, 1891, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Education: Los Angeles High School, Los Angeles, California; attended extension division classes of the University of California, Los Angeles, and continuing education classes at the University of Southern California.

Spouses: Willie Mae Hutcherson: married 1911, deceased 1931; Lola Lillian Cunningham: married 1936.

Business History:

Superintendent, American Mutual Benefit Association, 1922-25.

Co-organizer and vice-president/director of agencies, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1925-45.

Chairman of the board, chairman of executive and agency committees, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1945-51.

Chairman of the board and treasurer, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1951-56.

Chairman of the board, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1956-65.

Chairman emeritus and member of the board of directors, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1965-80.

Chairman emeritus, director emeritus and co-founder, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1980 to the present.

Organizations and Affiliations:

National Insurance Association, vice-president, 1931-32; president, 1962-63.

Allied Organization Against Discrimination in National Defense, president, 1942.

Citizens' Committee on Crime and Police Brutality in the Negro Community, chairman, 1947.

Los Angeles Housing Authority Commission, 1946-62; acting vice-chairman, 1952-53; chairman, 1953-62.

Urban League home building and finance committee, chairman, 1951.

Freedom Fund Campaign, national advisory committee, 1957.

Los Angeles Town Hall, board of governors, 1964-67.

Other Affiliations:

All Nations Foundation, board of trustees.

Attorney General's Advisory Council, State of California.

Avalon Community Center (president for two years).

Commission on Equal Opportunities in Education, State of California, chairman.

Community Health Association (treasurer for two years).

Community Welfare Federation of Los Angeles, budget committee.

Cosmopolitan Golf Club.

District Attorney's Advisory Council.

First African Methodist Episcopal Church, choir.

Foundation for Promotion of Equality in Professional Goals, president.

Goodwill Industries of Southern California, board of governors.

Grand Jurors Association of Los Angeles County.

Holman Methodist Church, member and past chairman of board of trustees.

Chicago Round Table of Commerce, interim committee.

Los Angeles Area War Chest, board of directors.

Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations, advisory committee.

Los Angeles Family Welfare Association, board of directors and secretary-treasurer.

Los Angeles Metropolitan Welfare Council, board of directors.

Los Angeles Metropolitan Young Men's Christian Association, board of directors.

Los Angeles Rams Fan Club, charter member; served two terms on board of directors.

Los Angeles Urban League, board of directors, for two three-year terms; president for three years.

Mayor's Citizens Committee to Study Zoological Problems.

Mayor's Committee on Major League Baseball.

Men of Tomorrow.

Merchants and Manufacturers, employee practices committee.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, life member; served two terms as member of life membership committee; guaranteed financial security of the Los Angeles branch for ten years.

National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, board of governors, two years.

National Conference of Christians and Jews, member of board and vice-chairman of the Southern California region.

National Housing Conference, board of directors.

People's Independent Church of Christ, chairman of trustee board, six years.

People's Independent Church of Christ, clerk, fifteen years.

People's Independent Church of Christ, choir.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity.

Republican Community Advisory Committee.

Twenty-eighth Street Young Men's Christian Association, board of directors.

United Negro College Fund, national vice-chairman.

United Republican Finance Committee.

United Services Organization, Inc., Los Angeles area, board of directors.

Urban League, board of directors, three years.

Welfare Federation of Los Angeles, board of governors.

Honors, Awards of Merit, and Citations:

Certificate of Appreciation from Franklin D. Roosevelt, president of the United States, in recognition of patriotic services rendered in aiding the administration of the Selective Service and Training Act, 1943.

Certificate of Merit from Harry S. Truman, president of the United States, for service in connection with the Reemployment Program, 1946.

First African Methodist Episcopal Church Certificate of Merit, in recognition of achievements in the interest and welfare of the community and unselfish devotion to religious, civic, and cultural advance of our city, state, and nation, 1946.

Carver Citation Award, for outstanding service in business development of community, 1948.

Crusade for Freedom Citation, for effective and unselfish service in Southern California, 1951.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Social Action Achievement Award, in recognition of meritorious service in the field of social action and civil rights, 1951.

Outstanding Service Award from Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations, in recognition of devoted effort and distinguished achievements dedicated to the advance of democracy and improvement of human relations, 1951.

Community Chest, Women's Gold Feather Award Division, 1953.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Human Relations Award, 1954.

Red Feather Plaque, Community Chest Award, for outstanding citizenship, 1955.

Rheingold Civic Award, "in recognition of tireless and unselfish devotion to his community," 1955.

George Washington Carver Memorial Institute's Gold Award, for outstanding contributions to betterment of race relations and human welfare, 1960.

Award of Merit for Community Welfare Service Planning Council, Los Angeles Region, 1962.

Recognition Award, National Insurance Association, for outstanding service as president, 1963.

Appreciation Award, from field representatives of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1966.

Appreciation Award, from home office employees of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1966.

West Los Angeles Branch, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Scroll of Honor Award, 1966.

Resolution of Commendation for Public Service, from Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles County, 1966.

Holman Methodist Church Award, for effective service and leadership, 1966.

Resolution of Commendation for Outstanding Community Service, from the Los Angeles City Council, 1968.

Human Relations Award, from city of Los Angeles, 1971.

Pioneer Award, from Los Angeles chapter, National Association of Media Women, Inc., 1974.

Interview History

Interviewer:

Ranford B. Hopkins, assistant editor/interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., M.A., History, University of California, Santa Barbara. Ph.D. candidate, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara; current research entitled, "Leadership and the Growth of the Afro-American Community of Los Angeles, 1900-1965"; interviewer was born, raised, and has resided in Los Angeles for twenty-two years.

Time and Setting of Interview:

Place: George A. Beavers's home in Los Angeles.

Dates: April 29, May 4, May 11, June 1, June 12, June 22, July 1, July 8, July 27, 1982. An untranscribed video session was recorded August 8, 1982.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of hours recorded: Interviews took place in the early afternoon. Each session lasted about one hour; several were slightly

shorter and two sessions were slightly longer. A total of nine hours, forty-five minutes of conversation was recorded on audiotape, fifty-five minutes on video.

Persons present during interview: Beavers and Hopkins.

Conduct of Interview:

Hopkins reviewed Beavers's personal files, reports and documents at Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and articles on Beavers published in the Los Angeles Sentinel and the Los Angeles Times. Hopkins also contacted and talked with individuals who have worked with Beavers.

The interview followed a chronological outline. Hopkins posed questions that would yield both oral autobiography and documentation of the interviewee's status as a community leader. Particular attention was given to the history of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company and to Beavers's many services to the city of Los Angeles. Hopkins encouraged Beavers to speak freely about any subject he wished, and the interview contains at many points Beavers's personal opinions on racial discrimination, civil rights, education, the black power movement, and community institutions.

Editing:

Michael S. Balter edited the interview. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Beavers reviewed and approved the edited transcript. He made no corrections or additions. William E. Pajaud, vice-president-secretary and director of public relations, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, provided essential aid in verifying spellings and identities of the many persons mentioned in the course of the interview.

David P. Gist, editorial assistant, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and index.

Supporting Documents:

The original tape recordings of the interview, as well as the untranscribed video recording, are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

Table of Contents

- **TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (April 29, 1982)**
- Family background -- Memories of Atlanta -- Early impressions of Los Angeles: jobs, education, church -- Marriage -- Series of jobs -- Social life in church and Young Men's Christian Association -- Role in World War I -- Black hospitals and hospital integration -- The Great Migration.
- **TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (April 29, 1982)**
- Rapid growth of Los Angeles' black community -- Housing problems -- Racial discrimination in real estate -- Black movements for equality and justice -- A message for young people.
- **TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (May 4, 1982)**
- Social activities -- The Negro baseball league and its star players -- Founding of People's Independent Church of Christ -- Reverend Napoleon P. Gregg -- Church founders' community roles -- Real estate business open to blacks -- Young People's Lyceum of People's Independent Church -- Holman United Methodist Church -- Prominent blacks affiliated with churches.
- **TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (May 11, 1982)**
- Founding of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company -- Principal founders Norman Houston, William Nickerson and George A. Beavers -- Development of company through sale of "certificates of contribution" to community supporters -- California legislature doubles required number of applicants with premiums paid and financial guarantee fund in attempt to prevent creation of a black-owned insurance company -- Last minute fundraising -- Branching out to Oakland -- Learning the insurance business from William Nickerson -- Golden State's philosophy of business.
- **TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (May 11, 1982)**
- More on the company and Beavers's personal philosophy -- Breaking race barriers in competing white-owned companies -- Providing opportunities for young employees.
- **TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (June 1, 1982)**
- William Nickerson's founding principles -- Breakdown of responsibilities within Golden State -- Golden State's ties to churches -- Support from Assemblyman Fred Roberts -- Company expansion and redistribution of duties -- Beavers's civic activities and grand jury responsibilities -- National Negro Insurance Association -- Breaking race barriers.
- **TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (June 1, 1982)**
- Golden State's racial policies -- Golden State Minority Foundation -- William Nickerson's family background and experience with American Mutual Benefit Association -- Norman Houston: family and educational background, service in

World War I, early experience in insurance -- Golden State during the Depression era.

- **TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (June 12, 1982)**
- Strong bond between Golden State and black churches -- Golden State expands during Depression era -- Great Migration provides growing clientele -- Expansion to Chicago -- Cooperation between competing black-owned insurance companies -- Finding clientele during the Depression era -- Enormous growth in 1940s and 1950s -- Technology and modernization -- Beavers's priorities for the black community.
- **TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (June 22, 1982)**
- Policyholder and employee financial security -- Leadership opportunities -- Retirement plan -- Monarch Award -- Prominent women at Golden State -- Golden State's commendation system -- Commendations recognizing Beavers's accomplishments: selective service board, postwar reemployment programs, community affairs, Citizens' Committee on Crime and Police Brutality in the Negro Community.
- **TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (June 22, 1982)**
- More commendations: George Washington Carver Citation, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Award -- Founding of the fraternity -- Beavers's role in the Community Chest -- More human relations and community services awards -- Award from the Los Angeles Region Welfare Planning Council -- Beavers's election to presidency of National Insurance Association -- More community, church service, and human relations awards.
- **TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (July 1, 1982)**
- Los Angeles Housing Authority Commission: Beavers's service -- Controversy over public housing -- Implementation of public housing programs -- Other black commission members -- Function of commission -- Beavers's election as commission president -- Pressure from the House Un-American Activities Committee -- Sale of Chavez Ravine property to the Los Angeles Dodgers.
- **TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (July 1, 1982)**
- Mayor Norris Poulson -- More on Chavez Ravine -- Disagreements between Beavers and Mayor Sam Yorty -- Beavers's roles on Mayor's Committee on Major League Baseball and Mayor's Citizens Committee to Study Zoological Problems -- Geographical and political boundaries to Chavez Ravine -- Los Angeles County Redevelopment Association -- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): Beavers's involvement, reaction to arrest of Dr. H. Claude Hudson for sunbathing at the beach.
- **TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (July 8, 1982)**
- Young Men's Christian Association, importance to black community in east Los Angeles -- YMCA, an early sponsor of desegregation -- Beavers's involvement -- Los Angeles Urban League -- Skilled-labor job-training

programs -- Enlisting Hollywood community support -- Hollywood community makes the legal defense fund a major issue of the NAACP -- Relationship between the NAACP and the Urban League -- Beavers's perception of NAACP's function in the whole of society -- Churches'influence upon black, community and society.

- **TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (July 8, 1982)**
- Improved social conditions for blacks -- Black community organizations involved in civil rights -- Challenges facing the disadvantaged under the Reagan administration -- Beavers's political affiliation and voting history -- Republican party alienates blacks -- Black support shifts to Democratic party -- Necessary steps for progress of black community -- Los Angeles black community contrasted to those of other large cities -- Opportunities for blacks greater in the western United States -- Willie Mae Beavers's death -- Second marriage to Lola Lillian Cunningham.
- **TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side One (July 27, 1982)**
- Current status of Golden State -- Fellows in Life Insurance Management -- Coping with difficult economic conditions -- Preparing for future difficulties -- Beavers's association with Richard Nixon -- Distinction between politics and civil rights -- Nixon's attitude toward civil rights -- Ralph Bunche's association with Beavers -- Bunche's influence upon Beavers and upon society.
- **TAPE NUMBER: IX, Side Two (July 27, 1982)**
- Betty Hill -- Kenny Washington -- Opportunities for black athletes to improve themselves -- Jackie Robinson.

Contents

Copyright Law

Restrictions on this Interview

Literary Rights and Quotation

Biographical Summary

 Personal History:

 Business History:

 Organizations and Affiliations:

 Other Affiliations:

 Honors, Awards of Merit, and Citations:

Interview History

 Interviewer:

 Time and Setting of Interview:

 Conduct of Interview:

 Editing:

Supporting Documents:

Table of Contents

1. Tape Number: I, Side One (April 29, 1982)
2. Tape Number: I, Side Two (April 29, 1982)
3. Tape Number: II, Side One (May 4, 1982)
4. Tape Number: III, Side One (May 11, 1982)
5. Tape Number: III, Side Two (May 11, 1982)
6. Tape Number: IV, Side One (June 1, 1982)
7. Tape Number: IV, Side Two (June 1, 1982)
8. Tape Number: V, Side One (June 12, 1982)
9. Tape Number: VI, Side One (June 22, 1982)
10. Tape Number: VI, Side Two (June 22, 1982)
11. Tape Number: VII, Side One (July 1, 1982)
12. Tape Number: VII, Side Two (July 1, 1982)
13. Tape Number: VIII, Side One (July 8, 1982)
14. Tape Number: VIII, Side Two (July 8, 1982)
15. Tape Number: IX, Side One (July 27, 1982)
16. Tape Number: IX, Side Two (July 27, 1982)

Appendix A Index

1. Tape Number: I, Side One April 29, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, I'd like to begin by discussing the years prior to your coming to Los Angeles. When were you born?

Beavers

I was the first child born to George and Annie Beavers in Atlanta, Georgia, October 30, 1891. My early childhood days were spent in the city of my birth. My parents were-- Did you want--?

Hopkins

Yes, yes, their names.

Beavers

My parents were George A. Beavers, Sr., and Annie Beavers. They were very poor economically, but rich in spirit and Christian principles. My earliest recollection of my father's employment is of his job as a laborer in a wholesale grocery store, at a salary of one dollar per day. My mother supplemented the family income by doing laundry work for private families. In addition, they maintained a vegetable garden and raised chickens. We always had food, clothing, and housing. As far back as I can remember, my parents were devoted Christians and dedicated workers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In quest of full citizenship rights and better living conditions, they moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1903. At that time there were three children in the family, George Jr., Mary Elmyra, and Leroy. A fourth child, Helen, was born in Los Angeles. When we came to Los Angeles my parents immediately joined the First A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] church, which at that time was located on Azusa Street, but was soon to move to its new home, now remembered as historic Eighth [Street] and Towne Avenue.

Hopkins

Very good. What was your mother's maiden name?

Beavers

Andrews. Annie Andrews.

Hopkins

Do you have any recollections of Atlanta? Do you remember Atlanta at all, as to the kind of town it was?

Beavers

My recollections of Atlanta naturally are very limited, because I was only eleven years old when we came to Los Angeles. But I do remember going to elementary school up to the fourth grade. I went to school out in--well, I forget what section you call that, but it was right across from Spellman University--it was called the Old Roach Street School at the time. And we lived in a section called "Mechanicsville" on Humphreys Street. I have recollections of that, and also recollections of my attendance with my parents to the St. Paul's First A.M.E. Church. My parents were very active in that church, and I remember at the time Reverend-- I think his name was Joseph Flipper, he later

became a bishop. That might have to be checked. But also I remember that my father always took me to the--any big gathering where there was a discussion of conditions involving our race, and when there was noted speakers, bishops, and such characters as Booker T. Washington, and other leaders at the time. My father wanted me to get every benefit possible from hearing inspirational speakers and leaders. I remember also a very terrible race riot that resulted from some activities of a man. I don't remember his name now, but he killed some policemen in a little town called Pittsburgh, which was a suburb of Atlanta, and of course the excitement of the patrols going back and forth to the site of that incident made quite an impression. It was that type of thing that caused my parents to move to Los Angeles seeking to find better economic conditions, and better race relations.

Hopkins

Why Los Angeles? Why not Chicago or New York? Do you know why they chose Los Angeles over those eastern cities?

Beavers

Well, I can't say that I do, but possibly because of some friends they had who had come to Los Angeles. They had heard from them about the splendid conditions that existed at the time, and Los Angeles seemed to have been a new heaven to the people. Particularly our people, who are so burdened with problems from racial segregation and discrimination.

Hopkins

Now, Mr. Beavers, what were your impressions of Los Angeles when you came? I know you were maybe, what, eleven or twelve years old at that time. Did you have an impression that you remember?

Beavers

Oh, my impressions of course would be in the category of a child's impression there. I was glad to be with my parents and to note the changes that were taking place. In fact, I felt very grateful to my parents for their efforts and sacrifices to provide for the family, and to the best of their abilities, the necessities of life, education, and above all, good examples of Christian living, concern for others, and a strong desire to see racial segregation and

discrimination removed from American society. I recall that my first job I ever had was as a water boy for the Pacific Electric Railway Company. At the time the company was expanding its transportation system to serve nearby smaller cities and communities such as Whittier, Santa Ana, Long Beach and Santa Monica, and my father was employed by this company. And my first job was as a water boy for railway construction workers who were building the Pacific Electric Whittier line. It was during a school vacation period, and I was receiving as much salary per day as the daily wage previously paid to my father in Atlanta.

Hopkins

What did your father do for the railway in Los Angeles, at the Pacific Railway?

Beavers

Well, he was one of the workers on the-- He was employed to expand the Pacific Electric system that I referred to, and he worked for the Pacific Electric firm for a long time. But later his most permanent job was with the Santa Fe Railway company. He served in the building maintenance department at the head office in Los Angeles, and remained in the employment of this company until his retirement.

Hopkins

Do you remember when he retired? Approximately?

Beavers

Oh, I could look that date up for you. I don't remember it, I don't have any independent recollection of it at the moment.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, before we continue with the visit to Los Angeles, I would like to ask you: In Georgia, were your parents, did they hold positions in the A.M.E. Church?

Beavers

Oh, yes. My father had a position on the steward's board, the trustee board, and my mother was a stewardess, and active in women's clubs and that type of thing.

Hopkins

In relationship to the other children that you knew and played with, would you say that your family was wealthy, average, or poor?

Beavers

They were poor.

Hopkins

Poor. All right. Now your father, when he came to Los Angeles, he took a position-- Was the first position he had in Los Angeles with the Pacific Railway?

Beavers

Yes. Pacific Electric.

Hopkins

Pacific Electric. What kind of job did he have actually?

Beavers

As a laborer.

Hopkins

A laborer. Building tracks and so on?

Beavers

Yeah.

Hopkins

Were the work teams--the contractors, the laborers--were they-- Was it an integrated operation, or was it all black?

Beavers

No, it was integrated. There were not many blacks here at the time.

Hopkins

OK. I'd like to talk about your education while in Los Angeles a bit. I know last time you had told me that you attended elementary school here, I think?

Beavers

Um-hum.

Hopkins

Could you follow your education track here in Los Angeles?

Beavers

Well, after completing the elementary grade school I went to Los Angeles High School, and followed the example of my parents. I became involved in church work as a teenager. I was active in the Young People's Christian Endeavor Society at First A.M.E. Church. I succeeded Paul R. Williams as president of this organization. Paul and I became good friends and that friendship continued until his death. I guess you recall that he was famous as an architect, and he and I worked together in many religious and civic organizations. During my second year in high school I became engaged to marry Miss Willie Mae Hutcherson, one of my schoolmates. We planned to marry after completion of high school. Unfortunately, the next year her mother died, and we felt it necessary to advance the wedding date.

Hopkins

So, what year were you married?

Beavers

What year?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

1911.

Hopkins

Can you tell me something about your wife. What was her background?

Beavers

Well, as I said, she was one of my schoolmates, and she and I were married in a wedding ceremony at First A.M.E. Church. Our first home was next door to the residence of my parents on East Washington Street in--near Santa Fe Avenue. We were a very happy couple. Two years later we became the victims of a disastrous fire. At the time we had to rely on horse--drawn fire equipment. Needless to say, when the fire department arrived my parents' house, and well, both homes, my parents and ours, had been completely destroyed. We lost everything, including household goods, clothing, family pictures, and records that could not be replaced.

Hopkins

Boy. What caused the fire? Do you know?

Beavers

We don't know. Something, I guess something, I don't know whether it was electrical or what. We never did know the real cause of that fire.

Hopkins

Where was your wife born?

Beavers

She was born--the first wife--she was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

Hopkins

Did you know her in Atlanta before you came?

Beavers

No.

Hopkins

OK. Now, you stopped in school in your junior year, and you got married. Did you go to work once you were married?

Beavers

Oh, yes. I went to work, my-- I guess the first job at that time was a job at the-- it was called the German-American Bank, and it later became a part of the Security National Bank, which in turn has developed into the Security Pacific

National Bank, I think. And my job, well I was an elevator operator and then I was a stock clerk, and then a messenger. And it was during the War that I--the first World War that I left that job and went to work in Los Angeles Foundry and became a molder's helper.

Hopkins

Molder's helper?

Beavers

Molder's helper.

Hopkins

What's that? I don't know.

Beavers

Well, molding iron--hot iron--molding it into, at that time, molding it into equipment for defense industries.

Hopkins

I see. Was that segregated employment then or was it integrated?

Beavers

No. It was integrated. You have to understand that it was a very small Negro population in California at that time. And they couldn't follow the patterns of segregation as they, as had been done in the South, because there just were not enough black Americans here. So they-- That was to come later when they learned, learned from the South how to promote segregation.

Hopkins

OK, I'd like to come back to these war years, but we need to clarify a few points. The German-American Bank, why was it called German-American Bank? Did it have any relationship to German-Americans here or--

Beavers

Well, of course, I didn't know at the time why it was called the German-American Bank. I guess they-- Perhaps it might have been the ownership, and then it could have been the appeal for German patronage. I just don't know. I

never thought of that, as to why they named it that. But, I know they changed the name after [Adolf] Hitler and his escapades over in Germany, that World War.

Hopkins

So it changed later in the thirties then? It changed in the 1930's? The name?

Beavers

Oh, it was changed-- Well, it was changed before the thirties I think, 'cause, you know, World War I ended in 1918. That was the First World War, I'm not talking about the Second World War.

Hopkins

Yes. OK. Hitler is associated with the Second World War, and maybe--

Beavers

Well, let's see, maybe they--

Hopkins

I know Americans were fighting the Germans in the First World War, maybe that was--

Beavers

Well, it was the German-American Bank when I was working for them, and I might be in error about the time that they changed the name, but I think it had something to do with the-- That might have been the Second World War. You're right, it could've been. I might have confused the time element there, but I know that subsequently the name was changed in--it became a part of the Security First National Bank. But I wasn't working for them at the time the name was changed. You see, when I was there it was the German-American Bank.

Hopkins

I see. Now, I'd like to talk again about Los Angeles High School. Was that the only high school in the city at the time you were a high school student?

Beavers

No, no. They had other high schools, but Los Angeles High School was--it was located up on North Grand there. Up on the hill, well that's about the same site where the Board of Education building is now. Of course, it looks a whole lot different now. [laughter]

Hopkins

What determined what school you went to? Did you have a choice as to what high school you went to? Or was it by neighborhoods as it is today?

Beavers

It was-- You were assigned according to your location. You were assigned a high school. You didn't choose. The student didn't choose.

Hopkins

OK. Mr. Beavers, during this time that you were married, say in your early twenties, during those years, what was the social life of youth like? What kind of social activities would someone like yourself be involved in?

Beavers

Well, we were-- The social life was revolved around churches, and so far as I was concerned, of course, there were other activities, dance, pavilion dance clubs, and-- But being brought up in the Christian environment, I didn't have any experience with what was called the nightclubs, and things like that. I just didn't have time for it, and I didn't have that inclination of it. I was brought up in the, and was attracted to the work of, the church and the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and the charitable institutions, and community welfare and that kind of thing. And I just fell right into it, and I didn't have time for the others. There was a definite division there, because I remember observing, and I knew what was going on in some of the social activities of the young people, but the type of program and the surroundings of the nightclubs didn't appeal to me. And I don't say that with any feeling of downgrading anybody. There were a lot of good people involved in those kinds of activities, it just didn't appeal to me. I was too busy, I guess, with the other activities, trying to make conditions better and advance.

Hopkins

I've spoken to Miriam Matthews, and H. Claude Hudson, and others, and I asked them the same question. And they also did not frequent the nightclubs, and it seems to me the leadership--black leadership--in this city was not so involved in that kind of activity. Would you say, in generalizing, that progressive blacks at the time probably were not so much involved in that kind of social life?

Beavers

Well, I think that is generally true, and I think the reason goes back to the important part that the church life played in developing-- I know that I had-- I was greatly influenced by my church activities and the training there and the problems that we observed, and problems that we were trying to solve. Trying to improve conditions, you know, if you're dedicated to it, why you just didn't, you felt that you were throwing away your time when you went to the social clubs, and they all-- The only thing they would do-- They were drinking, and dancing and that kind of thing, and it just seemed to be a waste. And I think generally, that-- And because, too, the church leadership, the ministers, you know, played a very important part in building and improving conditions, and in the final analysis it played an important part as demonstrated by the help they gave us in organizing the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company.

Hopkins

As long as we're on the church, I know you were a founder of People's Independent Church [of Christ] as we talked about last time.

Beavers

I was one of the founders.

Hopkins

One of the founders, excuse me, one of the founders. Can you give me the background of how the People's Independent Church came into existence?

Beavers

Well, can we go off the record just a bit? [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

OK, Mr. Beavers, we'll defer the discussion of People's Independent Church. Let me ask you, then, about your participation in World War I.

Beavers

During World War I, I was in a deferred classification and worked as a molder's helper in a Los Angeles foundry. During that period I was--served on the selective service board and I was air raid warden, and generally did what I could to help with the work that had to be done at home, so to speak, not in the foreign service. But they had a program worked out for those who were in a deferred classification, so there was some participation here at home. And I was active in that.

Hopkins

What disability allowed you to be classified for it?

Beavers

Oh, an injury to my eye. I-- In my teens, while chopping wood once I--I think I was about, oh, I must of been about sixteen or seventeen years of age--and I was chopping wood, and a piece of wood flew up and hit my--hit me in the left eye, and of course I suppose if medical science had advanced like they have today they might have been able to save that eye, but the fact of the matter is they didn't, and I lost [the] sight of that left eye, and I was in my teens. So that was the cause of my deferment.

Hopkins

Was that traumatic--obviously it must have been traumatic for you to lose the sight in that eye. Did that in any way influence your thoughts about life or how you perceived your future at all?

Beavers

Well, it was very discouraging to me at the time. I did-- Oh, I was greatly disappointed, and I felt very badly over it for awhile, but I soon got over it, and thanks to the environment--my parents and the church environment helped me considerably. So I learned to accept it.

Hopkins

I know eventually there was a Negro hospital established in Los Angeles, or was there? I've read--

Beavers

Yes, there was one established. It was Dr. [Charles] Diggs and his associates that established a Negro hospital. And then there was an effort made to establish another hospital, it was called the Good Shepherd, and people interested in it-- One of the moving characters was Bishop [W. Bertrand] Stevens of the Episcopal Church. And, of course, he was connected with the Good Samaritan [Hospital of Los Angeles], and as a result of that movement to establish the Good Shepherd Hospital, it was finally decided that more good would be accomplished by breaking the racial barriers in the Good Samaritan Hospital.

Hopkins

So, rather than starting a separate black hospital, it would be better to try to integrate the Good Samaritan?

Beavers

That, that's what happened. It might not have been the key for the real motive for the acceptance of black Americans, but that was the result. When we were unable to satisfactorily accomplish the goal of the Good Shepherd, to establish the Good Shepherd as a Negro hospital, subsequently it developed that gradually barriers were broken, and some aggressive doctors came along at the time and helped to advance the integration program at Good Samaritan. Of course, as you have suggested, I think the result was that [it] was much better [than] trying to establish a separate hospital for the blacks. It was much better that they be accepted as part and parcel of the Good Samaritan.

Hopkins

Dr. Diggs's hospital, did that ever get off the ground? Or was that the Good Shepherd?

Beavers

No, that was a separate-- That was another-- They actually operated. They were very small.

Hopkins

What was the name of that hospital, do you recall?

Beavers

I have a faint recollection, it seems it was called [Paul Laurence] Dunbar Hospital. I think I ought to check that out. I know that Diggs was the-- I don't think they called it "Diggs Hospital," I think they called it the Dunbar. I want to see if I can get some information on that, so I can be more accurate about it. But I know it operated for several years.

Hopkins

But it's not in existence today?

Beavers

No.

Hopkins

OK. Was Good Samaritan-- What years are we talking about, with the blacks beginning to go to Good Samaritan?

Beavers

Well, that's something else I'll have to check on.

Hopkins

All right. No problem. OK, We'll come back to that--

Beavers

I'll make a note to myself. In connection with that participation in the war activities, I also served on the board to seek employment for returning veterans.

Hopkins

Oh. Now was this a city generated activity, or was this a community generated activity?

Beavers

Well, this was a-- I guess it was generated by the federal government. Yes, because I received a commendation from-- One of the a commendations I received from the president was for that work in connection with reemployment activities. Helping secure jobs for veterans.

Hopkins

For all veterans or for black veterans?

Beavers

Well, for all veterans. Of course, mine was-- Naturally I was particularly concerned with the blacks, but in the natural order of things--but the program itself was federal, national.

Hopkins

Did you work with the Urban League in this particular instance?

Beavers

No, this was a separate board, it was by the government.

Hopkins

How was it that you came to be appointed to work on the selective service board, and as an air raid warden?

Beavers

Well, yes, it just naturally developed because I--my classification they were trying to use everybody.

Hopkins

I see. [laughter] Mr. Beavers, before we close this first session of our interview, I do want to get your impressions on the so--called Great Migration of blacks out of the South during the period of World War I. Now I know that the majority of blacks went to Chicago, and New York, and elsewhere, but some came to Los Angeles.

Beavers

Quite a number.

Hopkins

Quite a number. Do you have any impressions of that that you can share with us?

Beavers

The impressions of--

Hopkins

Did it seem like there was a large influx of blacks to Los Angeles?

Beavers

Oh, there was, no question about that. There's a-- The population of blacks in Los Angeles just-- Oh, it was very rapid, and as an example: There were very few blacks here in the early years when we came, but by 19-- Well, I would say, it was-- The big influx began after World War II.

2. Tape Number: I, Side Two April 29, 1982

Beavers

There were only about forty thousand black Americans in the whole state of California at the time that we were organizing the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and that was in 1924 or '25. And by the end of World War II there were, oh, something like two hundred fifty thousand black Americans right here in Los Angeles. And then of course, you know, now I guess it's over a million.

Hopkins

Yes. Just shy of it.

Beavers

What?

Hopkins

Or, just shy of it, yes.

Beavers

Somewhere around that.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

So you can see that during the years there's been quite an influx of blacks. Of course, while we're on that, there's been quite an influx of whites too. And they brought with them those same prejudices that they had down South. But fortunately we have had more political freedom here, and we've been able to deal with it, as is evidenced by the fact that we have a black mayor of Los Angeles, and a black superintendent of education. The state, with a number of state assemblymen, and even one state senator. So it's being-- The numbers are being felt. And still we don't-- We have been, we've had too many who were negligent in participation in voting, and that's the big thing we've got to correct now, is to get people registered and voting. They don't-- If we can get anything like our full voting strength, why we could have even a larger piece of the pie.

Hopkins

The blacks that were migrating from the South to Los Angeles during the World War I period, did they seem to fit in easily in the Los Angeles environment?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

There wasn't major problems with housing?

Beavers

Oh, well, that was felt later as housing became a problem, and then we had this situation and it brought about the segregation that we have. We really have segregation, but it's not imposed by the law. It's imposed by the pattern of living. The whites moving out when the blacks move in. And whenever the

whites feel that there's a majority of the people in their area that are black, and they're becoming a minority, they don't like to live in a situation where they are the minority, so they move out. I remember at first, there was a time when there were no Negroes west of Central Avenue. Well, they moved over to San Pedro. They moved the line over to San Pedro [Street], then to Figueroa [Street], then to Vermont [Avenue]. Now, let's see, then they got-- Then they got to Crenshaw [Boulevard]. I remember when, in 1949, when we built the Golden State Mutual home office at Western and Adams, some of the people complaining about the Golden State moving away from the Negroes. And at that time, all this area in here was completely-- No at that time, this was a golf course in this area. And I remember the time when the line was in Western Avenue. There were no Negroes living west of Western Avenue, and there were even Japanese gardens, agriculture, agriculture all in this area.

Hopkins

Baldwin Hills, and Leimert Park area.

Beavers

Well, then there was a golf course here, but down Vermont on the other side there was agriculture all the way almost to the beach. Of course, there's been a real-- The real estate business really soared in the development of all these areas, and the whites moving right in. Of course, they can't-- You can't get away now--they can't live in the ocean. [laughter] And the remarkable thing though, is that long before the decision of the [United States] Supreme Court striking down the illegal covenant in deeds--racial covenant in deeds, which made it impossible for Negroes to get clear title--before that decision, our company was lending money on homes in white areas, and despite the fact that these deeds contained race restrictions. But we knew that the race restrictions were not valid, and that some time that they would have to be lifted. But in any event, owning the property-- They couldn't keep you from owning it, they might keep you from living in it. And so by virtue of that policy, we helped to break the backs of the legal segregation, and bring about this law--United States Supreme Court decision outlawing the racial restrictions in deeds, and some of the property that we made loans on was involved in the decision.

Hopkins

One more question here: Following the war, when the industries-- When the war-related industry dismantled, and we had a lot of black migrants here from the South, was it difficult for them to find jobs?

Beavers

Uh-hum. Yes, and as a matter of fact, we had what is the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], and the Urban League, and some of the churches, all of the organizations that were concerned about this discrimination brought together in one group which was called Allied Defense--Allied Defense--I think it's mentioned in my biographical data there. Allied Organization Against Discrimination in Defense Industries. And we worked together to force the industries to accept Negro workers, and the Los Angeles Sentinel and the California Eagle, and the churches all worked together on that. The fact of the matter is Leon [Harold] Washington and the Los Angeles Sentinel were-- They headed a movement called "Don't shop where you can't work." And they didn't have any Negro employees on the streetcars we had-- Before the buses we had electric streetcar transportation for the local citizens, and the motormen and conductors had to be white, and we knocked that out. And then they took on the telephone company next. And now, it's quite a different day now; of course we have the Civil Rights Law of '64, and now it's fashionable for them to advertise that they're "Equal Opportunity Employers," or affirmative action. All of that has come about because of the tremendous working that was done in those years when they just didn't think about having blacks in any of these places. In banks, in government positions, even if they qualified. So our big problem today is to urge our people to first register, and vote, and go to school, get an education, be prepared to do something. Be qualified. There are a lot of jobs, still a lot of jobs that we don't have because we don't find enough people qualified. That's hard to say, but it's true. And our young people, the big message to them should be to study and not be satisfied with anything less than the best education possible, because the day is fast approaching when there is just no opportunity for the menial jobs. I think the technology today, so many things are done by machine, and computers, and various types of electrical equipment, automation. It's taking jobs, but it takes people to operate those machines. And computers, and the automatic machines, they

don't do it by themselves. It takes some people to tell the machine what to do, and that's where we can be pointing our education.

3. Tape Number: II, Side One

May 4, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, you were going to talk something about social activities today?

Beavers

Yes, Mr. Hopkins, I wanted to supplement my remarks of our previous conference, concerning social activities in the early days. Of course, while our social activities were rather small comparatively, but at that time, we young people received quite a bit of enjoyment at the ice cream parlors, and at the motion picture theaters, and stage theaters at that time. As an example, we had a very nice theater building on Central Avenue near Twenty-fourth Street, and we had stage plays and motion pictures. But I remember one period in which the Lafayette Players were giving programs every week. And that little theater would be crowded every session to see and hear those players acting the roles of well-known plays, and it was very interesting and very entertaining. I remember especially too, in the same theater that I first saw and heard Lena Horne, and in addition to the theatergoing, we also had a lot of fun going to baseball games, particularly in the winter season when major league stars would visit the course in their training sessions, and play ball with the Negro stars. Stars from the old Negro baseball league, and such characters as Satchel Paige, Bullet [Joe] Rogan [Wilbur Rogan], Josh[ua] Gibson, and Biz [Raleigh] Mackey, Cool Papa [James Thomas] Bell, these players representing teams like the Kansas City Monarchs and the Home State Braves, the Birmingham Black Barons, and the Cleveland Buckeyes, Philadelphia Stars. And it was very entertaining and amusing to see these Negro stars beat the major league stars. And that was a common occurrence, and naturally the Negro community enjoyed seeing their black brothers beat the white major league teams out here. Then we also had the Pacific Coast Minor Leagues, and the Los Angeles team was called the Los Angeles Angels, and it came in for its share of beating at the hands of the Negro stars. Which was demonstrating at the time that there shouldn't be barriers to Negroes participating in the major

leagues. And, as you know, that barrier was finally broken when [Brooklyn Dodger President] Branch Rickey hired Jackie Robinson. And in addition, we had from time to time the dance-halls-dances--sponsored by various groups, collegiate groups and other clubs, and that served to provide some social activity for the young people in the early days.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, what time period are we talking about would you say?

Beavers

Well, we're talking about the time period when, say in the 1930's, early 1920's, thirties, forties, covering about three decades there.

Hopkins

You mentioned the Lafayette Players. Do you know anything about them or when they were formed? Who sponsored them?

Beavers

No, I'm sure we could look that up in the Negro Yearbook possibly, but it was a traveling group, and it had very, very big talent. And of course they had few opportunities to use that talent nationwide, and like other things in a segregated society, their opportunities were limited in the same manner, perhaps, that our athletes were limited at the time.

Hopkins

Did a group like the Lafayette Players, did they play-- When they came to Los Angeles did they play exclusively to a black audience?

Beavers

Well, not exclusively, but most of their opportunity for performance was provided by the Negro audiences.

Hopkins

OK. All right, so do you want to move on to Golden State-- I mean to People's Independent?

Beavers

Yes, we can do that now.

Hopkins

All right.

Beavers

Now, let's see, where's that book?

Hopkins

OK, Mr. Beavers, I'd like to turn now to People's Independent Church, which I know you had a great part in the founding of this church, if I'm not mistaken. Can you account for us please, how did People's Independent Church come into existence?

Beavers

Yes, I'd be glad to. The excitement of 1915 still lingers in my memory. The aroused action of a large group of sincere members of First A.M.E. Church to--reaction to the abuse of authority by the bishop of the district. This involved the bishop's action in terminating the pastorate of the church by the Reverend N[apoleon] P. Greggs, who had made a tremendous impact upon the Los Angeles community as well as members of the church. He was a man of sterling character, outstanding ability, Christian zeal, and a most eloquent pulpit orator. He had not served a maximum term of pastorate, and the membership had petitioned the bishop to return him for another term of service. On October 3, 1915, after trying for several weeks to have the bishop give some consideration to that petition, a body of members congregated in Christian--in the Christian Church on East Eighth Street. They declared themselves a separate and independent body under the name and title of First Independent Church. The group then authorized an invitation to be extended to the Reverend N. P. Greggs to accept the pastorate of the new church. On October 6, 1915, the Reverend Greggs accepted the invitation, and the church was born, which later became known as the People's Independent Church of Christ, and located at Eighteenth Street and Paloma [Street] in Los Angeles. I had the pleasure and privilege of serving as secretary of the organizing group, and was elected to the position of church clerk of the permanent organization. At that time, I was the youngest member of the official family of the church.

During a span of twenty-five years, I served in many other positions, including choir member, soloist for the bass section of the choir, chairman of the board of trustees, and numerous important committees. Now, I want to ask, do you want to continue about the rest of that? About my wife?

Hopkins

Well, I'd like to-- Yes, just a couple of questions here. Do you know the bishop's name who was involved in this?

Beavers

Bishop, what is his name? [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

OK, so the bishop's name--

Beavers

I think his name was Bishop H. B. Parks.

Hopkins

I see. And, then Reverend Greggs, his initials "N.P." stand for--

Beavers

Napoleon P. Greggs. I'm not sure what the "P." stood for, but Napoleon was his first name.

Hopkins

OK. You mentioned that Reverend Greggs was a prominent person in Los Angeles, and he was well thought of by the church community. Can you remember any of his activities that are outstanding?

Beavers

Yes, he was-- He was thirty-second degree mason, and he was quite popular in fraternal circles. He was also active in the Ministerial Alliance, and frequently appeared in other churches. He was invited to other congregations to visit and preach. And he took an action in anything that was for the betterment of the race and our community. He was very helpful to us in the organizing and promoting of the insurance business, the life insurance business.

Hopkins

Now, People's Independent Church broke away from what church?

Beavers

The African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Hopkins

And that was located on--?

Beavers

That was located at Eighth and Towne in Los Angeles, the First A.M.E. Church of Los Angeles.

Hopkins

So then there was a larger-- He was one of many bishops then in the A.M.E. Church? Bishop--

Beavers

Parks?

Hopkins

Parks.

Beavers

Yes. But he was the bishop of this district at the time.

Hopkins

Now, when you started People's Independent Church, were your mother and father members of People's Independent Church?

Beavers

My mother died in 1915, prior to the organization of the Independent Church. My father was included, my father and my sisters, the rest of the family were involved.

Hopkins

I see. What did your mother die of?

Beavers

Well, paralysis and cancer.

Hopkins

Now, Mr. Beavers, I see that you're listed as one of the founding members of the People's Independent Church. Who were some of the other founders of the church?

Beavers

Well, there was Captain F. H. Crumbly, and Mr. J. [H.] Shackleford, a businessman. P. J. Alexander, a businessman, and G. W. Whitley, a businessman, and Mrs. B[essie] F. Prentice, who was owner of a novelty store, and Mr. J. H. Shackleford, who owned a furniture store, and-- Those are some of the outstanding people who were associated with the movement.

Hopkins

Can we take a moment here to maybe talk about a couple of them. What can you tell me about Mr. Shackleford?

Beavers

Mr. Shackleford was quite an active member, and he had a good business on Central Avenue. He dealt with the furniture and household goods, and later he became an outstanding real estate businessman. He was engaged in the real estate business, in selling and renting property, and he was also later one of the organizing directors of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company.

Hopkins

Well, do you know why he left the furniture business?

Beavers

Well, to make more money, I guess. He thought it was a better opportunity, and at that time the real estate business was growing and new people coming in, and providing housing for people was--offered quite an opportunity at the time. And, he saw another need to be filled there, and he took advantage of it. In fact, I think he made more money in the real estate business than he did in the furniture store. Which proved the wisdom of making the change.

Hopkins

I notice-- I've seen pictures of him riding on a bicycle with a table on his back. Were there other furniture stores around at the time? Other black-owned furniture stores?

Beavers

Not black-owned.

Hopkins

Not black-owned.

Beavers

No. I think his was-- His was the only black-owned furniture store that I remember.

Hopkins

So when he went out of business, where did most blacks that you knew buy their furniture?

Beavers

Oh, there was a furniture company by the name of-- I think it was Gold Furniture Company, and a number of stores, and I-- Yes, I'm sure the ownership-- They were Jewish people, and there were several furniture stores operated by whites or Jewish people. You know, that's the regular--seemed to be the regular order of things. The Jewish people and the Caucasians going into the Negro community to benefit from their trade. They wanted Negro trade. They were not interested in developing any Negroes to be their competitors, naturally. [laughter]

Hopkins

There's a Mr. Crumbly, Colonel Crumbly--

Beavers

Captain.

Hopkins

Captain Crumbly.

Beavers

He was an army captain, and he was a very outstanding-- He had an outstanding record in the army, and he was also very active in the community, very good orator, and very persuasive, and very honorable.

Hopkins

Mr. Whitley?

Beavers

Whitley was also in the real estate business, and he was very active in the church. Very determined sort of character, and he and his wife played a very important part in the organization. She was a deaconess and very sincere, very dedicated.

Hopkins

You know, I noticed that there seems to have been a lot of blacks who have gone into the real estate business in this early period. And I know you mentioned already that Mr. Shackleford did so, in order to-- He felt it would be more profitable. Was it difficult for Negroes to become involved in real estate business?

Beavers

No, not especially. It was like other things. They had to be-- They had to qualify themselves, and get a license, and that was a business where your success was determined by your own ingenuity, and your activity, being able to sell, and to persuade people to buy what you had to sell.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

And of course, in those days, they knew people were coming into the community, and if they didn't have the money to buy, why, they had to have some place to live, so they'd be interested in renting. So it was an opportunity

to help provide housing for the influx of the blacks who were coming in from other states. Particularly from the southern states.

Hopkins

Were there any-- What would be the major obstacle, if any, that a black real estate person would face? To going into that business? Were there any obvious obstacles?

Beavers

Well, in those days, there were no special obstacles there, because the whites, the whites were glad to use their services when they wanted to move out of a Negro district. So there was no particular obstacle there, the only thing they had to do was to qualify for a license, and then to know how to manage a business and operate.

Hopkins

Now, going back then to People's Independent Church, I know preliminarily you've mentioned that there was a Young People's Lyceum of People's Independent Church. Can you tell me something about that?

Beavers

Well, yes. My first wife Willie Mae was very active. And she supervised the Young People's Lyceum, in fact, she was the organizer of the activity and she supervised for a long time, and it was an outstanding young people's organization. It attracted many young people to the church without regard for denominational ties. I remember that Mr. Leon Whittaker was the first president and my sister, Helen Beavers, was the first secretary. Whittaker achieved notable distinction as the first of our race to serve as deputy district attorney of Los Angeles County. And the dramatic department of the Lyceum was especially successful and came close to professional standards in producing a number of plays that claimed city-wide attention. These were presented in the theatrical atmosphere, with stage equipment and props, at Gamaut Club, an auditorium. It was located on South Hope Street. They put on several prominent plays, such as Experience, Cast Upon The World, A Woman's Honor, Crimson Eyebrows, Belle of Barcelona, and some of the participants in these plays later achieved distinction in other careers. For

example, the Honorable Ralph [Johnson] Bunche--now deceased--became, became the noted Nobel Peace Prize winner, and assistant secretary of the United Nations. Louise Beavers--now deceased--was a motion picture actress. Kenneth Spencer, who achieved international distinction as a bass soloist, and my sister Elmyra--she was Elmyra Beavers at the time--played a starring role in Cast Upon The World.

Hopkins

Did you have a part in the, in this dramatic role--

Beavers

Oh, yes, I played a little part. I was-- In fact, I-- My own participation was in the leading role in the play Experience, which I enjoyed very much.

Hopkins

Now, Louise Beavers, is she any relationship to you?

Beavers

Yes, she was my cousin.

Hopkins

Can you remember offhand any of the roles she had in the movies?

Beavers

Well, she was noted in the role of-- Shut that off a minute. [tape recorder turned off] Imitation of Life.

Hopkins

Imitation of Life.

Beavers

It was a play that concerned a family--a spiritual family where the young woman, she was light of color and passed as white, and then this play had a strong racial bearing, because it dealt with some of the race problems. And the role played by Louise was the-- She was a servant in the family, but it brought out several life situations that were very significant at the time.

Hopkins

OK, thank you. This Young People's Lyceum, was it a Sunday school, a kind of Sunday school, or--?

Beavers

No, no. It dealt strictly with the-- Well, it was a social activity for the church, and development of young people. It supplemented school, Sunday school activities, and gave the young people something to do during their weekdays.

Hopkins

Now, when you say young people, what age group would we be talking about?

Beavers

Well, generally from kindergarten size on up to adulthood.

Hopkins

To adulthood. OK. Mr. Beavers, now you currently belong to Holman [United] Methodist Church, Episcopal Church--

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

--or Holman Methodist?

Beavers

Holman United Methodist Church.

Hopkins

Holman United Methodist Church. Why did you leave People's Independent Church?

Beavers

Well, I-- My wife and I felt that there was an opportunity to serve in a church that was not confined to the black community. Of course, Reverend Greggs, the original pastor of Independent Church, he passed away in, back in 1932.

And we saw an opportunity, we thought, to get into a church that was--that crossed racial lines, and in keeping with our philosophy to get into the mainstream, we thought that activity in the United Methodist Church perhaps would offer more opportunity to promote that philosophy of getting into the mainstream. After getting into the-- After joining Holman Methodist Church, I did have the opportunity of serving on the board for the All Nations Foundation, and the Goodwill Industries, all organizations that cut across racial lines. And, it was-- It has been a nice experience.

Hopkins

About-- Do you remember what year that you joined Holman's?

Beavers

Oh, I think it was '57. You can verify that, I think it appears in my biographical data.

Hopkins

OK. OK, now, so then from roughly 1915 to 1957, you were a member of People's Independent Church.

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

Can you-- Were there any significant changes in People's Independent Church over that time that are worth noting?

Beavers

Well, of course, the church has moved from it's old location on Eighteenth and Paloma, it's now on West Boulevard near Fifty-fourth Street, I believe. And they have a new pastor. They've had several pastors since Reverend Greggs has passed. And it's doing very well I think, but I have no regrets for having moved to the United Methodist Church.

Hopkins

I guess my question is generated from the fact that there were so many prominent blacks during this early period that seemed to be members of

People's Independent, and now looking at the church from what I know of it, which isn't a whole lot, there still are some prominent individuals, but not as many as there were in the earlier period.

Beavers

Well, as conditions change and you have new leadership, you see, there's quite a difference in the Los Angeles periods since--in all those years, you have more churches, and more able ministers. We have Dr. [Thomas] Kilgore [Jr.] at the Second Baptist Church, we have so many outstanding ministers in other churches, and of course, Dr. James [Morris] Lawson of our church, he's an outstanding minister, and there's Bishop [Hartford H.] Brookins of the A.M.E. Church too, he's outstanding. He's been a pastor-- I think they have a pastor by the name of [Reverend Cecil] Murray, but the churches like other activities have grown and there are so many more now, and there's so many more outstanding people. So I think that would account for the difference that you observe.

4. Tape Number: III, Side One May 11, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, last time we talked about the founding of People's Independent Church, and today I'd like to talk about another institution in which you were involved in the founding of, and that is the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. Can you tell me how you came to be involved in Golden State?

Beavers

Yes, Mr. Hopkins, I'll be glad to review that as much as I can recollect. You know, that's been a long, long time.

Hopkins

Uh-hum.

Beavers

In the early spring of 1922, a young man by the name of Calwell Jones--he was an agent for the American Mutual Benefit Association [of Texas], that was a

fraternal organization--and he came to my home and tried to sell me an insurance policy in that organization. I asked him many questions that dealt with the association, its record, stability, management, and finally its ability to pay. Jones talked a little about the insurance benefits, but most of his sales pitch focused on race pride, and he didn't satisfactorily answer my other questions. He requested that I give him an opportunity to bring his superintendent to further bolster his presentation, and I agreed. Later he returned with the-- Mr. Norman O[liver] Houston. This was my first meeting with Norman, and we engaged in a lengthy discussion, and Houston then arranged to have me meet Mr. William [H.] Nickerson, Jr. Mr. Nickerson had come to California in 1921. He was from Houston, Texas, and was the secretary and general manager for the American Mutual Benefit Association which had its origin and home office in Houston. I shall never forget the meeting with Mr. Nickerson, he had such a magnetic personality and an abundance of enthusiasm, and that enthusiasm was contagious. After talking with Mr. Nickerson, I not only paid the premium for an insurance policy, but I became an agent for the Association. And that was the way that I first became involved. Now that was a fraternal insurance organization, and I started to work for them on a part-time basis, and I began an intensive study of life insurance and salesmanship, and Norman and Mr. Nickerson shared with me their experience, and some special courses on the subject. Mr. Nickerson was an excellent teacher, and he was truly dedicated to the insurance business. Oh, in about a year, with the help of others, he had built, we had built a sizeable debit. That is, Houston and I. And I sold a building maintenance in which I was engaged, and decided to make life insurance my career. I accepted the philosophy of life-long learning and started an educational program to take special training and college courses, not for degrees or college credits, but rather for practical use in business, and for helping to find solutions to the various problems that confronted me daily. Norman and I, with a small staff of agents, continued building the American Mutual debit, but ever looking forward to the time when we could realize Mr. Nickerson's dream, to build a real life insurance company. At that time we felt there was a great need for a life insurance company for our people in particular, because they were denied so many benefits from the operations of the life insurance business by other companies. In other words, they could get only substandard policies, and they couldn't get any employment, no loans on their property. In

other words, they couldn't enjoy the full benefits of the business that their premiums helped to build. Mr. Nickerson was quite sensitive about this, and felt the need. And he had a dream of building a big company that would serve those needs, and give opportunities to our people to have the full benefits of their life insurance premiums. So Norman and I shared that dream, and we helped to, we were glad to help make it become a reality. Mr. Nickerson's associates in the business were in Texas, and apparently they didn't share his dream to build a larger organization, and as a result they refused to renew the license that was necessary in California for the year 1924 to '25. As a result, we decided to build a company in California. And Mr. Nickerson was very happy to have us join him in this endeavor, and I recall the major, major crisis that faced us when they decided to change the law during the time we were organizing. Of course, in order to get going with the organization of the company, it was necessary to find a law under which we could operate, a law that didn't require such large expenditures as was necessary for an old line legal reserve company. I recall that I went with Mr. Nickerson to the offices of some lawyers who were insurance specialists, and they outlined what was necessary, and during the course of the interview indicated what their fees would be for the preliminary work, and having us to get started with such an adventure. And, of course, their preliminary fee was fifteen hundred dollars before we had anything in the way of a license to operate.

Hopkins

What company was that? Do you remember offhand? The lawyers, I don't know if you remember offhand?

Beavers

No, they were life insurance specialists. I don't recall their names, it was a group of them. I don't recall their names. However, that incident brought out the determination in William Nickerson, Jr. We left the lawyers' office, and he said to me, "Beavers, where can we get some law books?" And I took him to the law bookstore that I was familiar with, and there he purchased a copy of the Civil Code of California. In other words, Mr. Nickerson would become his own lawyer. [laughter] And as a result, he searched that law book, and he found Chapter Four-- It was called Chapter Four at that time, under which the law in Chapter Four provided that you could organize a guarantee fund

insurance company, and the requirements were a fifteen [thousand] dollar guarantee fund to be placed with the state treasurer, and five hundred applications with the premiums paid, and of course, you had to have in addition to that some money to operate on. In other words, it involved about an outlay of twenty-five thousand dollars and five hundred members. Well now, during the time that we organized we incidentally choose that method of organizing, reasoning that that was a starter and once we were successful with that part of the organization we could convert into an old line legal reserve.

Hopkins

So at this point, you were organizing a guarantee life insurance.

Beavers

The Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company, we called it. And the policies had to carry an assessment clause, and that's an interesting point too. Although we carried that assessment clause in the early policies, at the same time we maintained the full legal reserves just as though it had been a legal reserve company. Having in mind that when we finally converted, the reserves would have accumulated and there would be no problem in transferring it into a larger company. So, we went to work on that basis. And Mr. Nickerson, he was the president and general manager, and was taking care of the actuarial part of it. He succeeded in getting an actuary to help him. His name was John H. Upton. He was a retired actuary, and there were no black actuaries at that time. And this man was retired and quite a help to us. He was broad in his concept, and was very helpful in helping us to get our original organization in order. During that period, Mr. Nickerson, as I said, took charge of the general management and the actuarial part of it. Norman Houston was the secretary and he took charge of the drive to sell "certificates of contribution," we called them.

Hopkins

Was that like stock?

Beavers

That was similiar to stock, but it lacked the quality and guarantee of stock. It was a contribution, and payable only when the company had surplus sufficient

to pay it. So that it was to-- Some people would call it a gamble. At least it took a lot of faith to put out a thousand dollars for something like that, in a nonexistent company, hoping it would succeed and you would get your money back, so you could get interest on it.

Hopkins

Can you remember some of the people who bought these first certificates?

Beavers

Oh, yes. There was, of course, naturally we had to buy them. We were organizing the firm, and then there was Dr. [Henry H.] Towles, Dr. H. H. Towles, a prominent physician. Mr. S[imon] P. Johnson, who was an undertaker, in the mortuary business. And there was a man by the name of Ed Banks, Edward Banks. Another doctor, Wilbur C. Gordon, a Hartley Jones. And Jones was connected with the Liberty Savings and Loan Association. See, we-- Houston and I had a lot of friends. Houston had a lot of friends in Northern California where he was born, and he was also a legionnaire, and I was very active in the Independent Church, and I had a lot of friends there, including the pastor, the Reverend N. P. Greggs, who was very popular, and a great orator, a man who was very much interested in business success as well as in religion. And those were some of the people. Then up in Northern California, we had another undertaker by the name of Luther Hudson. Of course, you might say that it was natural for undertakers to have some interest in the insurance business, because that's another way to guarantee they get money when the policyholder dies. If he has insurance, why, they would be benefited by their help in having them insured. But these men were of high caliber, and they were concerned about building more business owned and controlled by black Americans. Oh, there is another prominent man, I should mention J. H. Shackleford. He was in the furniture business, and later became a real estate dealer. So they were quite a number of people.

Hopkins

What would be a rough estimate? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt, but what would be a rough estimate of the number of certificates you sold?

Beavers

Well--

Hopkins

In this early-- In the beginning?

Beavers

--we sold the certificates. We counted them in amounts of money, so we had to raise-- The certificates furnished the major portion of the money that we raised. Of course, that was supplemented by the premiums that people paid for the policies. And while we were in the process of organization, they changed that law to--which almost doubled the requirements. Instead of five hundred members, you had to have a thousand. Instead of fifteen hundred dollars, you had to have-- I mean fifteen thousand dollars, you had to have twenty-five thousand. And that law was-- The new law was to go in effect in July of 1925, and we actually started the charter membership drive in the early part of 1925, because in 1924 we were busy getting the organization formed. In the latter part of 1924, we were busy planning and getting ready for the drive, and then the charter membership drive actually started in 1925. When the news came out that they had changed this law, we were more determined then, and that helped us as we went to the people, to show them that some effort was being made to block the success of this company.

Hopkins

You mean these laws were designed--do you think--specifically to--

Beavers

Well, it seemed to us that our company was the only one in the process of organizing that particular kind, and it was the first time that any company had used these certificates of contribution to raise money. And there was no doubt in our mind that it was specifically aimed at stopping or blocking our success. We had one, only one representative in the state assembly then, whose name was Fred [Frederick Madison] Roberts. He was the first black man elected to the state assembly in California. And he was quite a help to us. Now, if I think I can get back to our main subject here. We had some interesting sidelights on the way to raising this money. I remember that in the first part of July, in 1925, the insurance examiner came and inspected our

books, and checked on the progress being made in raising the fund. Then the day before we were to have the final inspection, we needed about eighteen hundred dollars more to really get just the minimum. We gathered at the mortuary owned by S. P. Johnson, and we had a little meeting--the directors--it reminded me something of a church in raising money. The pastor needs just a certain amount to round out the collection, and he makes a frantic call for additional contributions. At that meeting though, in about twenty minutes we raised that extra eighteen hundred dollars, and it was put in the bank the next day. And the new law I referred to was going into effect on July 23, 1925, and we received a telegram from the insurance commissioner at noon on that day, informing us that we had met the requirements and would receive the license to operate. That was a very happy and glorious time. At that time we were in a little office--well, the building was owned by Dr. Towles. It was a little building at the corner of Clanton [Street] and Central Avenue, and that was between Newton Street and Fifteenth [Street]--that street I don't think is there anymore. But we had a one-room office up there, and we stayed there just long enough to get--to find a place to accommodate our business. And that was the second office that we had. It was at 3512 South Central Avenue, that was just below Jefferson. Right at the intersection of Jefferson and Central Avenue. And there we remained until we built our first new home office building. That building was built by L. [Louis] M. Blodgett. He was a black American contractor, and we had that building on Central Avenue between Forty-first and Forty-third Street--or between Forty-first and Forty-second. The numbers of the streets later were changed, but that was at 4111, was the address. It was a two-story building, and we occupied the second floor for the business, and we rented out the three stores. One to a beauty parlor, one to a barber shop, let's see, no, I guess it was two stores. Two storerooms. And they rented out originally to a beauty shop, and then a barber shop. We remained there until, well, there's quite a bit of history that was made right at that address. [tape recorder turned off] By the end of 1925, the company paid its first death claim, and this established a precedent of prompt service. We made a special point of making a payment of the claim within twenty-five minutes after proofs of death were filed. The full settlement was made to the widow of a charter member by the name of T. A. Torrance, one of the first to express his faith in Golden State Mutual by signing a charter membership application. In December, the company dispatched one of its talented young

agents to Oakland to organize a branch operation in that Northern California community. Edgar J. Johnson, one of Golden State's first agents, was the man chosen to be manager--first branch manager for the company. He eventually attained the title of president of the company. The tiny office in which the company had its beginning had to be abandoned after seventy-nine days. Growth had reached the point where it was unsuitable. And the new storefront office was secured, and the company grew during the next fourteen months to an organization of fifty-four employees, with assets of \$25,346. Income in 1926 reached \$60,793. Now between 1926 and 1928, Golden State extended services to Pasadena, Bakersfield, San Diego, Fresno, El Centro, and Sacramento. In Los Angeles a new home office building was erected, and that was the one I just referred to.

Hopkins

At 4112?

Beavers

At 4111.

Hopkins

At 4111.

Beavers

By the end of '29, Golden State's assets stood at \$73,033. Its annual income was \$188,847, and its employee force 126. While economic conditions in America ebbed, Golden State Mutual grew. In 1950 there was war again, and some thirty-four thousand American lives were lost on Korean battlefields before an uneasy peace was restored. In the 1950s there was the launching of the first man-made satellity by the Soviet Union, and the first atomic-powered submarine by the United States, and also the discovery of vaccine against polio by Dr. Jonas [Edward] Salk. The United States elected Dwight [David] Eisenhower president, a British queen was crowned, and a new African nation of Ghana came into existence. The outlawing of segregation in public schools, and the Little Rock [Arkansas] incident became a symbol of defiance of that ruling. And a Georgia preacher named Martin Luther King [Jr.] led a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in the struggle by black people for

economic, social, and political freedom. For Golden State Mutual, the decade meant more expansion, and a new kind of identification for its representatives. Oregon, Washington, and Arizona joined California, Texas, and Illinois as Golden State's service states. The company broadened its services to include mortgage cancellation insurance and group insurance. I don't know how far you want me to go in discussing this, but that gives you some idea as to the beginnings, and you might have some questions to raise before we proceed with the other progress.

Hopkins

That was very good. Just a few questions if we can start back in the beginning. Now, you mentioned that you studied life insurance in part with Mr. Nickerson. What kind of formal course work did you have in insurance business? Or how was your training?

Beavers

Well, I took courses in the UCLA Extension, and some special instruction from a professor at the University of Southern California. For example, I was the vice-president and director of agencies, and in the early days we served in multiple positions. For instance, Mr. Nickerson was president and general manager. Mr. Houston was secretary and treasurer, and he looked after the investments as well as the secretarial work. I was director--not only director of the agency, but I was claim adjuster, I was the public relations director. In other words, we had to do-- Whatever had to be done, we had to do it.

Hopkins

I see.

Beavers

So during that period, at first, I extended my knowledge of economics, I had a special economics course, had a special course on insurance salesmanship, a course on life insurance, and I had a course in advertising, a course in public speaking, a course in special law--in commercial law. And those are examples. I took those courses, and naturally that helped. Also, I think it well to point out at this time, and this was my philosophy from the very beginning, was our philosophy, we wanted to build a business-- One of the motivating factors in

building Golden State Mutual was not only to provide opportunities for better life insurance to our people, but also opportunities for employment, opportunities for mortgage loans, these are the other benefits that they did not receive at that time from other companies. So I took the position then, knowing that it would take time to build the kind of corporation we had in mind, and that we were in fact trying to provide for the younger generation coming on. And that was why I was not personally concerned about getting diplomas or degrees, I was concerned about getting the information so that I could use it to apply where I needed it, and when I needed it. I knew that when the company grew and became large enough, that there would be opportunities for the younger people, and that's what I was interested in. I got as much as I could to use where I needed it, and when it was important, but I was very much interested in encouraging the younger people to go on and get their degrees, M.B.A.'s, and all the education they could get, because I could see that there would be a need for it. And they would have places to use it. At that time when we were coming along--

5. Tape Number: III, Side Two

May 11, 1982

Beavers

OK?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

So, I've seen a number of cases in the business world, and particularly in life insurance, where we were specializing, where the old hands stayed on so long, that there was no opportunity for younger people to come in and to perpetuate the business. We in Golden State Mutual, we had the philosophy of building not only the business but building people and giving them opportunities. And now that's being paid off, because we have so many people well-trained. Our chairman of the board, and chief executive of the company now, not only has his M.B.A. but he has a degree in actuarial science. He has his C.L.U., Chartered Life Underwriter. He has the F.L.M.I., that's a

degree from the Life Office Management Association [Fellow of the Life Management Institute]. And there's another story behind that, which I'll touch on later, how we--how our people have helped to break the barriers of discrimination in the life insurance industry, so that they not only got in, we not only got the company in as a member, but our people have served in various official capacities in those trade associations. And at the time we were organizing they were not accepted in any of the trade associations. We managed to, through our activities in the community and in the State of California, work through some friends who-- In the life insurance business here, for example there was Leslie [J.] Hooper, who was an actuary for Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company. He and I served in the 1949 Grand Jury together. He was also helpful to us in the life insurance business, because-- And there's, in all the activities in the community and the city, and the state, Mr. Houston and I were very active in these various organizations, and naturally we met people from these other companies, leading companies here, like Pacific Mutual, the Occidental Life Insurance Company, and the Prudential, and meeting those people, and working through them, that we helped to break the barriers to race in the trade industry groups. Our company, we belonged to Life Advertiser's Association. We belonged to the Life Office Management Association, we have more, I'll be giving you that too. We have more members who-- More of our employees and officers who have that distinction, the F.L.M.I., having completed all the courses in office management and insurance. And it's a fellowship degree, F.L.M.I., and--

Hopkins

Now, what does that stand for again, F.L.M.I.?

Beavers

Fellow, Life Insurance Institute. Let's see, I have these. See, a number of the officers there that have that F.L.M.I. after their names. We made a special point of encouraging our employees and our officers to take those courses, and you'll notice the number of F.L.M.I. and C.L.U.'s, and we have retired officers who receive those--that recognition. Well, getting back to the point, the philosophy of building our youth, and giving them opportunities, because take me now, I'm 90 years old, and I knew that I wouldn't be the beneficiary of all these opportunities, so if I could do something to help make the way for

others, I'm happy I made a contribution. And that's the philosophy. And see, a number of our companies failed because the old hands stay on too long, and they die, and go on, and there's nobody left to carry on the business, see. Now, if they carry-- If they had left, they are not trained and not able to keep up with the change in time. Business now is a whole lot different now than it was in 1925. So--

Hopkins

Were there competing life insurance companies--black--was there competition from other black insurance companies in Los Angeles when you started Golden State?

Beavers

No.

Hopkins

What about this group from Texas? Did they just disband then? Or did they send other agents from Houston?

Beavers

Well, no, they finally disbanded.

6. Tape Number: IV, Side One June 1, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, as you recall, last time we met you gave us an excellent sketch on the growth of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. We have some questions we'd like to ask you, to clarify some points as well as to maybe initiate some new ideas on the growth of this company. Can you trace for us, please, your role in the growth and development of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company?

Beavers

Thank you, Mr. Hopkins. That's a big order, but I'll do the best I can. Of course, I think we've already covered the fact that I was one of the cofounders, and

Mr. Norman Houston was a cofounder, but the founder was William Nickerson, Jr., who originally came to California from Houston, Texas, and was the man who first conceived the idea of a life insurance company on the West Coast that would be owned and controlled by black Americans. Mr. Nickerson believed very strongly that it was important that some insurance company be organized here that would provide not only the insurance benefits, but the other benefits for our people that derived from the operations of the insurance companies. Of course at that time, while there were major companies--major life insurance companies--operating here, at the time they did not look kindly upon Negro-Americans as risks. Some thought that they were not insurable, others thought that they were poor risks, and there was little opportunity for black Americans to get the full benefit of life insurance here or anywhere else. But we were convinced, as Mr. Houston and I shared the opinion and the concerns of William Nickerson, Jr., the founder, that our people should have the opportunity to enjoy all of the benefits of the operations of a life insurance company. That is to say not only the best insurance protection, but also the benefit of jobs, and mortgage money to buy homes, and all of those benefits that accrue to members of a life insurance company. And that was not the case at the time that we started organizing the Golden State. In fact, one of the motivating factors--the greatest motivating factor--was to assure that we would have a company that would be available and would provide for our people all the benefits that accrue from its operation. So at the time of organization-- I think we covered the fact that Mr. Nickerson took over the responsibility of the overall management of the project, and Mr. Houston had the responsibility for raising the fifteen thousand dollars needed for deposit with the state, and I had the responsibility for getting the five hundred members necessary for qualification. Now, in all of our activities, we worked together, this unit: Nickerson, Houston, and Beavers. And each of us had multiresponsibilities during the organization of the company and after the organization of the company. For example, after we succeeded in qualifying for a license, and that was on July 23, 1925, we received the notice from the insurance commissioner that we had succeeded in qualifying for our first license, and that was issued to the Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company. From that time on, we worked together, and we-- For example, I had the responsibility as vice-president of the company and director of the agencies. Also I was the claim

adjuster, adjusting the claims, and I was also the public relations man, so we had-- You see we had multiduties to perform, and it was a small company, and we had to grow to the point where we would have individuals heading various departments, and for the time being during the organization period, and during the early years of the operations, each of us had numerous duties. During that period, of course, the fact that I was active in the People's Independent Church of Christ was quite an asset to us, because in addition to having the support of a dynamic pastor, the Reverend N. P. Greggs, we also had the support of the membership of the church. And that was quite an asset to me, since I had to get these five hundred members, and naturally many of them came from that church, and from other churches. I was active in church work, and of course, my activities were not confined to the People's Independent Church. And it, by the way, was what its name implied, an independent church, and it didn't restrict itself to denominational ties, but all denominations were recognized and were encouraged. Through the activities of that church many families were brought together who prior to that time-- One was a Methodist, another a Baptist, and oh, some other denomination, but the Independent Church furnished an opportunity for the family unit to be brought together as one, so naturally the Independent Church grew very rapidly, and it was quite an asset to me to have that entree into the--that particular church. I served as clerk or secretary, and I was on the trustee board. I was at one time chairman of the trustee board and also I was an active member of the choir. In fact, I was the soloist for the bass section of the choir. It was through those kind of activities that I was able to make a valuable contribution to the organizing and the operating of the Golden State.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, about how many people-- How many members of Golden State came from People's Independent Church?

Beavers

Oh, I have no idea.

Hopkins

Guess.

Beavers

I couldn't guess.

Hopkins

I was wondering, did it contribute more members than say, some other church? Like Second Baptist, or A.M.E. Church?

Beavers

Well, that's-- During those-- During that particular period I'm quite sure they did, because it had a large membership and I was very active in that particular church, and--but we had the cooperation and support of practically all of the churches in California. And we're always happy to give due credit to all of the churches. They welcomed us from time to time to come and speak to their congregations, and it was just-- We just felt at home in any of the churches, and they were always giving us welcome and cooperation and support.

Hopkins

Did the general public that you spoke to, did they seem receptive? Did they seem to believe in your company? Or were they looking at it in a skeptical fashion?

Beavers

Well, it was not only the people in the church, but I'd say there was a certain amount of skepticism to begin with on the part of the public and naturally they-- When you say the public, that includes the church. People, they're human, they're people, and until they have something tangible to--by which to judge business or an individual, their skepticism is somewhat justified. So there was skepticism. There were doubting Thomases who said it couldn't be done. And there were a lot of people who sought to block our path and prevent it from becoming a reality. I think I told you about the incident during the organization period, in which time the state laws were changed. That was an effort to prevent our success in organizing and meeting the requirements of the state, and we're-- We may not be able to prove that, but it was very obvious to us, because nobody had thought to--thought about this particular chapter under which we were organizing until that time, and there had been no thought of changing the law until we started our drive for membership to organize under that particular guarantee fund law.

Hopkins

Along these lines, as we talked of last time, you said that Congressman Fred Roberts aided your company--

Beavers

Not congressman, assemblyman.

Hopkins

Excuse me. Assemblyman is correct. Aided your company. What was his role?

Beavers

Well, Fred Roberts, he was the first member of our race to serve in the state assembly in California. He had quite a long record, and he worked with us. He was also head of a newspaper, I believe it was called the New Age. He gave his support and he was very useful in keeping us informed as to the legislative activities, and anything that involved our operations, why, we always could rely upon him to give us advanced information. And he also spearheaded the adoption of a law that amended the insurance code under which we were operating to provide for insuring children and juveniles. So Fred Roberts was very helpful in many ways.

Hopkins

OK. Can we continue, then, with tracing your role in the company? Now, in 1925--around 1925, you were instrumental in bringing some five hundred members, with the help of others I'm sure, too, but where do we go from there in terms of your contribution?

Beavers

Well, we-- As the company grew, we were able to divide up some of these positions. Of course, as the volume of business grew, why naturally I wouldn't be able to fill all those positions, vice-president, and director of agencies, and claim adjuster, and public relations officer, and so there were openings. Of course, it was interesting that-- I think, as an example, my secretary, the young woman who served me for sixteen years as secretary, was able to become our first public relations director, Mrs. Verna Hickman. She was Verna Stratton at the time. Of course, our public relations, or rather my public

relations responsibility, was taken over by her, and then later we had-- We would promote one of our staff to the office of claims adjustor, Mr. Berke [N.] Hunigan was our first claims, claims adjustor, that is the first after me. I gave those duties-- Those duties went over to him, and then later we had a superintendent of agencies that took-- First we had an assistant agency-- assistant director of agencies, and then finally a superintendent of agencies, and finally another agency director. And then I was-- After Mr. Nickerson passed in 1925, pardon me, 1945, Mr. Nickerson passed in 1945, we had to reorganize, and we followed the same script of--in the reorganization taking titles that would identify the functions as much as possible, and I became chairman of the board and continued to direct the agencies. Now, Mr. Houston became--who *was* secretary/treasurer --he became president, and we brought up to secretary a Mr. Edgar J. Johnson, who had worked his way up from agent. He was one of the first agents in the charter membership drive. I recall that he came to us from UCLA, and had-- He worked in the charter membership drive and waited until the company qualified to get his compensation, and he did a splendid job as agent and manager of agencies. So he was brought up to an executive level, and was secretary after Mr. Nickerson had passed. And that made the new trio of Houston, Beavers, and Johnson, in the early days. I don't know-- Well, to continue my role, I, in addition to serving as an officer of the company, I was very active-- I continued my activities in the community. I was active with the NAACP, the Urban League, and all of those organizations named in my biographical data. I was on the 1949 Grand Jury. That Grand Jury was noted for its activity in indicting the chief of police [Clemence B. Horrall] [Note: The charges against Horrall were later dismissed at a preliminary hearing.], and notorious Brenda Allen who was quite a-- Had quite an organization around-- She was known as head of the prostitutes in Hollywood. And we also indicted Mick-- Mickey--

Hopkins

Mickey Cohen?

Beavers

--Mickey Cohen.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

We had a busy year that year, that 1949 Grand Jury. And then, of course, I was also a part of the organization of the Grand Jurors Association [of Los Angeles County] which still continues.

Hopkins

What does that-- What's its responsibility? Or what's the nature of that organization?

Beavers

As the members of the former Grand Juries, they formed an association, it's called the Los Angeles Grand Jurors Association, and it holds meetings, and has been very active working with other--with the Grand Juries that--the current Grand Juries each year. They take an active interest in trying to promote those principles and laws that are dictated by--from time to time--by the results of the various services performed by the Grand Juries. And I've served on several mayor's commissions.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, I want to get back to those, get to those commissions, but I do want to carry on with the insurance, but you brought up now the indictment against the police chief. Can we go into that a bit? What was his name?

Beavers

Well, that grew out of the connections of the police department with organized crime. This Mickey Cohen outfit-- There was an incident that came up that was investigated and found to have definite ties with the police department. And that was the thing that lead to the indictment of the chief.

Hopkins

How were you regarded on the Grand Jury? Were you the only black on the Grand Jury at that time?

Beavers

Oh, yes. I was the only black.

Hopkins

How was your opinion regarded?

Beavers

Well, I guess it was regarded very highly, I was the one that made the--that wrote the first draft of the indictment for the--of the chief. But I think it was very highly.

Hopkins

How were you appointed to the Grand Jury?

Beavers

Oh, the appointments are by the Superior Court judges make recommendations, and then after a given time those recommendations-- It's really by lot. They were put into-- They have some system of drawing, drawing their names. And my name was entered by a judge, Judge Scott, Judge Robert Scott, and he's deceased now. But through the procedure of drafting I was one of the nineteen that went on.

Hopkins

Did you know Judge Scott personally?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

Can you tell us about the nature of that relationship?

Beavers

The relationship with the judge? Oh, no close, no special close relationship. I just knew him, he knew of my work on some of the committees, mayor's committees, and in the Urban League, and that's-- I guess that's how he happened to think of me as being one for the Grand Jury.

Hopkins

We do want to spend some time on some of the other city-wide committees that you were on, but getting back to the insurance, I'd like to ask you, the National Negro Insurance--

Beavers

Association?

Hopkins

--Association. [Now known as the National Insurance Association.] Can you tell me something about that, and if you played a role in that association?

Beavers

Yes, our company played a role in that. We felt obligated to maintain membership in that organization, and to help as far as we could in inspiring and developing the--and promoting the work of the organization. And it was-- The work of the organization was to encourage and support the insurance business among black Americans. I think you read M. S. Stuart's book [An Economic Detour, 1940] on the history of that organization.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

That tells you-- In that book that Stuart brought out the services of the organization and the importance of the business, and it's relationship to the-- what he called an "economic detour" in America. Then there was-- Well, you're interested in that particular organization.

Hopkins

Were there any other organizations that were formed that Golden State belonged to as a company?

Beavers

Well, I'm glad you raised that question, because we made it our business to break down the racial barriers in the trade associations generally. For example, at the time we organized there were no black Americans who were members of any of the major trade associations in America. So we made a

point of breaking those barriers, not just for the sake of being a member of the white association, but for the purpose of getting the benefit of the training, the methods, systems, and procedures used by the major companies. And at the same time, making our contribution as a member of such trade associations. So let's start with the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. We became members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. We had good associations with the officers of the white insurance companies operating in California, such as, particularly, the Pacific Mutual, and the Prudential, and Occidental Life, those companies especially because they had headquarters here in Los Angeles. Prudential had its southwest division headquarters here in Los Angeles. And through those contacts we were able to get into such organizations as the Life Advertisers Association, the [American] Life Insurance Convention, it was called, American Life Convention, the American Life and Health Insurance Association, the Life Office Management Association. Those associations in particular-- First, I recall, we were able to get material from the Life Insurance Association and we were accepted as auditors. We could go to the meeting, but we couldn't get membership. But when we-- We took advantage of the opportunities that were offered, and from that we were able to finally break the barrier and get recognized. Now we belong to all of the important life insurance trade associations. Now the Life Advertisers Association, in that organization we won our public relation--probably won many awards for excellence in our advertising. If you're interested, I might be able to get the number of awards that we won.

Hopkins

Sure.

Beavers

Then our first-- Mrs. Hickman and I attended the Life Advertisers Convention, and finally the present director of public relations, Mr. William [E.] Pajaud. Pajaud has served as chairman of the western division of that association. And we've had other officers, too, in positions. In fact, in the American Life Convention, Mr. Norman O. Houston was on their board, and later Mr. Ivan [J.] Houston, the present chief executive of the company, served as--on their board-- He served on the Life Office Management [Association] board, he was chairman of the Life Office Management board, entertained that board out

here in California. So we broke the barriers racially. And we had the help of officers of the companies operating in Los Angeles, the white companies operating in Los Angeles which I named before. They had the result--the help--of those officers in breaking these barriers. And it was through our contacts with them, in activities here in Los Angeles, that helped us get this wedge to break these other barriers.

Hopkins

Did companies like Prudential and others that you mentioned, did they insure blacks before Golden State came into being?

Beavers

Well, they insured them, but they didn't explore the-- In other words, they didn't give them the same type of policies, and they didn't employ them in the numbers that they do now, prior to the operations of the Golden State Mutual, because, no question about it, whereas we had the field all to ourselves, you might say, at first, and we had no competition from--little or no competition from them, from the other white companies, until a number of things happened. Until we had set a pattern that showed that the black Americans, in the right economic climate, would be good risks. That was demonstrated not only by our operation, but by the operation of other big black American companies, for example the North Carolina Mutual [Life Insurance Company]. I'm sure that the success of the larger Negro companies opened the eyes of the larger white companies, and shook them up a bit as to what they were missing. Now, we have to-- We have a job meeting the competition of them, not only for the business, but for employees. And we welcome that, because we-- Our race needs all of these other benefits that accrue from the operation of the life insurance business. And that was our major motivation at the start, and now we-- It is some source of satisfaction to see the new picture that has evolved now, where we have our offices and employees so recognized nationwide.

Hopkins

I know at one point, you mentioned that the Golden State has also hired whites in the corporation, where at one time they hadn't. Can you discuss the racial policies of Golden State Mutual?

Beavers

Well, the-- You understand that there are laws now against discrimination. And, of course, we have to live by that law, same as the whites. Of course, the whites have-- They are so indoctrinated with the segregated pattern that we--

7. Tape Number: IV, Side Two

June 1, 1982

Beavers

They're so indoctrinated with the segregated pattern that we don't have so much difficulty in employing our own people. But we do have difficulty in getting qualified [people]. So we, as a result, we have other races, quite a number of other races, represented in our employment. And more and more that's happening because of the unemployment picture, and because of the inability for the-- Well, I-- Maybe *inability* is not the correct word, but there is a problem in getting really qualified personnel. That goes with black and white. And it's because of, particularly within our own group, the failure of people to take advantage of the opportunities to get business education. That has caused us to sponsor a new nonprofit corporation called the Golden State Minority Foundation.

Hopkins

Could you talk about that a bit? I didn't know about this.

Beavers

Well, that-- Shut it off a minute. [tape recorder turned off] The Golden State Minority Foundation is--was organized for the purpose of encouraging students, and helping students to become--to graduate in business administration, to get their business education. That's-- And it's been operating for seven years, and we-- Through that foundation we have made possible grants to help students get higher education, and to get student loans. We helped the [United] Negro College Fund, we helped USC, and UCLA, and have a number of graduates who have been helped and who have been able to get their business education through the efforts of our foundation. I'll give you a copy of the update of this organization. They're

having a dinner and program at the Century Plaza Hotel on the evening of June 9.

Hopkins

OK.

Beavers

And we give scholarships, and student aid to students, and that's done for the purpose of meeting this situation and trying to help to get more qualified people ready for jobs in the industry.

Hopkins

Can you remember the first date--the first time that a white person was employed by Golden State?

Beavers

No, I can't, because it goes back a number of years. We had-- We had a white woman, Goodham, a good white clerk and secretary up in the northern--in the northern branches, and then we've had several-- And we do have several members of other races employed now in the home office. Did you ever go through the home office of our company?

Hopkins

Right, I did.

Beavers

Did you observe some other--members of other races working in there?

Hopkins

Yes, I did.

Beavers

You know first hand, then, that this is true.

Hopkins

Exactly.

Beavers

And, of course, to tell you the truth, we've been somewhat embarrassed by the fact that in this Minority Foundation, we've had-- We haven't had the number of male students that we thought we would have, that would qualify for these honors. Let me see, where are we now?

Hopkins

OK, well a--

Beavers

We were talking about the competitiveness in the employment field, and what we are doing about it.

Hopkins

And relations with other companies. I wanted to turn now, if I might, to Mr. Nickerson, and could you tell me something--give me kind of a biographical sketch of his life? Share with us what you recall that may be interesting and significant to us?

Beavers

Well now, yes. Mr. Nickerson was-- He was born in Texas, let's see, he was born January 26, 1879. He was the first child of William and Emma Pool Nickerson. He was born in San Jacinto County, Texas, and his parentage, of course, was American black. It was not the worst time for an American of black parentage to be born, neither was it best. Two decades earlier, to be born black in America was most likely to be born one of 3.5 million slaves in thirteen southern states, in border states. To be born black in America in 1879 was to be born free, but into a wilderness of social and economic repression. And there was growing national indifference to the problem of the freedom--whom freedom had somehow failed to endow with money, property, education, or skills. Mr. Nickerson's father was a slave, and was a cotton and corn farmer. Both his mother and father were offsprings of slave owners, as well as slaves. And Mr. Nickerson, he was a farmer, and then of course he became-- He prepared and became a teacher and he was-- He taught school prior to the time that he went into the life insurance business. He was attracted to the life insurance business, and he was working for a white

company, the American National [Insurance Company], I believe it was. I can verify the name later. It was through the unfairness and discrimination that was used by that company that inspired him to try and organize a company in Texas, and that was the--his reasons for organizing the American Mutual Benefit Association. He and two other men, I was trying to think of their names, I knew them, I have met them and I knew them well. I can't think of the names right now, my memory isn't that good.

Hopkins

Well, OK, we can come back to that.

Beavers

But anyway, he and two other men organized this American Mutual Benefit Association as a result of discrimination that Nickerson had encountered as an insurance agent for the American National. I believe I told you earlier about the American Mutual Benefit Association, a fraternal organization.

Hopkins

Uh-hum.

Beavers

And he was representing that organization when he came to California. He got a license to operate that fraternal insurance, and did so for, well, about three years prior to the organization of the Golden State.

Hopkins

Can you tell us-- We talked earlier about a trip he took from Texas to California, it was an interesting sideline. Would you share that with us?

Beavers

Oh, yes. That was quite interesting. In 1921, in June of 1921, he and his wife and eight children journeyed from Houston to Los Angeles, and to show the cost in the mechanism, and the problems that result from segregation, his trip to Los Angeles, and how he made the trip, is a good example of the, not only cost, but the silliness of racial discrimination, and these are the facts: Segregation had such a-- Racial segregation had such a hold on the people, on the white people, that in order for Mr. Nickerson and his family, wife and eight

children, to come to Los Angeles in a first-class compartment of the Southern Pacific Railway, the superintendent of the system in Houston wrote a letter. And they had a sufficient number of copies to furnish all of the stationmasters and the personnel at every stop between Houston and Los Angeles, advising them that this Negro family would be occupying a stateroom, and that they were to be confined to that stateroom at all times, and that they were to be given service--their meals and all--in their stateroom. And all the way from between Houston and Los Angeles, and of course at each stop, the stationmaster and his personnel who had the responsibility for handling the traffic had to be informed, and they had a copy of this letter to put them on the alert, to know that there was a Negro family in the--in this compartment--in the compartment on this train. I was really struck by that when I first read it, and noted how difficult it was, and what lengths people would go to to see to it that segregation was maintained.

Hopkins

Can you give us an account of Norman O. Houston?

Beavers

Now, Norman Houston, he-- He was a native son. He was born in California, in--I think it was San Jose. And Houston was-- He lived, when I first visited him up there, he lived with his mother and stepfather in Fruitvale, California. That was a little suburb of Oakland. Houston was-- He was a war veteran and he attended school at the University of California [Berkeley], public elementary school in Oakland, Fruitvale, but mostly north Oakland. And then he went to the University of California, and-- But he didn't graduate, but he, I think-- Yeah, I think he was called to service and went to-- He was in the Second World War, and--

Hopkins

Second World War, or First World War?

Beavers

Let's see, the Second World War--no, the First World War, yeah, the First World War, the Second World War we were in operation. Were we? Yeah. So that was in the forties, wasn't it?

Hopkins

The Second World War, right.

Beavers

Yes, thank you. That was the First World War. His son [Ivan J. Houston] was in the Second World War. Mr. Houston, a veteran of the First World War, that's right. And he was-- Let me see, what did he-- He had an officer's position in that war, such as it was. Let's see if I can find that. That ought to be in the information here. [tape recorder turned off] Mr. Houston was born in San Jose, and he lived there until he was three-and-a-half, and his father got a better job at a new hotel in Portland, Oregon, and they planned to make the trip by boat. Later, in Portland, the Houstons found what Lillian [Houston Harris] would describe as many colored people, but a town that was rather wild. And the harsh Pacific Northwest winters did not agree with Norman and caused him to have asthma. And after two years, the family returned from the Bay Area, moving to Oakland. By this time Norman was of school age. The family's economic condition had improved, and they bought their first home in north Oakland, near what was to become the boundary line between Oakland and Berkeley. Norman entered Derek School. The family situation did not remain stable, the house did not remain stable, however. When Norman was twelve his parents were divorced, and Lillian sold the house and moved with her son to Fruitvale, then an unincorporated area of Alameda County and later annexed to Oakland. Oakland was a railroad terminal, known all over the country as the place where the trains all stopped. A year after her divorce Lillian met and married a railroad man, James Ervin Harris. She called the next set of years the happiest period of her life, marred only by a tragic accident in which her husband's left foot was severed as he alighted from a slow-moving train in a railroad terminal. Although eventually able to return to work, James never completely recovered, and the loss of his foot subsequently contributed to his death. Now, that was his stepfather. An ingenious woman, Lillian Houston Harris kept her teenage vow to herself never to do laundry work for a living, and she had fulfilled her desire for a richer life. She took part in amateur theater, theatricals in San Francisco, wrote for the Oakland Outlook, a weekly newspaper, and raised canaries, pigeons, and Irish setters commercially. And like Mr. Nickerson's mother she exerted a strong influence on her son, and she was quite an influence on Norman, and throughout her

lifetime he was her pride and she didn't mind telling anybody about it. She was quite helpful to us during the organization and operation of the company in the early days. I remember going up there on business with the company, and staying at her house, the hotels were not so available then. She was very helpful to us. Although her husband then, Harris, he was just as-- He couldn't have done more-- No father could have done more to encourage a child than he did to encourage Norman. I have told you about Norman going to college up there. He worked as a switchboard operator in an apartment house. And his first job, that was his first job, an attendant left behind several volumes of Alexander Hamilton Institute books, and he was quite a reader, he liked to read, and he had a correspondence school business course. And he graduated from high school, he entered the University of California at Berkeley, and he majored in business. Of course, he wanted to be in business. There were jobs which offered security and perhaps minor promotions, but they didn't satisfy his ambitions. It only whetted his appetites for a meaningful part. While attending the University of California at Berkeley he was in good company. Earl Warren, who became governor of the state and Chief Justice of the [United States] Supreme Court, was at the same school. And then in 1917, Norman-- In 1917, let's see-- Oh, yes. He decided to go to New York to finish his education, and that was when he had to go to war instead. So he served in the war from 1914 to 1917. And I was trying to find where-- [tape recorder turned off] Colonel Young [Lt. Colonel Charles Young], while he was--

Hopkins

He met who?

Beavers

--while he was an inpatient at-- I was trying to find what hospital that was. It was one of the military hospitals. And--

Hopkins

You said he met somebody?

Beavers

Colonel Young. And Young gave him permission to use his name, and Houston-- He was commissioned in 1917, and he went overseas with the headquarters

unit of the 317th ammunition train, part of the historic Ninety-second Infantry, Buffalo Division. In France, Houston was made regimental personnel adjunct and became involved with the army payroll. His unit witnessed the-- Witnessed the reduction of St. Mihiel, followed by the successful [Meuse] Argonne Offensive which ended with the signing of the Armistice--November 11th. Well, by November 20th the walled city of Metz was reached and American and French troops entered the city. But I guess you're interested now in getting back to the-- After that military service he came home, and was-- Let's see, he landed a job as clerk in the brokerage firm of E. S. and H. H. Potter and Sons, later called The Loyalty Group, it's a major fire and casualty insurance group.

Hopkins

Was that--in what city?

Beavers

That was in San Francisco.

Hopkins

I see.

Beavers

Although this was Norman Houston's third experience with insurance he had not yet considered it the area in which his dreams of becoming a successful businessman might be realized. But one day on his way home from work, he ran into an acquaintance who offered him a job in Los Angeles selling insurance to waiters and cooks at the railroad commissary. Then he moved-- This caused him to move to Los Angeles. And that's what he was doing at the time, he was working at that job as a life insurance salesman selling insurance to waiters and cooks at the railroad commissary. That's where he was when he met Mr. Nickerson.

Hopkins

Oh, I see.

Beavers

I mean, he was in that job, doing that job when he met Mr. Nickerson.

Hopkins

What type of person was Mr. Houston? How would you describe him?

Beavers

Well, he was-- He was-- You're talking about his personality?

Hopkins

Yes, right.

Beavers

Oh, he was very affable person, very friendly, aggressive, and that's what I liked about him. In fact, he and I worked together for all those years, for Golden State, and we were good friends, and throughout our associations, and until his death.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we've been at it a while, but in order to kind of round out the Golden State story, I'd like to ask you at least one more question.

Beavers

All right.

Hopkins

This is concerning the growth of the company itself. There must have been some highlights in the growth of the company, or say through key periods, that the company had to deal with. For example, the Depression, how did the company fare up under the Depression?

Beavers

Well, believe it or not, we did very well during the Depression. We-- Despite the Depression, we continued to grow. I could-- Lets see, if I could--'32-- It was in 1929 to 1932, three years. It'd be interesting to mark out those years and see just what we did. You want me to do that?

Hopkins

Yes, if you wouldn't mind at some point, yes.

Beavers

I guess it'll have to be next time, then.

Hopkins

OK, yes, sure.

8. Tape Number: V, Side One

June 12, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we'd like to go back, if we may, in concluding our discussion on Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and ask you if you can clarify and maybe add to the role of the church in Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company.

Beavers

Thank you, Mr. Hopkins, I'd be glad to. I recall that no mention was made of Mr. Nickerson's church membership. As I recall, he was also a member of the People's Independent Church of Christ. He was not originally a member, but he became a member during the process--the time when we were organizing. Later he served on the board of trustees of the Independent Church. Of course, he too was quite impressed with the leadership of the Reverend N. P. Greggs, who was the pastor of the Independent Church at that time. Also, my other associate and cofounder, Norman O. Houston, was a member of the First A.M.E. Church, and he was also very active in the Ben Bowie Post of the American Legion. He helped to organize that post. So, in addition to that, we had on our board one of the leading members of the Second Baptist Church, Mr. S. P. Johnson, and he was quite active in the Second Baptist Church. Also Dr. H. H. Towles, in whose building our first office was located. Dr. Towles was also a member of the First A.M.E. Church, and you can see from that that the churches were well represented officially. But in addition to that, we from time to time made it a point to visit all of the churches, all the churches that were owned by members of our race in California. And we felt at home in any of the church buildings. Now, I think that would clarify that particular point about our church affiliation and the support we received from churches.

Hopkins

OK. As I recall, we left off our discussion with Golden State-- We've talked a great deal about the leadership in the church, we've talked about the internal structure of the church, and we left off last time talking about some external impacts on the insurance company. We left off with the Depression. Can you relate to us information on the impact that the Depression might have had on Golden State Mutual?

Beavers

Well, you're speaking of the Depression, I guess, in the 1930s?

Hopkins

Yes. The Great Depression.

Beavers

About the 1930s?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

Well, the-- I can't say that the Depression did not bother us at all. We did feel the Depression, naturally, but we were not-- We would not let the Depression stop us. I think to give you some idea of how we felt about the Depression, Golden State Mutual greeted the new decade with its first dividend payment to life policy owners in 1931. The Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company became the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and the firm continued to expand. Assets during this ten year span rose from \$73,000 to \$437,714 and income from \$188,847 to \$487,262. In July of 1938 the Golden State entered the state of Illinois, establishing an office in Chicago for its first venture across California boundaries. And it was in 1938 also that the company initiated its drive to convert its legal status from an assessment company to an old line legal reserve insurer. To do so meant the company had to deposit \$250,000 as a legal reserve with the state treasurer. Now to raise such an amount of money, the company directors decided to use the same method which had proved successful in the organizing effort, and

the sale of certificates of advancement. This project, which began in the closing months of 1938, was still in progress at the end of the decade. And in an era characterized by mass unemployment, business failures, and overtures to war, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company proved equal to the challenge of adversity despite its youth. So in 1941 the company had accumulated enough, through the sale of the certificates of advancement, to make the required deposit that would make it eligible to be reclassified as a mutual legal reserve insurer. So that on January 2, 1942, the conversion was complete. Golden State Mutual was licensed as an old line legal reserve insurer. I might emphasize at this point that the payment of interest and the payment of the original certificates gave the people more confidence, and we were able to raise the funds just mentioned, \$250,000, much easier than it was to raise the original amount.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, you had massive migration of blacks coming from the South to work in the war industries during the 1940s. Did that aid or have any impact on the insurance company at all?

Beavers

Well, it had some impact. Naturally the black population in California increased, and with that increase came more opportunities to serve. For example, it was during that period that we organized what was called the organization Allied-- Let's see, let me get this correct there.

Hopkins

Sure.

Beavers

The Allied Organization Against Discrimination In National Defense. Now this group spearheaded a fight which opened the doors of war industries to Negro workers on the Pacific Coast. As a result, naturally that helped our business, and it helped the new people coming in to California.

Hopkins

OK. Did Golden State Mutual have any relations--business relations--with other minority businesses? Maybe Japanese or Mexican businesses that may have existed in Los Angeles over time?

Beavers

No. At that time there were no important organizations among the other minorities, and we were so busy trying to take care of the discrimination against the blacks that we hadn't reached the point that we have now, where there are so many other minority groups in the state. We were focusing on the plight of the blacks at that time.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, in continuing this discussion with Golden State Mutual, before we get back to our chronology and talk about the 1950s and 1960s, and then bring the company up to date, I'd like to ask you about this question of expansion. Now you've already mentioned that in July of 1938 Golden State expanded into Chicago, Illinois. Can you tell me something about how the expansion process works, or worked for Golden State?

Beavers

Well, to begin with every state has its own insurance laws. You have to know-- if you don't know, you have to find out--the requirements of such state [laws], and before you make an application you get that information, and then you determine whether or not you are willing to expand your operations in that particular state. In the life insurance business there are two major ways of operating: One is through a general agency method, and the other, is of course, with the office management.

Hopkins

Can you explain the difference between those two?

Beavers

Well, in the-- With a general agent, you select a general agent, and he has to be bonded or meet your requirements to represent your company in that state, or in whatever city you choose to operate. And the general agent is responsible for-- All of the expenses in your contract are with the general agent, and it sets forth the requirements that he must meet, and the

compensation, and so on. But on the branch office system you set up an office, and you employ a manager and the assistant managers and the agents, and you are responsible-- The company is responsible for the general operations. And it's, as you can see and perhaps understand, it's quite more expensive to use the branch office method than it is to use the general agency method, particularly when you are confined to a certain--to the business of a certain segment of the population, which brings out the evils of the state of the racial segregated system. No other race is subjected to that kind of restriction except the Negro race. Now being realistic about it, whereas we don't have any segregation, or advocate segregation of the races, we have to be realistic about it, and recognize that because of this evil custom there's--we are not going to be able--we do not have the same access to securing business from the other racial groups, as, say, the whites have. But we take all that into consideration to begin with and we knock down the barriers where we can, and we-- It's a never--ending battle to fight against this racial segregation, because it doesn't help us.

Hopkins

Why did Golden State select Chicago, and why in 1938?

Beavers

There's a very simple reason, because Chicago is a central point, and there's a tremendous population of Negroes in Illinois, and so Chicago being a traffic center, that was a natural for us we thought, and we-- The records show that we were justified in taking that position, and we built up a business in Chicago.

Hopkins

Why 1938? Why that year as opposed to earlier or later?

Beavers

Well, that was the year that we were prepared, and the kind of business that we were doing at the time was acceptable in Illinois, and so there was no other reason. Of course, it's significant that it was only a few years after that we qualified as a legal reserve insurer, and we could really qualify to go into any state for operation. But the Chicago-- The Illinois laws were such that it accommodated our purposes at that time. Now since that time we have

entered other states. Well, we've entered Texas, and Oregon, Washington, Arizona, and several other states. In fact, our company's licensed now to do business in--in addition to Illinois--Arizona, Oregon, and Washington, we're licensed in Indiana, Michigan, and Texas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Georgia, District of Columbia, Louisiana, Nevada, Florida, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Missouri, Tennessee, Kansas, and Mississippi.

Hopkins

Was there any state that refused you a license to operate in that state?

Beavers

No, we haven't been refused. We have refused *ourselves* to go into states where the law and the population didn't justify it.

Hopkins

Can you give me an example of that?

Beavers

Well no, I don't have any example in mind, but I just have in mind some states where the population--the Negro population--isn't very large, and there'd be no particular point in going into a state like that.

Hopkins

You mentioned, Mr. Beavers, that New York was-- You consider it personally to be perhaps the most difficult state to get a license, or to set up an office in. Could you elaborate on that at all?

Beavers

Well, that's my personal opinion. I think that their-- Well, their laws are something like California, but I think they're a little more rigid than California. Really, the opportunities are there, and no doubt sometime we'll probably be operating in New York, but not yet. [laughter]

Hopkins

Just a couple more questions again on this question of expansion. When we talked about opening up an office in Chicago in 1938, were there any other black insurance companies in Illinois at the time?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Oh, there were?

Beavers

Oh, yes, there were a number of black companies operating there.

Hopkins

Insurance companies?

Beavers

Insurance companies.

Hopkins

Right.

Beavers

Atlanta Life [Insurance Company], the, oh, Metropolitan [Insurance Company] of Chicago, the--what's the name of that company--Universal Life [Insurance Company]. Those are the ones that come to mind now. There were several, and of course, they had a number of burial insurance companies in Chicago.

Hopkins

How did these insurance companies receive you? Did they look at you as a threat, or did they just look at you as-- Well, I'll let you answer that. How did they perceive you?

Beavers

The other black companies?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

Oh, well, we belonged to the National Insurance Association, and we have a very good relationship with the other officials, and we all recognize that our main competition is coming from the other racial--white--operated companies.

Hopkins

I see.

Beavers

That's where the real competition comes from.

Hopkins

Well then, through this association, do you ask each other, do you get a consensus as to whether you can move into a state?

Beavers

Oh, no, no.

Hopkins

You decide based on your own policy, and then move forward.

Beavers

Yes, yes. There's nothing-- In the National Insurance Association we have a very good relationship, in fact we have our conventions every year, and we have committees that work through the year. We have a director, and his job is to help in the promotion of the Negro insurance business. And of course, as time goes on we've had the problem of facing up to the importance of having our operations meet the test of other companies. In other words, we try to develop in our people the attitude of building a good life insurance company, not just a good black insurance company but a good life insurance company, as measured by the best standards in the industry. We have made it a point to break down as far as we could all of the racial barriers, because when we first organized, why, no Negro companies belonged to these leading trade associations in the life insurance business. We have succeeded in breaking down all of the racial barriers to membership in the trade associations. We are not only members of, but we freely participate, and our officers have accepted responsibilities and worked with the trade associations for the betterment of

the life insurance business. As an example, our chairman and executive officer Ivan Houston has been on the board, and has been chairman of the leading life insurance trade association, the Life Office Management Association. And that's the one that sets the tone, and aids in development and training of life insurance workers. As you'll notice behind the names of the officers the term F.L.M.I., that's Fellow of the Life Management Institute, and C.L.U., Chartered Life Underwriter, those distinctions--and you'll notice those letters following the names of several officers of our company.

Hopkins

You gave some documented evidence that during the Depression years the company continued to grow. It's amazing to me that people were interested in buying insurance during the 1930s. An example is, you expanded in Chicago in 1938. Were they as receptive to buying insurance as they had been before? Could you note a difference then?

Beavers

Well--

Hopkins

As you recall--

Beavers

--that Depression is a relative time. You see, in times of depressions when there's a lot of unemployment, why, you don't go around advertising the unemployment and seeking business from the unemployed. You focus attention on the employed.

Hopkins

OK. [laughter]

Beavers

If you focus attention on the unemployed and try to--and the agent uses all his time trying to insure somebody who is not working, why you can see pretty soon he won't be working because he won't be earning anything. That's a little comical way of putting it, but it's very factual when you get out to it. If you get into the right frame of mind, you can-- There's always a large group of people

working, there has to be to take care of the needs of society. And of course, it's up to a businessman to try to find ways of contacting those who are employed, who are earning, and have them recognize that the need for insuring so that their future and their dependents' future will be taken care of. So, that's-- I guess that's the reason. And we in Golden State-- Well, it just happens that during that particular time, during the forties, we accumulated-- it was during the forties that we actually finished the drive to become a Negro reserve insurer. After the conversion of the company to a legal reserve status, why then, we really were prepared to grow. So in spite of the war years, and their restrictions, Golden State's growth during the forties was tremendous. At the beginning of the decade, Golden State's assets stood at \$527,800, its annual income at \$496,395, and the company had 220 employees, whose annual salaries added up to \$211,736. But now, by the end of 1949, the company's assets had grown to \$4,270,205, and its yearly income \$3,496,663, and there were 642 employees who were receiving a total of \$1,750,223 in salaries and commissions. A fitting climax to an eventful decade was the dedication in 1949 of Golden State Mutual's new home office building, at the corner of Western Avenue and Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles. It stands today as a symbol of black enterprise and of loyal service to many thousands.

Hopkins

As long as we've started-- We've talked about the forties, and in trying to conclude our discussion on Golden State, can you carry this through today? What did the 1950s hold for Golden State?

Beavers

Well, for Golden State the decade meant more expansion and a real--and a new kind of identification of its representatives. In 1954, Golden State Mutual's board of directors formally declared the "Golden Rule" as the company's business philosophy. As a symbolic reminder of this principle, the company began the practice of presenting to each new employee a marble enscribed with the phrase, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In 1957, also, the company adopted the new graphic symbol and coined a new nickname for its field representatives. The Golden State agent thus became "The Man With the Golden Pen," a name symbolizing not only the great importance of the Golden State field underwriter services to families,

but also the professional nature of the special skills for which his training has prepared him. The fifties meant more for GSM than physical expansion, and added services and bigger financial figures. It meant a new high in technical proficiency and professional and ethical standards. More and more, company employees were increasing their technical competence through professional insurance education courses being provided by such organizations as Life Underwriters Training Council, Life Office Management Association Institute, and the Health Insurance Association of America. In an age of stepped up technology it takes not only competent people but modern systems and up-to-date machinery, too, to keep Golden State services efficient. In 1959, therefore, Golden State Mutual introduced into its home office operations an electronic data processing system, to help Golden State people perform their services with the speed and accuracy expected of--expected by Golden State policy owners. A celebrated milestone in the company's development was recorded in 1956 when insurance in force reached a hundred million [dollars]. Golden State closed out this ten-year period with \$133,281,913 of insurance in force, and assets amounting to \$16,442,783. Golden State people were providing services in six states through some sixty branch offices and general agencies.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, if you recall, of course, during the 1960s and 1970s there was an increased awareness in this concept of blackness, and black is beautiful, and buy black, and be black, and that sort of attitude. Do you recall whether that made a positive impact or a negative impact upon Golden State, just from your personal recollections?

Beavers

Well, we have been reluctant to use, or to confine ourselves to those terms, and they might be all right for slogans, but in a day when there's such mass unemployment, and people have to measure up to high standards to--and have some skills to sell to get jobs, we think it's more important to deal with the matter of training and being prepared to serve. That's where the beauty comes in. If you are well trained, and can render a service that other people need, then you have a better chance of fitting into the skilled operations of today. We have-- We have to face up to the problem of getting the best

training possible, and it was that idea that caused us to endorse, or to sponsor, what we call the Golden State Minority Foundation, which gives scholarships to students in college, and encourages them to engage in business careers, or prepare for service in business careers. That organization through the past seven years has done a remarkable job in focusing attention to education, and getting the help of businesses and educational institutes--institutions--and promoting this program of preparing for more efficiency in business. So to get back to your question, we think it better to focus on education and being prepared to do something and do it well, than to kid ourselves along with these slogans, black is beautiful and all. Black can be beautiful, black can be very ugly too, as witnessed by the crime picture in our communities.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

So, we've got to be practical and realists, and try to do the best we can to keep pushing for black Americans' citizenship and recognition of the contributions that our people make to the state and the nation. We can't put ourselves off, and just paint ourselves into a corner and be black. We've got to get into this mainstream and swim with the rest of the people.

Hopkins

So then the company did not exploit that slogan of "black is beautiful," and say, "OK, black is beautiful, now, all blacks come and buy Golden State Life Insurance Company." They didn't exploit that?

Beavers

No, that's right. And we don't exploit that, and we hope that our people will wake up and understand the need for getting prepared to do a job.

Hopkins

OK. In concluding this discussion on Golden State, which I might mention has been an excellent and detailed and very rewarding experience to hear, I'd like to ask you: Can you tell me the state of the company as it stands today in 1980, '81?

Beavers

Well, by going with this training program and getting new leadership for the company, I feel very proud of our young leadership. I think Ivan Houston, C.L.U., F.L.M.I., our chairman and chief executive officer, and Larkin Teasley, the president-- Larkin Teasley is F.S.A. [Fellow of the Society of Actuaries], and he's president and chief operating officer. And then we have-- [Note: Due to technical problems, Side Two of Tape V was not transcribable. The continuation of the discussion of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance will be found on Tape IX, Side I.]

9. Tape Number: VI, Side One

June 22, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, last time we were talking about Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and I believe this time you might have some concluding statements to make about the company.

Beavers

Yes, thank you, Mr. Hopkins. I was just thinking that behind the statistical data in the annual statement is the real story of the service of Golden State Mutual Life. For example, the benefits paid to policyholders, the thousands of people who have received money to pay doctor bills, hospital bills, and to buy other necessities of life. Money to pay bills and funeral expenses. Money to pay for education. For example, I'm thinking of a barber I know who had-- He has two sons. He had educational policies on both of his sons, and they both have graduated from college, and he is very proud of the fact that Golden State Mutual policies helped to pay their tuition through college. I am thinking of the money paid to finance purchase of homes and medical centers and other businesses. GSM has been a vital force in helping the people in every community in which it operates to finance their operations, such as home buying, and medical centers, and other businesses of that type. And then there's another factor, the benefits received by employees. Of course, naturally there [are] salaries, and there are retirement benefits, and all of the fringes that go along with the maintaining of a good working force. Our

company has a reputation of which we are very proud: Not getting people to come to the company just because of the race, but they come to the company and enjoy the opportunities--the work opportunities--just as they [would] go to any other business. These kind of things can be best illustrated by citing certain examples. I'm thinking now of a young man who came to our company years ago when I was director of agencies, and I remember talking to this gentleman about the benefits he would receive, and I was also emphasizing the Monarch Award that we gave each year.

Hopkins

The Monica Award?

Beavers

Monarch Award. We had at that time awards for the best records of service each year. And I was thinking of the reply, the response of this particular man. He said, "Mr. Beavers, I appreciate all of the awards and trophies that you give," he says, "but, I have four reasons to do a good job here. Those reasons are at home: my wife and three children." I thought that was a good answer. And, of course, that young man came up through the company, he served in various capacities. He was an assistant staff manager, and then staff manager, and then finally he was one of our trainers. That man's family has grown up, and his son, no doubt you have heard of him, Johnnie Cochran, Jr. His last job was assistant district attorney of Los Angeles County. He gives Golden State credit for his success, because his dad was able to earn money to put him through school and give him the opportunity of becoming one of the outstanding lawyers in our city.

Hopkins

What was his father's name? Do you remember?

Beavers

Johnnie [L.] Cochran [Sr.].

Hopkins

Johnnie Cochran, that's right.

Beavers

He was Johnnie Cochran, Sr. [laughter] Johnnie Cochran, he had his daughters, one is a teacher in the Los Angeles school system, and the other's a nurse, a graduated nurse. That's just one example of what it means to have this kind of opportunity--employment opportunity--that would enable one to take care of his family in such a manner and have them become a credit to, not only the family and the Golden State Mutual family, but to the entire Los Angeles community and to the nation. That's an example. Of course, that's just one example, there are many, many other examples. Of course, since that time, we have a new system, a leadership conference now, that every year the leading agency personnel go to some designated place. We've had conferences in Las Vegas, and conferences in Hawaii, conferences in the, oh, islands, the Caribbean. And we've had conferences up in Canada. Those leadership conferences, that was instituted by Mr. Ernest Shell when he was agency director. He made quite an outstanding record with us. He's retired now, but he's the president of this Golden State Minority Foundation we talked about. Then, the matter of race relations, the company has been very active in various trade associations. I think I mentioned before how we focused upon breaking the racial barriers in all of the trade associations. We have hanging on the walls in the auditorium 102 awards, and we have twenty-four trophies that are now on display. And, oh, I'd say there are at least that many more that are packed away from previous years that--awaiting the time when we will have space for a real exhibition of the awards and trophies in a special room, as it should be. I think those are the remarks that I'd like to include in summing up what our company's meant. And, in this also, this matter of retirement, we have one of the best retirement plans of any corporation. The number of our retirees is continually increasing, because as people grow older and they--most of them are glad to get out and get the benefit of the retirement plan that they have, and that opens up the way for a new employee to come in, you see.

Hopkins

What makes this retirement plan exceptional? Is there something-- Can you give me an example?

Beavers

Well, it's exceptional in that employees have a-- They are not compelled to contribute, but they can contribute and augment the amount of their retirement salary by contributing, making an extra contribution to it themselves. They are given that opportunity every year. That's one feature. And, of course, we keep it--keep up with the changes that take place, and we try to keep our retirement plan very, very up to date, see. We make a special effort along that line. Now, was there anymore on that?

Hopkins

Well, you mentioned in terms of a question here, you mentioned a barber who through your company, he helped to better his life. Do you remember his name? The barber's name?

Beavers

Yes, his name is Bracey.

Hopkins

Bracey.

Beavers

Yes, that's the name of his barber shop. Bracey's Barber Shop.

Hopkins

What was his first name?

Beavers

Oh, I don't remember his first name. He's-- I can get that, though, without any problem. [Hayward Bracey]

Hopkins

OK. And also the Monarch Award, could you explain that a little?

Beavers

Well, that's an award that's given to-- At that time, we were using that to recognize the outstanding agency producers, the leading agents. We called them Monarchs, because it was a term that we agreed on and was used for this particular recognition. And every year, that was-- And, of course, we do it

to a greater extent now, because we've enlarged it so that we have different-- I guess I have one of them here-- But we have different classes, we have many different classes. And, that's-- And the winners each year, the top sales producers go on these trips to what we call a leadership conference. And that's a very good example of what it means to be a leader in the-- It's quite an incentive. It motivates the personnel to seek to be up with their leaders, be numbered among the leaders, so that they can take this trip, and the trip is partially business, partially entertainment.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we've talked about racial matters with the company, and we've talked about the company progressing and using modern techniques. What about women in general in your company? There's a lot of discussion today about women's role in business, and so on. How have women fit into Golden State Mutual's--

Beavers

Well, from the very start we had we--we recognized women, and we have a number of female employees who have attained that distinction that I've mentioned before, F.L.M.I., and the Fellowship Institute. They have advanced along with the men. They have-- We had a woman--she's retired now--her name was Amanda Lockett, and she was the head of our data processing department. And you'll notice among officers listed in our statement, there's Gloria Beasley as assistant secretary, there's, well, Brenda Miller, she's F.L.M.I., she's assistant controller. Helen Batiste, she was the first office employee way back in 1925, she's retired now, of course. She's still on the board of directors. We have, well until she retired, we had Lolette Davis, who was the head of our claims department for a number of years, and she's retired now. We have continually given recognition to the women, and they're invited to--or rather they have opportunities to, advance to any point according to their individual ability and their interest in advancing.

Hopkins

Has that pretty much always been the case?

Beavers

Well back in-- It started with my sister back in 1925. [laughter]

Hopkins

Oh, I see, so from the beginning they've had opportunities. Can you remember who was the first woman insurance agent?

Beavers

Women insurance agent. Well, now you're speaking of-- I think, well I can't think of her name now. I remember several but I would hesitate to say who was first.

Hopkins

Sure.

Beavers

I remember a women named Mary Morgan, I remember a woman named Hackett, Mabel Hackett, and I remember a number-- Let's see, I think Hackett, she became an assistant manager, and oh, the names don't come to me now.

Hopkins

Can you put a date on any of these? Or when there might have been the earliest?

Beavers

What?

Hopkins

Can you remember a date, a year perhaps? I know this is taxing, because probably-- Can you remember a date at all? Say, Morgan, what year was she an agent?

Beavers

Oh, that was back in-- In fact, we've always had some women on the agency staff from the very beginning. And I think this Mrs. Morgan that I'm thinking about, I think she's back then in 1925. I don't-- I would have to go back to the records, and I could get that out for you, because, I'm sure we've always had some women on the staff. There were some women that were particularly

outstanding, too, in their production. Of course most of these-- Well some of them became full-time agents, but we had several who were part-time agents. Then we had quite a number, and we have quite a number now who are full-time agents, and they get out there and wrestle with the men. In fact, in the leadership conference, we have a number of women who qualify and go to those conferences. If you'd be interested in getting some names, maybe I could-- [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

Now, these are examples of some women who participated at-- What conference is this?

Beavers

This was in 1976--no, 1975.

Hopkins

The Leaders Roundtable Business Conference, I see.

Beavers

Yes. And as member of that Roundtable, there was Maureen Carroll, Louise Marshall, Doris Wilson, and Erma L. Thompson. We had Helen Pinson, Lorene Jenkins, Marcelma Johnson, Dorothy Alderson. That gives you an idea.

Hopkins

That is quite a few. What's the criteria for selection as a leader?

Beavers

What?

Hopkins

What is the criteria to be selected as a leader?

Beavers

That criteria is set up each year for-- You see, it's based upon-- Each year in the agency department they set up the criteria for becoming, or qualifying for, those awards. That's done each year, and it's movable, for obvious reasons. Conditions change, you have different sales material, and there is a difference

in the, not only in the type of material, but many times there's a difference in the sales program. In other words, the-- You have to set up conditions for that just as you would for a budget, based upon the objectives and the--mainly the company objectives, what the objectives are, and the type of material you have to work with.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, as you think back in the early period, in the twenties and the thirties, can you remember any particular or special problems that women might have had as insurance agents at all?

Beavers

Any special problems?

Hopkins

Right. Perhaps as an example, maybe clients would not like to have a woman serving as their agent, because perhaps in those days they would think that the woman wasn't capable, or wouldn't be as aggressive as an agent. Can you remember any things along those lines?

Beavers

No, I don't. Nothing like that has registered in my mind. I don't-- I know that women themselves didn't-- Well, I can't say that either. [Inaudible] they didn't-- This kind of thing didn't really appeal to them, but we found that in the very beginning there was an interest on the part of women in serving. I don't have before [me] now the number of women, but there were some women in our charter membership drive, I'm very sure there were some women in our charter membership drive. Women seemed to be very active in business of this kind just as they are in other organizations, like churches and societies, and you know.

Hopkins

In looking at this Leaders Roundtable Business Conference Guide again, I notice there are two other awards that are possible here, the Ernest Shell Pioneer Award. Can you give us an example on that?

Beavers

That's an award that he put up.

Hopkins

Who's that, Shell?

Beavers

Ernest Shell. You know, I mentioned him as-- He made an outstanding agency director, he's retired now and he is now president of the Golden State Minority Foundation. That's that institution that helps college graduates, it stimulates interest in getting a good business education.

Hopkins

Then the other award or group are the Knights. Who are the Knights?

Beavers

Well, that's the name that we use, that's a division, the Monarchs, the Knights, and what other. And then the others are just members. But those, they are divisions of-- They represent divisions of the awards, Monarch is the top. First you have the outstanding leader, the man of the year, and then you have the Monarchs, and then we have the Millionaires, and that's a million dollars of production, and then Monarchs, then the Knights. They're divisions that we have just set up in our own organization.

Hopkins

I see. You can have a woman of the year too, though. Or is it the man of the year, or is that agent of the year, or--

Beavers

Well, we have had-- A woman has qualified as the-- Of course, it was somewhat of an embarrassment, but she was the leader for the year, and that's the one time. [laughter] It happened once that a woman won the honor.

Hopkins

What year was that?

Beavers

I don't remember the year, but she was a Texas woman.

Hopkins

Was it recently, I mean since, say, the sixties or seventies, or was it back further?

Beavers

No, it's been-- It's within the last, well, I would say within the last fifteen years, I don't know just which year it was.

Hopkins

Sure no that's fine, as a reference that's good.

Beavers

But it happened one time.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, you've shared a great deal of information with us about Golden State, and we're sure you're very proud of it, and I know the community as well as the city of Los Angeles is very proud of Golden State Mutual. And before we close here, just some random thoughts, do you have any other summaries of final statements you'd like to make about the company, or have you had your say?

Beavers

I don't think of anything at this moment, but I did think it was important to get, to say a word or two about the picture behind the figures. You read the statement, but then to get the real picture of the service of the company, you have to go behind those figures and see what they mean.

Hopkins

I notice that Ivan Houston now heads the company.

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

Do you have any relatives involved in the company who might carry on the Beavers name?

Beavers

No, I'm sorry, we don't. [laughter] But I'm very happy with the leadership that we have, and I'm just hoping that they will develop other leadership that will be able to take their places as time goes on, because we expect the company to be perpetual, and to be perpetual you have to have leaders developing to take the places of those who have to go off the stage of action. [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

OK, Mr. Beavers, you have an incredible list of appointments to government, civil services, to community organizations, and so on, and we'll try to cover as many as we can. Let the record show that we're reading from a biographical data sheet. Mr. Beavers, I see one of the first items here, in 1943 you received a certificate of appreciation from Franklin D. Roosevelt, president of the United States, in recognition of patriotic services rendered in aiding the administration of the Selective Training and Service Act. What was the Selective Training and Service Act?

Beavers

Well, that was in connection with getting draftees, and that was the act that provided for getting--selecting and training draftees. I was on that board in our community.

Hopkins

So, in the Los Angeles black community. Was there a particular station you worked out of?

Beavers

No, it wasn't divided racially, it was just-- You see, at that time we didn't have the large population that we have now. And, of course, it was not a racial set up, it was mixed.

Hopkins

How did you come to be appointed to this board, if you can remember?

Beavers

I didn't apply.

Hopkins

You didn't apply. [laughter] You were drafted.

Beavers

But I suppose by virtue of the fact that I didn't--that I-- Well, I don't know how it was I was-- I guess just due to my other activities in the city, I was active in other committees and boards in the city. I don't know-- I couldn't pin down who caused my appointment or anything like that.

Hopkins

OK. Then in 1946 you received a Certificate of Merit from Harry S. Truman, president of the United States, for service in connection with reemployment programs.

Beavers

Yes, and I remember that distinctly, because we did play an important part in trying to get jobs for the servicemen when they returned. And that's what that was about.

Hopkins

I see. Was that a successful program, to your estimation?

Beavers

Yes, that was quite successful. It was successful in terms of getting employment, but of course, it's another story when you deal with breaking down the barriers of racial prejudice and getting equal opportunities. That's another story. But this was a good thing, because it helped to get these fellows jobs when they came back from the service.

Hopkins

How did you go about that? About getting them jobs?

Beavers

Well, we worked with the various businesses, and through the Chamber of Commerce, and through the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, those types of organizations that had control of jobs.

Hopkins

So, at least for a period, it was kind of an employment agency, of a kind.

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

How long did this organization last? Do you recall offhand?

Beavers

No, I don't recall offhand, but it must have been-- I guess it must have been a couple of years anyway.

Hopkins

OK. Then in 1947-- Excuse me, let me back up here, in 1946, the First A.M.E. Church, you received a Certificate of Merit in recognition of achievements in the interest and welfare of the community and unselfish devotion to religious, civic, and cultural advance of our city, state and nation. Do you have anything you might add to that?

Beavers

Well, I think that covers it pretty well. It was just the attitude of the minister, and that minister was the Reverend Frederick [Douglass] Jordan. He later became a bishop. He's dead now, and it was just what it says there. He appreciated my service, and he gave me a nice plaque in recognition of that.

Hopkins

Was this a onetime certificate--

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

--or was it given to other people year after year?

Beavers

It was a onetime thing.

Hopkins

Very good. In 1947, you were commended by Mayor Fletcher Bowron for competent service as chairman of the citizens' committee which made investigation of crime and police brutality in the Negro community. Was there police brutality in the Negro community during the forties?

Beavers

Oh, yes. We had-- They had quite a bit of that, and that was brought about by the protest of our people. Police brutality seemed to have been getting out of hand. And, of course, the mayor thought it necessary to have a committee to make an investigation and make a report, so that something could be done to change the picture. We did that, and Mayor Bowron was--he was quite a sincere man, and he wanted to see justice done, and I appreciated his commendation, and he appreciated my service.

Hopkins

What was the makeup of the committee racially?

Beavers

Oh, it was mixed. It was a mixed committee.

Hopkins

You mentioned that the blacks protested, there was community protest. What form did that protest take?

Beavers

Well, it was the usual form of protest. Through the organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and other civic organizations. They-- I don't remember any particular case or outstanding case now, but it was just a matter of too many people being beaten. I don't-- There was no death involved, but it was a matter of brutality.

Hopkins

Why was this committee set up in 1947? I mean, was this--?

Beavers

Well, it was to make an investigation and a recommendation to the mayor so that he could deal with it.

Hopkins

Do you remember-- Did people testify? Did people from the community testify before the committee?

Beavers

Yes, we had interviews, and we'd make interviews separately, and we got a pretty good report together.

Hopkins

Are those reports, are those interviews, are they a matter of the public record?

Beavers

Well, now I don't know that. I really don't know that.

Hopkins

One final question on this, Mr. Beavers. What was the result of the committee? I know you made a report to the mayor. Was there some action taken against particular policemen or against the police department as a whole?

Beavers

Well, as I recall, the report was submitted to the mayor who in turn submitted it to the police commission, and that way they brought about a change, improvement.

10. Tape Number: VI, Side Two June 22, 1982

Hopkins

To your knowledge, is this the first such committee set up to investigate police actions with the black community?

Beavers

Oh, I wouldn't say that. I don't-- I never thought of it in terms of whether it was the first or not, and I really don't know. It could be, and maybe it wasn't, I don't know.

Hopkins

OK. All right. Let's see, as we go through our list here, we find that in 1948 you received the [George Washington] Carver Citation Award for outstanding service in business development of the community. What was the Carver Citation?

Beavers

Well, that was a citation, and I think it's self-explanatory, and the meeting was held out at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, yes, there was a luncheon out there. And quite a number of people gathered to recognize me and the occasion, I guess.

Hopkins

OK. Is the name Carver significant? I mean, is this Carver--

Beavers

Yes, that is--

Hopkins

--George Washington Carver?

Beavers

Yes. They used his name for these awards.

Hopkins

Do you know who sponsored this award at all?

Beavers

It was sponsored by, oh, I forget the name of the man. I had some, some, I had some questions about the individual myself.

Hopkins

Oh, I see.

Beavers

So I don't even remember his name. I guess he's dead now.

Hopkins

OK. In 1951 you received the Crusade for Freedom Citation for effective and unselfish service in Southern California.

Beavers

Let's see, who presented that? That was presented out here at the University of Southern California, I think. And I'm trying to think who was the head of it. So many years have gone, I don't remember.

Hopkins

Yes. In 1951, the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Social Action Achievement Award in recognition of meritorious service in the field of social action and civil rights. Were you involved in social--

Beavers

I was involved in everything that had to do with civil rights. [laughter]

Hopkins

Were you a member of this fraternity? The Phi Beta Sigma?

Beavers

Yes. I was one of the founders.

Hopkins

Oh, you were one of the founders. Can you give us a little background to the founding of that fraternity?

Beavers

Just, we got together and we thought we wanted to get this Greek-letter fraternity operating again, [inaudible] and a fellow named Perry was really the leader of it.

Hopkins

Perry, do you remember his first name?

Beavers

No. What was Perry's name? I'd have to look it up. I remember the man, but I don't remember his first name at the moment. [William Perry]

Hopkins

Sure. What year did this fraternity form, roughly if not exactly?

Beavers

Oh, let's see, it came into being sometime in the, either the late thirties or early forties.

Hopkins

I see. Was there any university in particular where this fraternity was established?

Beavers

They-- UCLA was its starting point.

Hopkins

OK. In 1951, the Outstanding Service Award was given to you from the Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations in recognition of devoted effort and distinguished achievements dedicated to the advance of democracy and improvement of human relations.

Beavers

Uh-hum. Now, that was a human relations-- No, this is community relations.

Hopkins

Yes. In 1953, the Goldfeather Award, Community Chest, the women's division.

Beavers

I was very active in the Community Chest, and that was one-- The women's division, of course, was one of the main divisions of the Chest. They appreciated my extraordinary services during that period.

Hopkins

Was there any particular area you worked in for the Community Chest that you can recall?

Beavers

Well, I worked on the board, and on various committees. I served on the audit committee, and I served on the-- Let's see, there was the audit committee, and then there was another committee that I served on, that-- I forget what they called that. But--

Hopkins

The audit committee was auditing the Community Chest?

Beavers

Audited the social service organizations that depended upon the Community Chest for contributions.

Hopkins

I see.

Beavers

That audit would include going over the budgets and checking--it was a large committee too--and raising questions, and making suggestions as to how they could cut, you know, and save the-- The Community Chest had operated within a savings budgetary framework, and of course, they would have to make the allocations based upon the whole, the total number of agencies that they helped. And, of course, the auditing committee served to keep these organizations, that is their budgets, in line with what the Community Chest budget would be, you see. That was the thrust of that.

Hopkins

In 1954 you received, from the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, a human relations award.

Beavers

Yes, that was an award that was-- I appreciated them selecting me because I didn't belong to that fraternity, and they sought me out. So I felt rather grateful for that.

Hopkins

Yes. Do you know very much about the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity in terms of what university it's associated with in Los Angeles?

Beavers

Oh, they don't go by universities, they're associated with all universities.

Hopkins

Yes, yes, it's just a chapter I guess in this case. In 1955 you received the Red Feather Plaque, Community Chest Award for outstanding citizenship.

Beavers

Yes. Well, that again was from my overall work in the Community Chest.

Hopkins

Again in 1955 you received an award, this time the Rheingold Civic Award in recognition of tireless and unselfish devotion to the community.

Beavers

Yes, well that was a commercial thing. I appreciated it, but it was-- And of course, we have to appreciate the efforts of the corporations to utilize opportunities to sell their goods and services. So while I appreciated the civic award, I recognized what they were doing. [laughter]

Hopkins

What business were they involved in?

Beavers

Oh, the-- Oh Rheingold, that was a beer company.

Hopkins

A beer company. I see. Was it a local beer company?

Beavers

Yes. They have long since departed. I think-- I really don't think that was worthwhile. We don't need to carry on there. [laughter]

Hopkins

All right. Here's an interesting one. In 1957 you were recognized for more than ten years of devoted service as a commissioner of the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles. Now, I know this could be a very detailed study, and if you don't mind I'd like to save this one until perhaps our next session

Beavers

All right.

Hopkins

OK? Because this involves ten years of service, and I know there were a lot of things connected with that.

Beavers

Well, that was-- You know I served on that commission for thirteen years, I believe. Let's see, 1946--sixteen years, and nine of those years I was chairman. I don't know, there might be some other awards down here that--

Hopkins

Yes, I'd like to touch up on all of them for our tape, and then come back to the ones that we can discuss more fully.

Beavers

All right.

Hopkins

In 1960, you received the George Washington Carver Memorial Institute's Gold Award for outstanding contributions to the betterment of race relations and human welfare. During that year 1960, or maybe 1959, was there any--

Beavers

Wait a minute, is that a duplication of--?

Hopkins

It looks different. One is business development, and this one is race relations and human welfare.

Beavers

This is the one that I was thinking about, and we discussed it up here. This is the one that I was thinking about, and I said about that hotel--the Beverly Hills Hilton Hotel--that must be it. I don't know, I don't even remember this one now, in '48, 1948. I don't remember what that was.

Hopkins

Well, then this one in '60, was there a particular or specific act that you did in race relations and human welfare that earned you this award?

Beavers

Well, that's what they felt. This is, yes, this is the one that I was thinking about when I was talking about the one up here in '48, twelve years later.

Hopkins

OK.

Beavers

I don't just remember this one in '48. I don't know what that was. Evidently it was--this says in business development, too-- Well, I remember this one in 1960. Because that was one that I was thinking about when I mentioned it just now.

Hopkins

You mentioned that they probably gave this for a particular event. Do you remember what particular activity or event that you accomplished?

Beavers

No, that was a Rheingold you're talking about.

Hopkins

Oh, I see.

Beavers

I didn't say that about the Carver Award.

Hopkins

In 1962 you received an award of merit for community service from the Welfare Planning Council [Los Angeles Region].

Beavers

Yes, now that was an important award, because it was the Planning Council. It was associated with the Community Chest, because it planned, it helped organizations to plan their social service work for the entire Los Angeles area, and I enjoyed working with them. A long time, and I really appreciated their recognition of my service.

Hopkins

In 1962 you received the Recognition Award for National Insurance Association for outstanding service as president. Now, did you serve as president in 1963, or is that--

Beavers

From '62 to '63.

Hopkins

Oh, from '62 to '63. You've given us an account before in earlier sessions on the National Insurance Association, but could you give us a brief background as to how you were elected president?

Beavers

Well, I was elected by their vote. [laughter]

Hopkins

All right.

Beavers

I did their-- I was a keynote speaker for that organization. I believe that was in Los Angeles, and I was elected at that meeting, I was elected president, and I served until the next meeting, which was held in Chicago. I think I-- I don't know if this is on record or not, but Martin Luther King [Jr.] was our speaker in the meeting in Chicago. He was really dynamite. Was that on tape?

Hopkins

I don't think you mentioned that he was a guest speaker in '63.

Beavers

Well, let me see. I have, well, I'll show it to you. [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, as president of the NIA, National Insurance Association, what were your duties?

Beavers

Well, being president of the NIA, you held all the responsibilities of leadership for that year. You have to work with you a director, who is an employee, full-time employee, and you actually direct the activities of the association through that year. And you have a board of directors, and you have the corps of officers who serve with you, and you're responsible for the appointments of the various committees that are needed to achieve the program of that particular year. It's quite a job because it's all volunteer service, and the company that you represent of course takes care of your expenses while you do this job in addition to the job that you occupy with your own organization. So it's quite a big order.

Hopkins

Do you work out of your own headquarters, your own, say the Golden State headquarters, or do you go to a central office of the association?

Beavers

No, you work out of your own, you have your own office. For instance, I was chairman of the board of the Golden State Mutual Life, and I was serving as president of the association, and I had to take care of my duties at the Golden State plus doing this. From time to time you have to go to the other points,

you go to the-- I would visit the headquarters of the NIA in Chicago, and attend other meetings that involved the NIA operations from time to time, as necessary.

Hopkins

Is the NIA divided into regions?

Beavers

No, no. We don't have that many companies.

Hopkins

Is there an attempt for you to visit as many companies as possible during the year, or is that an obligation?

Beavers

That's not an obligation, but it's nice to do it, as to visit when you can. But that isn't an obligation. The obligation is to try to put over the association's program for that particular year, and do the best you can to lay the foundation for it succeeding.

Hopkins

Did you have any desire to be re-elected?

Beavers

No. [laughter] You don't have re-elections. In fact, everyone is glad when his time is up, because it can come back to you later on after some years.

Hopkins

In 1966 you received an Appreciation Award for field representatives at GSM, an Appreciation Award for home office employees of GSM?

Beavers

Yes, that's-- The picture's up here. The plaques up there.

Hopkins

I see. And then the Scroll of Honor Award for the West Los Angeles Branch of the NAACP.

Beavers

Yes, that was delivered to me at the Biltmore Hotel, a big meeting that they were having. They held this meeting at the Biltmore. A fellow named [Philip] Murray, I believe his name was, he was a big labor leader, and he came out and was the speaker. He's dead now.

Hopkins

Of course, when we talk about the Housing Authority, I would like to turn again to the NAACP, but for now, I see that also in 1966 you received a, well, there's a resolution made for a commendation for public service from the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County. What was that about?

Beavers

Well, just as it says. That was in 1966. I have those listed around here. I guess I'll show them to you when we get through, but I have all these awards hanging up in different places.

Hopkins

Oh, OK. We've mentioned your affiliation and your membership with the Holman Methodist Church, and they've given you an award also in '66 for effective service and leadership, I suppose in the church?

Beavers

Yes. They were particularly happy over my work as chairman of the board during the period that they were building the-- They built a second building there, what did they call it? [Christian Education Building] The pastor would be disgusted with me for not knowing the name of that building, but that was in honor of my special service, and the leadership given in getting that building built.

Hopkins

In terms of financial support? Or--

Beavers

No. Well, I gave financial support too, but this was in recognition of my leadership. Of course, that involves several meetings with the Methodist board downtown, and getting them to see the light. [laughter]

Hopkins

Just a couple more here, then we'll stop for today. The resolution-- You received a resolution of commendation from the Los Angeles City Council for outstanding community service?

Beavers

That was in '68?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

I have that out there, and then I have a Human Relations Award from the City of Los Angeles in 1971, and a Pioneer Award from Los Angeles Chapter of National Association of Media Women. All of these are nice awards, and I have them here, I'd be glad to show them to you.

Hopkins

As we stop here with '74 and this award, can you tell me what is the National Association of Media Women?

Beavers

Well, that's an association of women involved with the newspaper, or well, not only newspaper, but newspaper, magazine, radio, television, that's the reason they call it media.

Hopkins

Is this an integrated organization?

Beavers

No, that's-- I think that's strictly Negro. Yes, it is.

Hopkins

Well, thank you, Mr. Beavers for your time again today, and we'll continue our discussion of community organization and civic responsibilities and go into more depth on a couple of organizations.

Beavers

All right. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to give you this information, and to do whatever I can to help promote your program of history.

Hopkins

Thank you.

11. Tape Number: VII, Side One July 1, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, today we'd like to continue our discussion of your participation in civic organizations and voluntary associations. We left off last time in 1974 with the Pioneer Award given to you by the L.A. Chapter of the National Association of Media Women. There were some other key organizations that you were involved in and we'd like to deal with those today since we have more time. Can you tell me about your service on the Los Angeles Housing Authority Commission. Perhaps beginning with how you became a member of that board.

Beavers

Well, I became a member in 1946, Mayor Bowron was the mayor at the time, and he appointed me. There was a vacancy on the board occasioned by the resignation of Mr. Floyd [C.] Covington, and I was appointed in 1946. I served on the commission for sixteen years. In fact, I had the privilege of serving that commission under three different mayors, Mayor Bowron, Mayor Norris Poulson, and for a short time, Mayor--I can't think of the man's name now.

Hopkins

Mayor [Samuel William] Yorty you mean?

Beavers

Mayor Yorty. Incidentally, that was quite an experience, because it came at a time when the city of Los Angeles--that is the council of the city--had reneged on its agreement for a new housing program, consisting of approximately ten thousand units. The division and the tension and the animosities arising out of that were so great that the city council couldn't get organized until the matter was settled. And I remember going with the representatives of the housing authority and the city council to Washington, where we conferred with the federal housing authority and negotiated an agreement, which was a compromise settlement, which enabled the council to go ahead with this meeting. That meeting was-- That meeting of the council in which they approved the compromise was really something. I appeared before the council with Mayor Poulson. We presented the agreement and got unanimous approval of council.

Hopkins

What was the issue of that was contended?

Beavers

Well, the Los Angeles housing development-- A private organization was opposed to the ten thousand unit program, and through their activities they had succeeded in influencing the council to renege on the agreement. Of course, at the time they didn't feel that the program could go through, despite the fact that the housing authority had already signed the agreement, and had spent considerable money preparing for the implementation of the program. There was quite a feeling against public housing that had been sponsored by this organization. So they didn't anticipate that it would go on to the Supreme Court, and it did take a ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States to verify, to confirm that the agreement was good. And that was the cause for having to negotiate or compromise so that they could get organized. The factions in the council were so divided that they really couldn't organize a council. They couldn't elect a president, they couldn't get their committees appointed, or anything.

Hopkins

Because each side was lobbying for this and that--

Beavers

Well, they were so evenly divided and they couldn't get a majority vote until the matter was settled.

Hopkins

If you think back to that period, what were the arguments against public housing that you can remember off-hand?

Beavers

Well, number one, they objected to three stories or more, that was one of the main objections, and of course, there was some indication of racism in it too. They felt that this was a program that would serve the black population, and also they felt that we didn't need any more public housing. Really that was a feeling that public housing was encroaching upon the interest of private housing development. It was quite a story.

Hopkins

This company you mentioned, the private construction company, was it?

Beavers

It wasn't a construction company, it was an association of builders, home--

Hopkins

Oh, I see.

Beavers

I think it was called the Los Angeles Home Builders Association or something like that. I could go to the records and get the exact name. I don't recall the exact name, but it was-- I think if that wasn't the exact name it was something to that effect. The Los Angeles Home Builders Association.

Hopkins

And what were the arguments for public housing?

Beavers

Well, the arguments for public housing were that there was such a shortage of housing and that people--the poorer class--which the housing development served, were just, they just could not be served by any private agency. Two

things: in the first place they didn't have the money to afford the kind of rents that these people would charge--that private industry would charge--and under the agreement of public housing, allowances were made for that. They could pay so much of their earnings and there was a limited amount that they would have to pay. They had a formula that was based upon the number in the family, the number of rooms that they occupied. And it was-- That entered into it also, the competition with private enterprise.

Hopkins

Now, you first mentioned that you first served under Mayor Bowron. When did this particular controversy come to light, was it under Mayor Bowron or Poulson?

Beavers

No, it-- This controversy started during the term of Mayor Bowron, and really it was the cause of the defeat of Mayor Bowron.

Hopkins

It caused the defeat of Mayor Bowron.

Beavers

Yes, this housing squabble.

Hopkins

What was his stance on it?

Beavers

Oh, Bowron was for it, and he was with the housing authority. And that was the thing that defeated him in the election--in the next election.

Hopkins

Were there members on the housing authority who were anti-public housing?

Beavers

Oh, no. No members on the housing authority. They were all for it, you know.

Hopkins

OK, now when Mayor Poulson was elected, what was his stance on it?

Beavers

Well, his-- He had a stance against public housing coming in. But he was converted after he got in. [laughter]

Hopkins

How was he converted?

Beavers

Well, that trip to Washington, when he understood the legal aspects of it, and he was reasonable, and he was-- He helped to work out the compromise.

Hopkins

Was there any discussion among those individuals who were against it that this was kind of a socialist activity to have public housing, was that--?

Beavers

Yes, they used that too. They used that, and the communists, and all those arguments were used. And it was out of that argument that new legislation was-- State legislation was approved which provided for no public housing to be built without the vote of the people in the community affected.

Hopkins

I see. So for each public housing unit that was built there had to be a--

Beavers

No, no, not each public housing, but in each political subdivision or each city or county of the state.

Hopkins

They would approve it on a yearly basis, or--

Beavers

Oh, they'd have to approve-- They'd have to get their approval before they could build. Once they approved it, though, that's-- It's only a one-time deal. Once they approved it, and then it was built, why that was it.

Hopkins

When you were on the board, what was the first public housing project that was OK'd?

Beavers

Well, after this compromise agreement, then we set about to build, oh, four thousand three hundred and some units, almost half of the program that was originally approved.

Hopkins

OK, so the program was approved for ten thousand units.

Beavers

Originally.

Hopkins

Originally. And then the compromise was reached about what year? Can you recall?

Beavers

Well, the year that Poulson was elected.

Hopkins

I see.

Beavers

The first year, that was the first order of business. The council couldn't get started until that item was taken care of.

Hopkins

So from there, do you recall the first site that was allowed for the building?

Beavers

Well, it had a number of sites. I remember that the largest development that was built was the Nickerson Gardens, down in South Los Angeles, and I can't recall the order of the finish of these projects because there were several, and

we had two that were down in South Los Angeles, and we had one up on Pico Boulevard, and then we had--of course we had that Chavez Ravine property, but we didn't build any housing up there, and we had the developments on-- oh, in East Los Angeles, called the Pico Gardens. I didn't anticipate having to go into any detail on this. I could get more detail on it, but I don't think it would serve any particular purpose, because the number of units--

Hopkins

Yes, yes, we can get that, but just in terms of discussion-- You related to me earlier about a story as to how Nickerson Gardens received its name. Could you tell us that for the good of the record?

Beavers

Well, I suggested the name of Nickerson because William Nickerson was the founder of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and at the time I thought it would be of interest and be an honor to use his name as the-- To identify one of these projects, and in particular the largest project that was being built. At that time it seemed like a good thing.

Hopkins

And now you have different feelings about it?

Beavers

Well, of course, through the years, why, the community has changed and we had some elements of the population that are criminally inclined, and the community itself has taken on a different aspect, not through any fault of the housing authority, but in that particular community we've had too much crime and drugs and homicides, and things like that. And, of course, the housing authority property in a community like that, it takes on, it has to take on the image of that community. It can't be separate and distinct from the community because it's a part of the community, and I guess I personally kind of feel like that it isn't such--isn't as great an honor as I thought it would be at the time.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, you mentioned earlier that one of the fears--or one of the thoughts--among some people was that these housing authorities were mainly

geared for blacks. Were the majority of these housing projects inhabited by blacks?

Beavers

Well, eventually that happened, but that happened over a period of years as the populations of the community changed, but the housing authority had a very strict policy of renting to people on the basis of their need and their fitting the qualifications outlined for that housing, and race didn't enter into it. But over a period of time with the usual pattern of Negroes moving out and whites moving in these communities changed, and that's one of the things that has caused and continues to cause a pattern of segregation, racial segregation, in these large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles. You can trace it from, oh back from the early 1900s on. First, I remember distinctly there was a time when there were absolutely no Negroes living west of Central Avenue. The next border line was Avalon, San Pedro Street, and the next was Main Street, Figueroa, and progressing until they get to the ocean. [laughter] So, there's a time, you see, when it wears out, and it's an economic, it's both an economic and a racial problem, because since the Supreme Court issued its [ruling] against restrictive covenants Negroes live anywhere in Los Angeles. We find-- It would be difficult to find a community in Los Angeles where you wouldn't find some Negroes. That applies even to Beverly Hills.

Hopkins

Were you the only black member on the housing authority during the years you served?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

And you served from 1946 to--

Beavers

Nineteen Sixty-two.

Hopkins

--to 1962. I want to talk about that a bit, but first I understand that there were at least two former black members on the housing committee. Looking at the records, was Paul Williams on the housing committee?

Beavers

No, he was an architect for some of the developments, he was an architect for the Nickerson housing development.

Hopkins

But he didn't actually serve as a member of the housing community?

Beavers

No, no, no.

Hopkins

Well, then Floyd Covington was?

Beavers

Floyd Covington, and then there was a woman that preceded Floyd, I believe, yes, Mrs., oh-- [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

OK. So there's Covington, and--

Beavers

Mrs. William Terry.

Hopkins

Mrs. William Terry. Do you remember her first name?

Beavers

Well, her husband's name was William. He was a building contractor, but, oh, what was her first name now? I don't remember at the moment, I might come back to that, but Mrs. Terry was the other commissioner.

Hopkins

What were Mr. Covington's years of service, if you can remember offhand, or roughly what were his years?

Beavers

Well, I don't-- I think he served a couple of years. You see, this housing authority, it came about as a result of housing policies developed under the Roosevelt administration, and it was only in the thirties that it came about, so it had not been operating too long.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, on the housing authority, so far we've talked about the public housing that they were involved in. What were some other activities this commission was involved in, or was that the principal?

Beavers

That was it, that was it. They had a sixty-five million dollar program at one time, and they had their hands full doing that. You see, it's volunteer work anyway. You simply had your expenses paid, and there were expenses you incurred in connection with the work, and you got that, but it was volunteer work.

Hopkins

So, you would not try to find private housing or any kind of housing for people who were in need of housing?

Beavers

No, the public housing authority was confined to developing, finding housing for people who were unable to qualify for purchasing of homes or renting under the regular procedures. See, in other words, the disadvantaged people. People whose salaries were not, were below the level, and they were classed as low-income applicants. In other words, they couldn't qualify for public housing unless total salaries were below the poverty level, and so that was the class of people that the housing authority served. And that was the one thing that set them apart, and that was the one thing that enabled them to-- enabled these particular classes of people to have decent housing, because it was demonstrated over and over that the regular housing in the private industry could not provide housing for these particular classes of people at

rents that they could afford to pay. That confined the operations of the housing authority to serving that class of people.

Hopkins

As we said, you began your career on this board in 1946. Can you give us some thought, and trace for us your activities on the housing board between 1946 and 1962?

Beavers

Well, I was just a member of the commission for seven years, and I was vice-chairman for a part of the time, but I became chairman, and I served as chairman for nine years.

Hopkins

How were you first appointed to the board? You said--

Beavers

I was appointed by the mayor.

Hopkins

And how did he know about you? How did he come to know about you?

Beavers

How did he come to know about me?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

Oh, I guess through-- He had appointed me on other committees, I guess, and he knew me from the company, from the business angle, and that's how I was known. I was known as a part of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, and also I was active in so many things.

Hopkins

OK.

Beavers

Did that answer your question?

Hopkins

You did. OK, then you were acting vice-chairman from 1952 to 1953. How did you become vice-chairman? What was the method of selection there?

Beavers

Oh, the board had its method of selection, it elected officers every year.

Hopkins

How many people on the board?

Beavers

Five.

Hopkins

Five. And then you became the chairman by the same process?

Beavers

Yes, elected, and that means I was re-elected every year for eight years.

Hopkins

Was that unusual, or--

Beavers

Well, it was unusual they didn't have anybody else. [laughter]

Hopkins

Well, you must have been doing something right. Were there any memorable events that happened while you were chairman of the commission?

Beavers

Well, we had-- Oh, yes, there were a number of things that happened in the ordinary operations. Of course, at that time there was a lot of attention given to the activities of the communists, and if you recall that was a time in which

they had a committee, a government committee that would search out the communists.

Hopkins

Was this the [House] Committee on Un-American Activities?

Beavers

Yes, the Committee on Un-American Activities, and that was the time when they were operating and in that field I had the displeasure of terminating a man who was in our public relations department, who was very gifted and was doing quite a nice job, but we had to terminate him on account of his activities. And, let's see, well, they had reasons to suspect him, I assume.

Hopkins

What was his name? Can you share it with us?

Beavers

His name was [Frank B.] Wilkinson.

Hopkins

First name?

Beavers

I don't remember his first name. His initial was F. I don't know whether it was Freddie or what.

Hopkins

Now, what did he allegedly do?

Beavers

Well, just being a member of the Communist Party was sufficient, you know.

Hopkins

And he was a member of the Communist Party?

Beavers

Well, that's what they said, and we had to take their word for it, and they seemed to have had the evidence to support it.

Hopkins

Was this a local group who said this or a national? I mean, do you remember what body asked you--?

Beavers

Well, they had-- The Committee on Un-American Activities made the investigation, and it came to our attention, and naturally we had to act on it. And as chairman it was my responsibility to terminate his services. That was on the darker side. We had many things that came up. One of the things outgrowing, coming out of this reorganization, and the compromise agreement, we had to get rid of the property that we would not be using due to the curtailed operations. And one of the good things that came out was the selling of the Chavez Ravine property, that is most of, it to the Dodger organization for the accommodation of major league baseball. And that was very interesting, because it required negotiations with the Dodger administration and, of course, there were those who thought that the contract agreement with the Dodgers was giving away some property, and they insisted upon-- The opponents of it got up a petition which required an election to determine whether or not the city would approve it, and that was a very interesting activity, and--

Hopkins

Can you share with us--?

Beavers

Let's see, that was voted on and I did have the year--'56.

Hopkins

1956?

Beavers

Yes. 1956. The property that we had in Chavez Ravine, of course the city was not receiving any-- It was such a small amount of money, you might say they were not receiving anything from that property. It was mostly, a considerable

amount of it was yearly, and then that that was occupied, it had housing on it. The housing was in such bad shape that the city was not getting any revenue from that property at all.

Hopkins

The little revenue it was getting, where did it come from?

Beavers

Oh, a few scattered places that were in one section of it.

Hopkins

So property tax from those few properties.

Beavers

Yes, and it didn't amount to very much. So to compare that with the millions of dollars that the city receives now from the Dodger organization in taxes certainly demonstrates the wisdom of their action. It was a real hot contest for the, in the election, but we won out, and the contract went through. That was interesting. And then from time [to time] we had meetings that kept the public informed as to what the housing authority program was doing, and its service to the city.

Hopkins

How did the housing authority come to acquire the Chavez Ravine land?

Beavers

Oh, under the eminent domain process.

Hopkins

Now, I understand there was some process among those people who were living in Chavez Ravine against the housing authority--

Beavers

Buying the property?

Hopkins

Buying the property.

Beavers

Against the condemnation of their property for-- Yes, there was. And, of course, the housing authority won out in that though, and I don't recall any legal case. What was done was just to assure the people that they would provide other housing for them.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we had a interview with Mr. Poulson a few years back, and he said that for three years he tried to get public groups interested in the Chavez Ravine area, but he couldn't seem to get anyone interested in developing it. Do you have any comments along those lines?

Beavers

Well, I'm sure that was a fact, because he-- Although he came in as an opponent of public housing, I must say that once he saw the problem, he did all that he could to promote the program, and I'm sure that what he said there is correct, that he tried to get other people interested. Because after he had been responsible for defeating the mayor who was favorable to public housing, I'm sure that he felt obligated to try to do something to justify the faith and the support that he received from the people who caused his election. I have found Norris Poulson to be quite a good mayor, and whatever attitudes he had against public housing, why, they got lost in the shuffle, because during my association with him we worked together very satisfactorily. I considered him one of my good friends, I still communicate with him, send cards and all, so it is a very good feeling that exists between us.

12. Tape Number: VII, Side Two

July 1, 1982

Hopkins

OK, so you were saying that pretty good relations then existed between you and Mayor Poulson?

Beavers

Oh, excellent relations.

Hopkins

I remember reading also in his oral history that he mentioned that he did have member friends on the housing committee, and he particularly and specifically mentioned you, and that he still communicated with you.

Beavers

Yes, that's true.

Hopkins

Now, as you said, he came in as an anti-public housing person, and he changed and became, if not prohousing, at least responsive to public housing.

Beavers

He accepted his responsibilities as mayor, because he had that program with him, like it or not, when he went to Washington and they had this compromise agreement, but then it was his program, he was mayor, and he accepted it and, I think, did a very satisfactory job.

Hopkins

OK, in your opinion, given the fact that he had these feelings against public housing, did that have anything to do with him allowing [Walter F.] O'Malley [to] take the Chavez Ravine area?

Beavers

Oh, no, no. That was strictly a business proposition, and everybody connected with it saw it as such.

Hopkins

Was there any division in the housing authority itself among its members as to whether Chavez Ravine should be sold to Mr. O'Malley?

Beavers

Oh, no.

Hopkins

The housing authority as a group unanimously--

Beavers

Yes, they were unanimous on that. We couldn't use it for housing, you see under the compromise agreement we couldn't use it, and this was a good opportunity to get rid of it--

Hopkins

And benefit the city.

Beavers

--and benefit the city.

Hopkins

I see. Well, let me ask you, what was this compromise? Why couldn't Chavez Ravine be used as housing? I might have missed it.

Beavers

Well, the number of units was cut down from ten thousand to four thousand three hundred and some, you see. Well, you have a lot of property there that can't be used.

Hopkins

So, what you mentioned earlier about this four thousand units, that was the ceiling then for public housing in Los Angeles?

Beavers

That was a ceiling on this particular program, because that was what we were dealing with.

Hopkins

I see. OK, so those units had already been allocated, so we had Chavez Ravine, with really nothing to do with it in terms of public housing? Is that correct?

Beavers

No.

Hopkins

No, oh, help me please.

Beavers

No, you see, the plans for use of the property had all been approved and that included Chavez Ravine and some other sites, and when we reached this compromise agreement, it was agreed that instead of ten thousand units there'd only be four thousand three hundred and some units used--built. Well, that-- It was necessary-- The basis of that compromise was ruling out any units or any buildings that would exceed two stories. They had some three-- and four--story buildings, and of course when you rule out that number of units, and you have to confine it to two-story units, well then naturally you can't build as many. And, we had to narrow the-- We had to reduce the number of units and build them in such a way as they would be self supporting, and in order to do that, why, you have all this land, and it was hilly land which was involved, that we had to dispose of. And nobody helped us to decide when and where and what, that was our little red wagon we had to work with. In that connection this happened to come along as a very timely project that enabled us to come out of it without losing.

Hopkins

OK. The compromise again, who were the people involved in it?

Beavers

That was with the federal housing authorities. Federal housing is, it was back in Washington, they--all of the public housing in the United States is under that agency, and the superintendent of public housing at the time had the responsibility and we had to work with him and his board. Work with him on reducing and getting a program that would take the place of the one that had already been approved.

Hopkins

What was his name, the superintendent, can you remember offhand?

Beavers

I think his name was Slusser.

Hopkins

OK, very good, thank you. Are there any other comments you want to share with us concerning the housing authority?

Beavers

No, I think I mentioned that we had meetings from time to time. They did have a meeting in which I was presented a plaque in recognition of my service.

Hopkins

You retired from this committee in 1962. Why?

Beavers

Mayor Yorty was elected and there were some things that he and I didn't agree on. I won't comment on them in this--

Hopkins

In this session? OK. We'd like you to though, if you would, but if you'd rather not--

Beavers

Well, it's really political, and I don't think those kind of things do any good.

Hopkins

Do you know if he appointed any blacks to the housing authority under his administration? Say in that first session, in that first term?

Beavers

I really don't know. He didn't replace me right away, he let me-- First he thought he could use me, and he found out he couldn't, and I really don't know who he appointed. He waited though until he was sure that he would have a majority on the commission. One thing happened, one of the commissioners got killed in an accident, and then there was a vacancy that occurred, and then with my resignation that assured him a majority on the commission. So, as these things happened, why that was the reason I served a year under his administration. He tried to get me to agree with him and ignore the regulations for hiring, so that some of his people could be employed in the housing authority. I said I wouldn't tell you, but I can tell you that much.

Hopkins

Well, certainly, as you know, any part that you say we can close for the record.

Beavers

And so I wouldn't budge on that, I told him, no, I wouldn't make a deal. I wasn't going to-- First of all, I told him I knew how he felt, and if-- I would step down any time. All he had to do was to let me know when he was ready and who he wanted to appoint, and it was all right with me. I wasn't interested in continuing in the service, so he tried a couple of times to win me over by--if I just agree, you know, if we could agree on a number of jobs that we would pass on, and they wouldn't be subject to the regular civil service procedure. Well, I wouldn't want to get in any nest like that. [laughter] So that was it. When he found out I meant business, that it was no deal, then he finally, as soon as he had this opportunity to get a majority, why then he notified me that my resignation was accepted.

Hopkins

Could you relate for us any specific example of what he wanted you to do?

Beavers

I just did.

Hopkins

All right, we'll leave it--

Beavers

I wouldn't want to go into any detail on that.

Hopkins

OK. Mayor Poulson said that a number of things that were begun under his administration, Mayor Yorty took credit for, including the Dodgers to some degree, and so on. Do you--

Beavers

He gave his full cooperation, we didn't have any problem with him. Another thing that shows you about politics, now, of course, coming in, he was right

with this gang that was opposed to housing authority, and he stepped right into office. And he got in there, and of course, I have to agree there was nothing he could do because all this had gone on before, and the best thing he could do was what he did. He joined with us and went to Washington, and that's where I really got acquainted with him. He made it his business to invite me as his seat partner, and we went on the train.

Hopkins

This is Mayor--?

Beavers

Mayor Poulson.

Hopkins

Poulson.

Beavers

We went to Washington, and we were together quite a bit, and we just talked things out. And he let his hair down, and I let mine down. [laughter] We became the best of friends, it was real-- He did all he could do to promote the program, and he was due the credit. He appointed me to the Dodger committee [Mayor's Committee on Major League Baseball]. Major League Baseball Committee, it was called, of course we didn't know about the Dodgers, who it would be, and I served-- It was his appointment, he appointed me to his committee, and I served on that committee, and I served on some other committees that he appointed.

Hopkins

What was the function of this baseball committee--or major league baseball committee? Obviously, to bring a major league baseball team to Los Angeles--

Beavers

That's right.

Hopkins

How did you go about that? What functions did the committee--?

Beavers

Well, the first thing, we had to get approval of the voters on the contract, that was the first thing. That was a big hurdle. Then, next thing was of course-- Well, it wasn't the next thing, because before we did that we had negotiated this deal with the Dodgers, but it couldn't become legal until the voters acted. Then after that, why, we went ahead and did the things necessary to complete the negotiations. And after that there was some other property involved, in which these, oh, the banks and hotel, that Bonaventure Hotel, and other properties that were a part of that parcel.

Hopkins

Part of the Chavez Ravine parcel?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

I see. You mean you took actions, or the committee [took] actions on that?

Beavers

Well, we made that property available. Then, well let's see, with the housing authorities, that just about-- I'm trying to find the dividing line as to what Poulson did and what would come within the scope of the housing authority, and then some other things that were not in the scope of the housing authority. There was another committee that he appointed me to--

Hopkins

Mayor Poulson?

Beavers

Yes. That was a recreation committee that had to do with finding, enlarging the program for the zoo. The Los Angeles Zoo. As we went to San Diego and checked over their operation, that was a remarkable zoo operation they have down there, the wild animals and all. And we worked on a committee and it started an expansion of the Los Angeles Zoo.

Hopkins

What was that committee called? Do you remember offhand?

Beavers

It was called the Los Angeles Recreation and the Zoo, I guess, because-- I don't know what they called that committee.

Hopkins

I notice on your biographical data sheet you have dated here, would this be the Mayor's Citizen Committee to Study Zoological Problems, is that it?

Beavers

Yes, that was it.

Hopkins

Oh, good. Mr. Beavers, you were on this baseball committee for how many years? Or what were the dates on that? Do you recall?

Beavers

Are they indicated in the biographical data?

Hopkins

No.

Beavers

Well, I think that was '56, and probably lasted a couple of years, maybe '56 to '58.

Hopkins

Do you think the fact that you were chairman of the L.A. Housing Authority had anything to do with your appointment on this committee, the baseball committee, or was that divorced from that idea?

Beavers

Well, of course, now, I don't know. That's a matter of speculation, I don't know. I don't know-- I think perhaps I would have been on the committee anyway, but that's something that I'd speculate on. I was chairman and I was appointed. [laughter]

Hopkins

Those are the facts, then. Were you a baseball enthusiast during those times?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Very good, just one more question here concerning this. I wasn't clear on the idea that the Chavez Ravine parcel and land was somehow connected with the area that now the Bonaventure Hotel occupies. That's all part of the same land? How is that connected?

Beavers

Well, it's part of the same land. All of that property up there, it was-- That wasn't known as Chavez Ravine, but it was adjacent to that, and it was under the housing authorities. It was included in the housing authorities. Oh, that ran right into the land that was controlled by the Los Angeles Housing Redevelopment Program [Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Program].

Hopkins

Which is different?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

OK.

Beavers

But, there was a part of the land that was connected with Chavez Ravine, and it came right on up and it was adjacent to this other property that was under the operations of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Program.

Hopkins

Now, the Los Angeles County Redevelopment Association, was that a public-- was that public land too?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

It belonged to the city, or to the state?

Beavers

Well, it belonged to-- A part of the land, as you say, was a part of the same parcel of the Chavez Ravine, and then the other part was the Los Angeles Community Development Program, and we cooperated with the Community Redevelopment Program, and as I recall, some other land that we could not use, and we had some kind of an agreement, I think. I did something with the community redevelopment forces that enabled them to go ahead with their program, which included putting up those--some high-rise buildings.

Hopkins

Is Bunker Hill a part of that operation?

Beavers

Yes, yes.

Hopkins

I see. Bunker Hill, and the Bonaventure, they're owned by private enterprise, aren't they?

Beavers

Yes. But they, you see, the community redevelopment program is a different type of program from public housing, so under their guidance the private industry could develop property, and that's quite independent of the public housing.

Hopkins

I see. And this group, the community redevelopment program, they would be more in favor of private or individual development, wouldn't they? I mean that's the nature of their business, I mean of that operation?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Was it legal for-- I'm sure it was because it was done, but were there any problems with shifting this land for development by private enterprise?

Beavers

No, no, no problem there.

Hopkins

OK, very good. I think that about does it for the housing authority. Before we close I'd just like to ask you a couple more important questions concerning some civic organizations. Of course, we know that you were, for ten years, the financial secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, can you tell us about your involvement with the NAACP. When did you first join?

Beavers

Oh, Lord. I was with the NAACP since I was, ever since I reached my maturity. [laughter] Yes, let's see, maybe, I don't think you mean that. You don't mean when I joined, when I first joined?

Hopkins

Well, let's see, I think the Los Angeles Branch was begun in, what, 1915 or so in Los Angeles, if I'm not mistaken, and did you have anything to do with the initiation of the organization in this town?

Beavers

No, I just became a member. I probably became a member when they started. But I know definitely I was a member in 1920, '21, and I think I have-- Let me see, was there anything in my biographical data that would indicate?

Hopkins

I didn't see the date, but I guess what we're really after is when you became an active member. Maybe you were an active member from the beginning. I mean in terms of attending meetings and participating in the organization. If you recall.

Beavers

Well, let's see, I have a way of arriving at it, I think, here. [tape recorder turned off] I became active in the Los Angeles chapter--I guess I became active around about 1940, yes.

Hopkins

When were you the financial secretary?

Beavers

What?

Hopkins

I see that you were the financial secretary, do you remember those years at all? I don't see them on the data sheet. [tape recorder turned off]

Beavers

I was a member of the Grand Jury in 1949, and I must have been a member in about the early forties, in about 1940, because I was president of the Urban League, they don't get that [on the data sheet] either, do they?

Hopkins

We can come back to the dates, but can you tell us something about the--

Beavers

Chairman of the Urban League home building and finance committee, 1951. Well, before that I was financial secretary of the NAACP. What was that you were going to ask?

Hopkins

OK. Are there any significant events that you can relate to us about the NAACP in Los Angeles, where you were particularly involved?

Beavers

Oh, I remember when Dr. [Henry Claude] Hudson was arrested for-- He was arrested-- They made a case of it down in Santa Monica, in the beach. No, not in Santa Monica, it was in another place.

Hopkins

Redondo Beach?

Beavers

Manhattan.

Hopkins

Oh, Manhattan Beach, that's right.

Beavers

He was involved in a case there. He pointed up the rights of black citizens to bathe in the Pacific Ocean [laughter], and I was financial secretary of the NAACP under his administration, he was president, and those years, that was during--

Hopkins

That would have been in the early twenties--the 1920s, when he was arrested. I discussed that with him once, and I think he said it was 1923 or '24 when he was arrested for bathing in Manhattan Beach. So you were perhaps financial secretary at least during those years. [tape recorder turned off]

Beavers

We organized the Golden State in '25, '24, yes, I was financial secretary of the NAACP in the twenties, in the early 1920s. It's a shame we don't have a-- At least when you're doing things like this and you don't have any idea of it. I was the secretary of the NAACP for ten years, and it doesn't say what ten.

Hopkins

When Dr. Hudson was arrested, can you remember some of the feelings in the community at that time?

Beavers

Yes, the feelings were very high, and of course, there were a smaller number of Negroes, but the feelings ran very high then. It was something else that happened there, too. Oh, yes, I remember, but I don't know the year of this, but I went with Tom Griffith down to the, well, I guess to the police

department, yes, to protest against the arrest of a member of our group. And as a member of our group, I mean race, we didn't know anything about the guy. We went down there and raved hard about police brutality, and come to find out this guy had a record as long as an arm, he had been in--committed all kinds of crimes.

Hopkins

Oh, and you had gone to help him.

Beavers

And we had gone down there on police brutality. I never was so embarrassed, and this man, the clerk we were dealing with, he thought I was a lawyer, and Tom Griffith was the lawyer.

Hopkins

Tom Griffith was the lawyer.

Beavers

Tom Griffith.

Hopkins

Griffith. Was he black?

Beavers

Yes, he's a retired judge.

Hopkins

Oh, oh, I didn't know him.

Beavers

And then to find out, we were-- I don't know what this Negro had done, and all, and then just-- And there was no way to put any credit on what he had said, we just had to get on out of there. But that showed, to me it showed the importance of two things. Number one, all-- They had a special [slogan] about "Black is Beautiful." Black can be beautiful, and black can be very ugly, you see. And you can't go just on the color of skin, and because somebody said they picked on me because of my race, isn't necessarily true. You have to--

And the next factor is first you, before you go protesting, get your facts, get your facts, because before you make a decision you've got to have the facts on both sides. Facts don't necessarily have to agree with you, but you have to take the facts as they are. That's one thing that we should keep in mind in our protest. We can't go all haywire and start blaming people and causing them trouble when we haven't got the factual data to show what we are talking about is true. We can't make a decision ourselves that's worth anything if we don't first get some facts, and I heard somebody say that, that wherever there's an argument, and you see two people arguing, there's one thing that's sure. That one of them is--neither of them is right. The truth is somewhere between them. [laughter]

Hopkins

That's very good.

Beavers

There are three sides to every question: There's my side of it, the other fellow's side of it, and then the truth of it, somewhere in the middle.

Hopkins

Somewhere in the middle.

13. Tape Number: VIII, Side One July 8, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, let's continue with our discussion of your illustrious and active participation in civic affairs. We left off last time with the NAACP, and we noticed today, we'd like to start with your involvement with the YMCA. Can you shed some light on your activities with the YMCA?

Beavers

Well, some years ago, I was very active in the Twenty-eighth Street YMCA. I was on their board of directors and I also served on the Los Angeles metropolitan board of directors.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, is it true that for some period during the twenties, and the thirties, and maybe even later, that blacks were not allowed to join the metropolitan YMCA?

Beavers

Well, I don't have any recollection of such [an] ironclad rule, but I do know that in the very nature of things that Negroes did not participate with whites, but I don't recall any discriminatory policies such as you've suggested.

Hopkins

OK. Do you have any idea of when the Twenty-eighth Street "Y" was organized?

Beavers

Goodness, that's-- I don't remember the year, but it was in the early days, back in the, oh, back in the twenties I believe. You might get a good lead to that on the construction of their building on Twenty-eighth Street. That was a big thing at the time, and I'm sorry, but I don't remember the year. I think that it would be easier for you to get that information though, as to the director, the year, and pinpoint it.

Hopkins

Sure, yes, we can get that. I guess what I'm driving at is, do you know why blacks organized a YMCA of their own? As you can recall?

Beavers

Well, as I can recall there was need for a YMCA in our community, and the very--the segregated pattern that is generally followed in large cities, as it developed, naturally there was a need for that facility in our own community, because it would do more good in the community in which the people lived than it would in some other area of the city. At that time the major portion of the population was on the east side of Los Angeles, which is now more the central part of the city, and there was just a need for that facility in the community in which the Negro children lived.

Hopkins

Now, as I recall reading, that actually Paul Williams was the architect for the Twenty-eighth Street YMCA, and it must have been a costly building. How was it funded? Was it a city operation or what?

Beavers

Well, the metropolitan board helped to finance it. It was, of course, like all other YMCA projects, they had a very fine and cooperative secretary at the Central "Y," the Metropolitan "Y," and naturally they had an interest in helping to fund and finance the one for our community.

Hopkins

Now during the 1920s there were still a large number of whites living on the east side of Los Angeles. Did whites frequent this "Y," as you can recall, when it was first built?

Beavers

Oh, yes. There was never any--I don't recall any--bars against whites participating with the blacks. I recall that there was always a good spirit between the YMCA kids and, in fact, the YMCA sponsored integrated activity. The YMCA was one of the forces used to break down the barriers of racial discrimination and segregation, so they didn't take a lead in promoting segregation.

Hopkins

OK. Also, in reading back in newspapers during the twenties and the thirties, we find that the YMCA seemed to have been a focal point, or a focus of a lot of community activities, whereas today it doesn't seem to hold the same part in the community. Do you have any thoughts on that as to why, if it is true?

Beavers

I don't think that is true. For example we have a YMCA in this community, in the Crenshaw area, and we still have the YMCA on Twenty-eighth Street, and more and more the YMCA has tended to encourage the integrated activity. We take the YMCA camp program, for example. They go to camp, and there's no discrimination. They try to act as a force against that kind of thing rather than promote it.

Hopkins

OK. Now, I understand that you became a member of the board of directors for the general Los Angeles metropolitan YMCA.

Beavers

Yes, that is true. I served, I don't know how many terms, at least two terms on the metropolitan board.

Hopkins

Do you know roughly what time that was--what period of time that was?

Beavers

Oh, I'd have to go back to the-- I'm hazy on the years. I don't know if it was--

Hopkins

So was it after World War II or before World War II?

Beavers

I think it was-- World War II was in the forties, wasn't it?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

Yes. It seems to me it was before World War II. It didn't have to be, it could have been later, but I wish I'd known that you wanted the years, then I could have maybe--

Hopkins

Yes, really, I never mean to pinpoint you on the years, I guess I'm always kind of looking for just the general time period, but we can touch upon that. It won't be difficult to find it. OK, and another very important civic organization that you were involved in was the Los Angeles Urban League.

Beavers

Yes, I was very active in the Los Angeles Urban League, I served on several committees, and I was a member of the board of directors, and I served two three-year terms on the board, and one three-year term as president of the Los Angeles board. And I served also on the national Urban League board, one term for three years.

Hopkins

During your term as president were there any outstanding events that occurred that you can recall, that you'd like to share with us?

Beavers

Well, during that time, let's see, Lester Granger was the executive for the national Urban League, and I worked with him very closely, and he was a very fine man. He was succeeded by Whitney Young, and I also worked with Whitney very closely, and during that time we had our office on-- The office of the Urban League was on Central Avenue, oh, yes, in the, I think it was the 3800 block, right across from what is the city health bureau in that area. City health facility. The accomplishments of the board revolved around its yearly promotion of race relations in giving awards to the outstanding corporation for employment, and also to sports organizations like football and baseball, and that was--it was during that time that we developed the training program, which is a very important part of Urban League activities, training of people for jobs. One of the weaknesses that we've had for a long time has been the lack of qualified, real qualified applicants for high class jobs, and the Urban League focused on that program, on a training program, and housing. Let's see, there was housing, employment training, and general welfare of the people in the black community.

Hopkins

Was there any conflict between the national Urban League and the Los Angeles Urban League over the years that you can remember? That is any serious conflict in terms of policy?

Beavers

No, no conflict between the local chapter and the national chapter. There was-- There was some, well, I wouldn't call it a conflict, but the national was

interested in getting more help from the Hollywood community. Because at that time Hollywood was in its heyday, and it was-- I remember having conferences with Lester Granger on the matter of getting more help from the Hollywood community on getting jobs and giving support to the national program. But that wasn't a conflict, that was just an added interest.

Hopkins

Was that also a concern of the NAACP, to try to attract Hollywood stars to participate or to help the NAACP?

Beavers

Yes, the NAACP had, they had, it developed into somewhat of a conflict, because the national office-- In fact there was an attempt made to have a Hollywood branch of the NAACP, and it really developed into the Hollywood group taking over the-- Well, they didn't take it over, but they focused on the life membership and the legal defense fund, and they focused on the legal defense for the NAACP, and I noticed just recently in the last convention, they had a real--that was the focus of a real fight between--within--the agency. I don't know what would be the exact outcome of it, but it seems that there is a breaking of relations there. They are going to make some changes, and I noticed in the executive director [Benjamin Lawson] Hooks's remarks on the program "Face the Nation," he indicated that there was no animosity involved, just a matter of making sure that the people in Hollywood and elsewhere would recognize the real problems of employment, and [that] the programs that were intended for the poor were being affected by the cutbacks under the present administration, and that the NAACP was determined to have this money coming direct to it, and not going through other hands, and maybe not serving the purpose for which it was given. So I don't know how that's going to work out, but it's-- Seemingly he has a good point, and he's urging that the programs that the NAACP is engaged in are due to have support and get the same recognition as to tax deduction as other programs, and that I think they've reached an agreement to go their separate ways, I don't know to what extent, but there is some type of agreement being worked out on that now.

Hopkins

Now, when you say go-- Who would go their separate ways?

Beavers

The Hollywood group that was--

Hopkins

The Hollywood NAACP?

Beavers

It was the Hollywood division for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, it was called. And there was some contention about that money being used by the NAACP, and who would have control and all that.

Hopkins

I see. Whether it would be a local control or national control?

Beavers

Well, I really don't know, because I'm not active in the management of it now, and I'm only going by what I heard on this TV show.

Hopkins

OK, that's fair enough. Now, during the twenties, maybe the thirties, there was a case where the NAACP, the national branch, was trying to get the Los Angeles branch to get movie stars like Mae West to hire blacks as servants or in whatever capacity. Were you aware of that, or do you remember that?

Beavers

No, I don't remember any specifics on that. Of course, the NAACP program is so broad that it would include any employer who had control over employment over a large number of people. They would want them to include in their employment program the people of all races, in particular blacks.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, you've worked closely with the NAACP and Urban League in Los Angeles chapters, and so you've been with the growth to some degree of these two organizations. Were there jealousies between these two organizations over time, or have they pretty much worked in harmony as far as you can see?

Beavers

They've been very much in harmony. So far as I know, they have worked in harmony through the years, because while the Urban League was interested in getting help by more employment and better housing and those kind of things, and the Urban League, they worked more from a social and charitable viewpoint. And the NAACP, they work through a legal and, not only legal, but what's the word I want to use? Legal, and active support from major corporations, and affirmative action in employment, and that kind of thing, and they worked through-- The NAACP of course, has to work through the legislative and political and legal, through those forces. They are not confined to the social and the economic boundaries that the Urban League is under. You see, the Urban League qualifies as a social service organization. NAACP is a protest organization, and it is free to use whatever methods that are legitimate that they can use to focus attention on these same problems. So there's been no, no-- I don't think there has been any jealousy, competitiveness on the part of the two branches in Los Angeles.

Hopkins

OK. Just another question here along these lines. Now during the sixties, of course, there was a lot of discussion among militant blacks that the NAACP was conservative and established in the status quo. Now, I'm not talking about the sixties, but when you think back during the 1920s, thirties, and into the forties, what kinds of people were members of the NAACP? I mean, how were you perceived by the community at large if you were a member of the NAACP in Los Angeles?

Beavers

Well, I worked in both organizations, and I didn't see any--I didn't see them as competitors.

Hopkins

Oh, I'm sorry, I'm not trying to-- I'm not comparing NAACP and the Urban League now. I meant when you look at Los Angeles, and you look at the black community in Los Angeles as a whole, if you were a member of the NAACP were you considered to be, in the twenties and thirties, were you considered

to be a radical, a troublemaker, or were you considered to be just trying to help your race? Do you see what I'm driving at?

Beavers

Well, I would say that I considered it as trying to not only help the race, but help the country. I felt that the segregation, and discrimination and racial segregation and discrimination was--it was a force that was damaging to the whole nation. It wasn't just a black problem, or-- It was just as much a white problem as it was a black problem, because it was injurious to the real welfare of the nation. As far back as slavery time they recognized that you couldn't advance a nation by keeping the races separated, that racism was a detrimental force, and that was recognized even back in the early days. So I think that still holds, that when you are fighting for your rights as American citizens, the racism is a detrimental force.

Hopkins

So you perceived your participation in the NAACP as helping not only blacks, but also the country as a whole. And many liberal whites saw that as well. Were there others who saw it otherwise? I know others did, but in Los Angeles among the black community, was it pretty well thought of as a positive group or as a negative group?

Beavers

Oh, it was positive.

Hopkins

OK.

Beavers

Of course there are always some people who will go to extremes and, for example, if we have different ideas, now, we want to improve race relations. Well, now some want to improve by-- They think they are improving by engaging in racism themselves, and being violent, and I think that Martin Luther King's [Jr.] idea was different and it swept the nation. You know, it showed that you didn't have to be violent to accomplish these things, and when you protest you can have a legal protest and stay within the bounds of

reason, and then you can have another protest and just go to the extreme, and burning, and killing, and that isn't a positive approach.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we'd like to leave then the civic organizations now, and we've been--I've been trying to solicit your opinions and perceptions of events over time. I'd like to ask you a few questions in that line, just your own opinions and impressions. How do you perceive the church in the black community today?

Beavers

I think the church is a real vital force and should be recognized as such. I have spent all my life-- I of course, I was fortunate to have good Christian parents, and I think that the church still is a vital force in the community, a vital force for good. And I think that all organizations of course have their weaknesses, and there are some good things that they do and there's some-- Well, let me put it this way, in all organizations you'll find there are some people who are true to the principles and work hard to accomplish the programs of the organization, and then there are others who have their names on the books, but they are not actually involved in pushing the program. There's always some who are just hangers-on, and they are not motivated by real religious principles, or the principles of their organization. What I'm trying to say is that there are some good ministers, and some poor ministers and just because a man is a minister doesn't necessarily make him right. That isn't the point. But the minister who takes seriously his obligation as a minister to lead, and to try and enhance the church and build his church on a strong foundation, that is a good minister. Now, there are other ministers who try to make believe, and use their offices in ways that are really detrimental to the organization. You have that kind of separation in all organizations, that's human, but it's up to-- I think in the final analysis the man who is really conscientious and is qualified for his job as a minister, and tries to use his talents and his opportunities to promote good and to spread the gospel of Christ, that's the minister that's running the best service to the community. I think that was the philosophy expressed by Benjamin Mays. Benjamin Mays, he's retired now, but I think he's president emeritus of the, oh, the church, no, the college. President Mays who was president of--

Hopkins

Morehouse?

Beavers

--Morehouse [College]. Benjamin Mays was president of Morehouse. I heard him say, in accepting an award, that we are here, that God placed us here to do two things: serve God and serve our fellow man. I think that philosophy expresses the service that is expected of a minister and an educator. That he is not only to serve God, but he is to serve his fellow man, and if he looks upon his obligations in that manner, he won't go wrong, and he will not allow himself to be used for political purposes, and used to help promote programs that are not in the best interest of the people. And I think that philosophy expresses what I have in mind about the good and the bad, and particularly among the ministers. This applies to educators, too.

Hopkins

OK, when you think back to growing up in Los Angeles, and going to church, do you think that the church exerts as great an influence today on youth as it did then when you were growing up? I know we're only speculating, but it's important.

Beavers

Well, I don't know. I don't think it does for this reason. Society is--the society of today is weaker in some respects along that line, because the home of today is not like the home of yesteryears. There's been a-- We have developed a permissive society, and much of it is due to the weakness that we find at home, that so many-- Well, take the divorce rate, there's so many families where the woman is the sole head of the family. And so there have been so many divorces, and women have been forced [to] become a wage earner, and the woman can't possibly do her job as a mother and do, that is the average woman, can't do the job that needs to be done at home and at the same time be responsible for earning a living for the family. Of course, I think black women in particular are due a lot of credit for what they have done under the circumstances, but not only is it true of black women, this is true of white women too, to a certain extent. Just as has been pointed out, the women, because of social conditions that we have today there are more women

having responsibility, financial responsibility, for the home than at any other time in our history. With that kind of situation there's bound to be a decline, and so I believe that we have to say that because of these conditions that it's very questionable as to whether or not the church has the same influence or has the same power in influencing youth as it had years ago.

14. Tape Number: VIII, Side Two July 8, 1982

Beavers

I'm not an expert in this field at all, but you're asking me for my opinion, and that's my opinion for what it's worth.

Hopkins

OK, thank you. Along these same lines, comparing the past with the present, when you think about the black community the way it was in the 1920s, and you think about the way it is today, do you think-- Was there a greater sense of community, well, a sense of community? Let me see how that strikes you.

Beavers

A sense of community?

Hopkins

That is, a sense of helping each other to pull together to improve the group as a whole, or were people just as individual as they are today, or--

Beavers

Oh, I think that all of the work that's been done by the church, and such organizations as the NAACP and the Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, I think that all of these things have developed an awareness, and I believe that we are much better off today than we were. For example, the work, the accomplishment of the civil rights program, I believe that a tremendous good was done by the adoption of the civil rights program, and what's more the implementation of the program. You can look at the number of political leaders, the number of elected officers that we have now, and we didn't have then, and the exercising of voting rights. Of course, we're

still working on-- We have a long way to go, but I think those conditions far outweigh what has happened in the past. In other words, I think we're much better off today than we were then, politically and socially, and in the field of religion. I think we've made progress.

Hopkins

I know these are rather vague questions, but again they mean something in the larger scope of this project, and so I ask you-- When we talk about leadership in the twenties and compare that with today, we talk about black leadership, have the goals of the leaders changed? I mean, I know we're dealing with a different environment, but can you see a marked difference in the kinds of leaders that we have in the black community today as opposed to in the earlier periods?

Beavers

Oh, yes. Yes, I think-- Well, the previous comment I made about the progress made would be indicative of the same picture, the fact that we have gone this far and accomplished as much as we have in the last twenty years, that in itself says something for the leadership, because these things wouldn't just happen. I think the-- Let's take, for example, a little something that's happened. When the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was-- When they were arresting the blacks and putting them in jail, the NAACP had money and was bailing them out as fast as they put them in, you see. So, these organizations working together, I think they are due a lot of credit. The NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Urban League, they worked together, and accomplished a tremendous amount. And without their working together, and demonstrating to the American public that they were together we wouldn't have had the civil rights program and the affirmative action in employment and all of that, which has made for a better life. Now, of course, we are hard pressed under the present administration, and the cutbacks in a number of the programs and all, and of course, now is the time when we've got to work together to bring some form of order out of this chaos that we are in. We've got to continue to work, there's no letup, we've got to continue to work on these same problems. And as has been brought out so many times, the impact is not just on the blacks, but it is on the poor whites. There are more poor whites suffering under this reduced

program than there are blacks. So it isn't just blacks, but it is the poor people, and the ones who are less able, with low income, and those that are without employment, the unemployment keeps going up and up, and that hurts the whole nation. We've got to find a solution to these problems, and it is going to take a long time, because while we have a whole lot of people employed, a much larger number of people employed than we have unemployed, but that unemployment is going to continue to rise unless something is done about it.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, what is your political affiliation? Would you mind telling us?

Beavers

Well, my-- I'm a registered Republican but I don't vote that way. I think there has to be somebody on the other side to try to make the balance. Of course, I haven't changed my registration, and I don't intend to, but I vote for the people that I think are the best candidates. I haven't voted-- I didn't vote for [Ronald W.] Reagan, and I did vote for [Lyndon B.] Johnson. I know I voted for [John F.] Kennedy, and then I voted for Johnson. Did Johnson run? Yes.

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

I voted for Johnson. That way, I don't think all of the right and justice is in any one party.

Hopkins

During the-- Well, let's see, I think it was in 1928, I was reading in the L.A. Times that-- The L.A. Times had an article in 1928 that blacks had begun to reconsider whether they should support the Republican party, because they felt the Republican party wasn't being fair to blacks down the line. Can you comment on the moods of blacks in Los Angeles during the twenties, and the thirties in terms of what was that article talking about. Not that you read the article, but you must have been--

Beavers

You say in the twenties?

Hopkins

Yes, it was 1928 in fact. I guess [Herbert C.] Hoover was still the president.

Beavers

Oh, well that was the beginning, I think, of Negroes turning to the Democratic party, because when [Franklin] Delano Roosevelt was elected, why, his program attracted, oh, the poor and the disadvantaged, and that included the blacks. And there was a movement to start it then, and from that time on I think that blacks have been more Democratic. In fact the overwhelming majority of blacks belong to the Democratic party, there's no question about that. And those who don't belong vote with them.

Hopkins

OK. So, you mentioned earlier that you had remained a member of the Republican party in order to create a balance. Could you explain that?

Beavers

Well, I don't mean that, to create a balance, but I mean that we ought to have some understanding about what's happening on the other side. See, I get these letters and all from the Reagan administration, and I know exactly what their program is, and I think that's important. Of course, I'm not able to be active out there on the front lines now, so it's just as well to be able to get information and be able to convey it to members of the other party.

Hopkins

Again, I'd like to stretch your memory. When you think back even before Roosevelt was elected, and you were involved in a number of civic organizations and you were involved in the business world there must have been friends who had begun to talk about, or criticizing the Republican party. Do you remember, was that the case? Or what was the attitude of your friends, the circles you were in, concerning the Republican party before?

Beavers

You say before Roosevelt?

Hopkins

Yes.

Beavers

Well, you're going back down to-- No, he wasn't much-- The Republicans, you see, they had a good record. Of course, the Republicans, the big mistake made by the Republican party, they allowed the southern Democrats to lead them, and they were really asleep as to the needs of the blacks and the poor and disadvantaged. See, here's what happened, in those days, the blacks controlled absolutely the Democratic party-- I mean the whites, the southern whites, they absolutely controlled the Democratic party. Every southern state then was Democrat, Democrat. And they built up a seniority in the Senate and in the House, all of the committees were chaired by, most of the important committees were chaired by white southerners. Now, you see, when the whites, when the southern whites disenfranchised the Negroes, the whites in other areas of the country didn't realize that they were being disenfranchised too. That disenfranchise was working against them, because it enabled them to build up a seniority at the expense of the Negro vote, they were able to build up a seniority and control all the important committees in the House and the Senate in Congress. So the Republicans slept at the switch there, they didn't recognize that, and I don't know whether they still recognize it today. But I've had occasion to direct their attention to that on several occasions, and of course you see what happened now. Lyndon Johnson said in his speech at Howard University that he felt that if the Negro was able to vote he could help himself, he was in a position to help himself. And they've been doing that. You see all these mayors in big cities, there are so many mayors, and sheriffs, and councilmen, the whole bit. There's more black elected officers now than you've ever had. They begin to help themselves. And they can do more of it if they'll just register and vote. There are three or four things that we need to do, and need it bad: Number one, we need for our young people to get an education, to be fairly prepared, to be able to, and qualify, to hold a decent job. Two, we need to register and vote, use our vote. Number three, we need to be good citizens. We have fought for first-class citizenship, we need to be first-class citizens. Stop all this crime and dope and all that. See we have a big job to do, if we just do it. Those are three important things that we need to be doing.

Hopkins

One final question in this vein of questions. Now, again, before World War II, before the forties, through the twenties and the thirties, again in your role as an activist, as a civic leader, as a businessman, you traveled to other cities throughout the country, like Washington, D.C., and so you've had an opportunity to see other blacks live in these other major cities. How would you compare the black communities in these other major cities with that of Los Angeles?

Beavers

They are on the same pattern. They follow the same pattern there. You take, in every major city, you have the same movement of population, the whites moving out, and the blacks moving in, and that same thing has happened over and over again in all these big cities.

Hopkins

Did you see Los Angeles as being a better place to live for blacks?

Beavers

Oh, yes. Well, it's a better place. First of all because the climate helps, it doesn't take you as much to live here. The seasons are not so severe. Most of the country is either real hot or real cold. And there's very little time where you have just nice days like we have now, and that's a plus for the poor. You don't have to have as much heat, it doesn't cost you as much to live through the winter season.

Hopkins

What about racial attitudes? Now, I'm not talking about today or in the sixties, but in the thirties--twenties and the thirties, did it seem like this was a better place to live for blacks in the--

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Racially speaking?

Beavers

Yes, definitely it was a better place, because they had better opportunities.

Hopkins

There was a large influx of blacks that came to Los Angeles after World War I, just like there was a large influx of blacks that came to Los Angeles after World War II.

Beavers

And there was a large influx of whites that came too.

Hopkins

And, there was a large influx of whites that came too.

Beavers

They came from the same places.

Hopkins

Same places, OK. [laughter] When you think about the--we're talking about the blacks at this point--did there seem to be a difference in the kinds of blacks in terms of skills, education that came in the twenties versus the forties? Did you get a--

Beavers

This is the forties?

Hopkins

Yes. When you remember-- OK, you were here in the twenties, and you saw these blacks moving into Los Angeles and you saw them try to fit into Los Angeles, and then you saw the same thing happening again in the forties, did you think to yourself, "God, these people aren't ready," or "They are ready," or "They're better prepared than the people that came in the twenties," at all?

Beavers

No, I didn't get that impression. I think one thing about it is that when people were ready to move from the South to come out West, we were getting the best of the lot, because it took a certain amount of income and vision to be able to do that, to be able to move so far west and start over again. And

another thing, the people who came out here in those days, they were looking for opportunity. They moved from places where they didn't have opportunity and they were looking for opportunities to work and to be a part of the community. So I don't know that I can say that there was so much a difference.

Hopkins

OK, then the final questions in closing are on a personal note. I know you mentioned that in 1936, your first wife died? Is that true?

Beavers

No.

Hopkins

No. I'm sorry.

Beavers

She died in '31.

Hopkins

Excuse me, 1931, your wife-- Her name again please?

Beavers

Her name was Willie Mae, Willie Mae.

Hopkins

Then you remarried in what year?

Beavers

'36.

Hopkins

1936.

Beavers

For five years I was free and unencumbered. [laughter] I really felt when I lost my first wife, I thought there just were no more like her, and I just didn't think

about marrying. Then in the summer of '36, in August of '36, a young lady came out here with her cousin, and I went to accommodate a friend, I was going with him, he had-- He was going with my wife's cousin and he knew her, and he was telling me about this cousin, and I went out on a blind date, and I met this Lola Lillian Cunningham, and that was about the second week in August, and somehow I got tangled up in a whirlwind courtship, and on the 5th of September we were married. And we've been married ever since. She's a wonderful wife. She's not in good health now, and neither am I, so--

Hopkins

Can you tell me something of her background?

Beavers

Well, she was a schoolteacher. In fact, she had just received her master's when she came out here, and she was resting up from the ordeal.

Hopkins

When did she come here? When did she come to Los Angeles?

Beavers

In August of 1936.

Hopkins

OK. And she was a school teacher in what city?

Beavers

Well, at that time she had just taken a position. She had just served one semester, I believe, at Morris Brown College in Atlanta. Prior to that, she had been a teacher at Florida A & M [University]. Prior to that, she was a teacher in the Kansas City schools. Then she came out here and I stopped her teaching.

Hopkins

You stopped her from teaching? [laughter] What did you ask her to do? What did she do when she was married to you, was she a housewife?

Beavers

Yes.

Hopkins

And she's been a housewife through the years? OK. Has she been active in civic organizations?

Beavers

Yes, she was active in the Urban League, she was active in the-- She was president of the Urban League Guild, and she was active in church organizations, and clubs, and that kind of thing.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we're about to close, do you have any last words?

Beavers

Last words? [laughter]

Hopkins

We've spoken for some eight sessions, so I didn't know if you had a closing statement.

Beavers

Well, I think we've covered a lot of ground. I don't know whether I've said much or not, but I-- In closing, and just summing up, I think you know my attitude with reference to American citizenship and the-- I would say that my philosophy is something like the one I mentioned about Benjamin Mays. "We're here by the grace of God to do two things: serve God, and to serve our fellow man." And, I think the noted American author [Charles Edwin] Markham summed it up pretty well in his creed: "There is a destiny that makes us brothers. None goes his way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own."

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we thank you for your participation and your patience over these long sessions. There is no question that you are the epitome of black leadership in Los Angeles, there's no question in my mind you're the epitome

of leadership--American leadership--at its best. It's been a pleasure interviewing you.

Beavers

Thank you.

15. Tape Number: IX, Side One

July 27, 1982

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, today as you know we'd like to tie up some loose ends in ending this interview session. In a previous session we talked at great length concerning the growth and development of Golden State Mutual and due to mechanical error on my part, and on the part of the tape machine, we did not get your response to one of my last questions on tape. So, to that end, we'd like to get your response on tape to the question. Can you tell me something about the status of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company as it stands today?

Beavers

All right, Mr. Hopkins, I'd be glad to do that. Our company, as it stands today, and I will use the 1957-- I mean I will use the fifty-seventh annual report, which covers the status of the company as of December 31, 1981. Based upon this report, I have to say that I feel that our company--the Golden State Mutual Life--has made great strides when we consider the original statement back in 1925, its first partial year, when we had something like seventeen-- We had something like seventeen thousand--seventeen or eighteen thousand dollars in assets. At this time, the company has assets of over \$89,000,000. Total admitted assets of over \$89 million. Our income for that year was \$37,342,000. Our life insurance in force today is \$3,757,000,000. We paid to policy holders last year [\$]23,000,000. I think the thing that I'm proud of, too, is the efficient officer staff that we have. I think they are doing an outstanding job. The chairman of the board and the chief executive officer, Ivan Houston, has done a very fine job. He and the president, who was Larkin Teasley, he's our president and chief operating officer. Those two men, backed with a good team of officers, well-qualified, highly skilled in their respective positions,

have done a tremendous job in the last decade. And it's reflected I think in the amount of insurance in force and the number of people we have employed and the tremendous service that they are rendering. I'm proud of the fact that they are well qualified. Our total official staff, they are well qualified for the job because they have taken advantage of the opportunity to learn and to get this specialized training offered by the life office management organization. We have among our official personnel, oh more than a dozen who have qualified for the fellowship, F.L.M.I. designation, and then we have--

Hopkins

What does that mean, Mr. Beavers, F.L.M.I.?

Beavers

F.L.M.I. means Fellow in Life Insurance Management [Fellow of the Life Management Institute].

Hopkins

Now, what exactly is that?

Beavers

Well, that's the highest training organization, I think the one--the main training organization in the life insurance industry. And it has a course of study divided into many parts leading up to the fellowship degree. When one completes that he or she is really highly qualified in the life insurance field. And, of course, in whatever specialty that they engage in, well that's-- Well, it's a complete training for life insurance business, and it's sponsored by the Life Insurance Trade Association.

Hopkins

So it is a fellowship of distinction? Not everyone has this--

Beavers

Oh, no, you work hard for that, and it's-- The very fact that you receive it is evidence that you're really highly trained and qualified. Of course, now what you do with it after you get it is another matter. But you have had the training. Did I say how many we had? Over a dozen in our employ. And we make a specialty of encouraging employees to take this training, and most, well, not

most of them, but as many employees as we can influence to do that, and more and more they are accepting the opportunity to take this training as they do their other work, as they do their regular work, and they get this training, and they are prepared to do a better job by virtue of the training. And our chairman, chief executive, he has his F.L.M.I., C.L.U., and in addition to his actuarial degrees, and the president, Larkin Teasley, he has specialized in actuarial work and life insurance management, and we have our agency director and senior vice-president and chief marketing officer, Stephen [A.] Johns. He has a C.L.U. and F.L.M.I.. And I think this training plays--it's a big factor in the success of the company. Getting back to the annual report, I mentioned the amount of assets and the amount of income, and I might also state that those assets are distributed among \$46,000,000 in bonds, \$3,000,000 in stock, \$17,000,000 in mortgage loans on real estate, and we have other assets and also we have over \$6,000,000 in surplus. So the company is in a good position today and is doing fine despite the economic conditions. Our chief executive officer reported that we are not trying to, or we can't hide the economic conditions, everybody knows the economic conditions are bad, but we encourage our sales forces to work with the people who are employed to solicit, and give more attention to people who are employed and not worry so much about the unemployed. Of course we are concerned about the unemployed, we want to, as good citizens, help to find answers to some of these problems, but then we can't afford to sit down and cry about the unemployed and let those people who are employed and need insurance, let that business go by. So that's a pretty good philosophy, I think.

Hopkins

You mentioned the C.L.U., what is that?

Beavers

That's a Chartered Life Underwriter. Now that's a study that's mainly for field personnel. It qualifies people to sell insurance and it goes into the life insurance business from the sales point of view.

Hopkins

Is that also a distinguished-- Does every insurance agent become a C.L.U.?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Oh, that's a standard. You have to have met some qualifications in order to--

Beavers

Yes, that requires a study that's concentrated on the sales side. Of course in doing that, that course includes a complete understanding of economics and the place of life insurance, and one's budget, and the many ways in which life insurance can be applied to help the individual. It's a course that's-- It's a specialization in life insurance from the sales point of view.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, in 1925, did you ever in your wildest dreams believe the company would be as prosperous and as successful as it appears today?

Beavers

No, frankly I didn't. I didn't see the picture then, but I knew and I had confidence in the ability--in our ability--to develop a good business, and I fully shared the view of our founder that our company was needed to provide employment opportunities and mortgage loans and all of the services that the insurance premium bought. In other words, give the policy owners an opportunity to share in all of the benefits that their dollars created. And I fully shared that conception as expressed by our founder back in 1925. And it was a privilege that I was happy to have, and as I look back now over those years it is a rewarding satisfaction to me to know that I played some part in helping to make Golden State Mutual a reality.

Hopkins

I know you were director emeritus of the company at one point, and now I think you've retired from that status. But as you look at the company, do you see any obvious pitfalls or any problems in the direction the company is moving?

Beavers

Well, let me explain that my status--I'm retired --but while I was retired I received the honor of chairman of the board emeritus. Of course, I'm a

cofounder and chairman of the board emeritus and director emeritus, so that's past history. In regards to the pitfalls, there are always pitfalls. There's a certain amount of risk a company in any business has. But I don't see any pitfalls for our company for the reason that our official staff maintains its interest in seeking well-qualified personnel, and as time goes on, and others, new personnel and new officers must take over, I think the company has been well established and it would take a lot of neglect and abuse of authority and all that I don't see in any of our personnel. With the type of management that we have at this time, I just don't see that happening. I just don't see any pitfalls that would come to our company that would cause it to fail. So I think that would answer your question. I can't see any pitfalls, because we have a very efficient core of officers, and we have some very fine personnel in our organization, employees in the office and field. So many of them are dedicated to their commitment to make the company better. In other words, we are not satisfied with what has been done, but we are trying to do better all the time. And with that kind of view and with that type of personnel, well it's pretty hard to find--to see ahead any pitfalls of any kind.

Hopkins

OK, Mr. Beavers, we've concluded our discussion about Golden State Mutual, and in the past we've talked to some degree about individuals like Charlotta Bass and Paul Williams that you've known. But, it also comes to our attention that you've known some national and international leaders; and in the international arena, Mr. Ralph Bunche, and in the national arena, former president Richard M. Nixon. Can we start with Mr. Nixon? How and when did you meet Richard M. Nixon?

Beavers

Oh, I met Mr. Richard M. Nixon-- Well, before he became vice-president I worked in his campaign, in the Eisenhower/Nixon campaign, and I became very close to Dick Nixon, and he and I were good friends. I visited his home up in Trousdale [Estates], and on one of my visits to Washington I was his guest in the Senate. I attended one of the meetings of the Senate as his guest. I thought I knew him very well. I was in one of the meetings, one of the campaign meetings, here at the Statler Hotel, and in this meeting were just a small number of his supporters, this was during a campaign for Eisenhower

and Nixon as president. And at that time one of the members in the audience raised a question to Nixon, and he said, he just asked the question bluntly, he says, "Dick, why do you fool around with this civil rights business and the Negro vote? We don't get their vote. Why are you so concerned about it?" You could have heard a pin drop when-- And Nixon in answering him, though, he gave such a talk about the rights of Negro citizens, and what it meant, I didn't think that Roy Wilkins could have done a better job that he did answering the question. I was really sold on the man. So you can imagine what a shock it was to me when he got into that Watergate mess, and I was very, very much disappointed just as many of his other friends were.

Hopkins

You mentioned then that you were working for his campaign. I guess it would have been the 1952 campaign, and as a Republican. And then earlier in a pre-tape interview you mentioned that you would like to make some correction about your affiliation with the Republican party that you had talked about in an earlier tape.

Beavers

Oh, yes, I think you asked me about-- You asked me if I were a Republican, or I don't know how it came about, but I would like to correct that answer, because I gave you some answer to the effect that there was some validity in being able to know what was going on in both parties. But the real answer is that I believe that, regardless as to whether it is a Democrat or a Republican or independent, whoever is in the White House, they have the same obligation to us as citizens as anybody else. And it shouldn't-- In other words, civil rights is not a partisan politic[al] matter. It's a real national problem that has to be dealt with, and the change of parties doesn't change it one bit. Of course, I admit that the Democrats have recently become a very real vital force in the Negro community, and it's because they have given more attention to civil rights. And that was brought about in part by the work of the NAACP in getting the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and '65, which requires the protection of the Negro vote. It doesn't matter whether you're black or white and where you live, you have a vote. And prior to that time the Democrats, when they had the power they didn't let Negroes vote in the South, in most of those southern states. They intimidated the Afro-American, he didn't get to go to the polls, and as a

result of that most of the chairmen of the very important committees in the Congress were from southern states. I don't believe that the white Americans realized how they were being disenfranchised until this happened, when the Negroes were able to go to the polls and vote down in the South. Now, they can understand, and even George [C.] Wallace recognizes the value of the Negro vote and he's talking about running again. So that takes care of my feeling, and the reason why I don't at this late date intend to change my party affiliation. But I still vote for the candidate that I think is best qualified and will do the best job for us. When he does the right job for the blacks it will be the right job for the whites, because the inequities and injustices that are so counter to what's provided in our Constitution and the Bill of Rights doesn't help anybody, it doesn't help anybody but those who are guilty of trying to defraud and take care of selfish interests at the expense of those who are unable to defend themselves.

Hopkins

Do you find the so-called Reaganomics a means to bring about economic equality in this country?

Beavers

No, when you say Reaganomics, I can't go for that, because Reagan seems to be so determined to have his way, and he doesn't appear to be concerned about the plight of the unfortunate and the lower income people, the poor. He's so concerned about the communists and building up the defense and the military that he wants to just forget about the responsibility to provide jobs, and the matter of equity and justice doesn't seem to enter his mind. He's trying to do too many things at one time. Now, I admit that the government should do more to balance the budget, and that the spending should be brought under control, but not at the expense of the poorest class of citizens. And I think the reduction of expenses and the reduction of taxes at the same time is bad, because while you're reducing spending you're reducing your revenue at the same time, and you'll never balance the budget like that.

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, going back to Mr. Nixon, as you said, you worked on his campaign. How did you come to meet him?

Beavers

Well I was a Republican, I worked in the Republican party, and of course when Dick Nixon became a candidate I met him.

Hopkins

You met him, I see. Did you by chance have any, as a Los Angeles or Southern California community leader, did you have any discussions with Mr. Nixon in private concerning his views on civil rights?

Beavers

Oh, yes.

Hopkins

Will you share some of that with us?

Beavers

I just mentioned about the answer that he gave in that meeting. I was very happy with him, and I thought he was-- And I also, you might recall this when there was a disturbance in-- [tape recorder turned off] Let's see, what was I going to say?

Hopkins

You were mentioning that I might remember an incident.

Beavers

When they had that-- It was a riot down in Greensboro, North Carolina, I believe it was. At any rate, Nixon went down there to speak and he got off the plane, the first thing, they asked him about his position. And he at that time explained that he was--that he believed in the principle that those Negroes had the right of citizenship, and he believed in what their rally was all about. So there are a number of things-- In fact, up to the time that he was caught up with the Watergate matter, I thought he was really straight, straightforward.

Hopkins

In 1954 we had the landmark desegregation decision, did you talk to him about that? What was his stance on the desegregation issue?

Beavers

Oh, he was for it.

Hopkins

He was for it, OK.

Beavers

Yes. But something happened after he became president. He didn't put into practice what he had been preaching. And, I think it was due to two things. The blacks were not supporting the Republicans, and of course that was a thing that the other side could use. And the next thing, it was just a matter of politics, it became a matter of politics, because he needed the votes, and of course the Negroes left the Republican party in droves, and particularly after the-- Well, of course, that wasn't until after the Voting Rights Act, last Voting Rights Act. That's when they left in droves. And that's why we have so many elected offices. Because they-- And the segregated pattern became a thorn for presidential candidates because they had to recognize those people, because they had the vote. They could vote them out of office.

Hopkins

Nixon ran on a law-and-order basis, too, and, I guess blacks were considered to be the lawless at the time.

Beavers

Well, we all believe in law and order. But it should be equally applied. The law-- All citizens, regardless of their ethnic identification, all citizens should have the rights of citizenship, and their rights should be protected under the law. We have to be against crime. I'm certainly against crime, and that's one of the things we have to fight hard about now, because in our own neighborhoods we are the victims of more crime than other people. So we have to be for law and order, but we want the law and order to be, we want the law to be enforced all around. The law should be blind as to color. The fact that a white man doesn't make it any better because he's white, and it doesn't make it any worse because he's black. Crime is crime, and that's the position that our officials should take.

Hopkins

You also-- Of course, we mentioned in previous tapes and discussed to some degree that you knew Ralph Bunche, but later he became, as we discussed, the assistant general secretary of the United Nations. Did you know him when he held this position?

Beavers

Oh, yes. On October 12, 1953, I have here a day pass he gave me. My wife and I had the pleasure of visiting him at his office on the thirty-third floor in the United Nations building, and we had a very enjoyable visit that day. He gave us a pass that enabled us to tour the United Nations building and to also sit in on one of the meetings of the assembly.

Hopkins

Did Ralph Bunche seem different very much from when you knew him earlier? I mean obviously he's more mature in 1953 than he was during the thirties when you knew him earlier, but what kind of person was he, as you recall?

Beavers

He was a very, very-- He had a very pleasing personality. And the very fact that he won the Nobel Peace Prize in that situation over there where, his white superior officer--he was murdered, wasn't he? And after it was over, he did a superb job. And he was well fitted for that kind of work, he had a pleasing personality, and was well educated and expressed himself so well, and he had that tact, that natural diplomacy to bring people together. It was beautiful. I shall never forget the day when I attended a meeting out at UCLA campus. I think it was the dedication of the Ralph Bunche building. That was a very impressive meeting with me. It was there that I first heard that song, the United Nations song, sung by some children. I remember those words, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was intended to be. God is our father, and brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony." Those words stuck with me, and it was beautiful, and Ralph was really a truly great, great man.

16. Tape Number: IX, Side Two

July 27, 1982

Hopkins

From previous discussions we've had, it seems as though Ralph Bunche made a wide impression upon the Los Angeles community as a whole. You mentioned once that Betty Hill had something to do with helping to see about his education. Can you shed some light on that?

Beavers

Yes, Betty Hill was, oh, she led-- She was a very dynamic character. She was the head of a women's organization, and she was very active in helping to raise funds to contribute to Ralph's education when he was going to college. Of course, Betty Hill, she was one of those kind, you just didn't say no to her. All the political candidates knew her, that she was well respected, and she had a very good and effective organization. That was a rather interesting point, too, that she voluntarily made this plea, and I don't know, I don't remember about the amount of funds that were raised, but it was a pretty good amount, and it was a rather successful affair.

Hopkins

Now, this was for him to go to Princeton or was it Harvard? I remember reading-- Do you recall what?

Beavers

I don't recall which particular university was involved, but it was for his-- I know the campaign was for his educational fund.

Hopkins

Why was Betty Hill so interested in Ralph Bunche?

Beavers

Well, Ralph was active here in the community, and his uncle was, his name was [Thomas] Johnson, and he was a part of the community, and we knew him, and he went to school here, and he was active in the church and the young people's organization and we just knew him. He was Ralph.

Hopkins

He must have shown great promise, I guess. There was no doubt. Johnson, his uncle, what was his first name do you recall?

Beavers

Oh, what was his first name? He was-- For a long time he directed the choir of the Independent Church. What was his first name? He also sang for the Los Angeles Temple. Before or after he left us? I'll get that name for you. I can't recall it now.

Hopkins

OK, we can get that. OK, Mr. Beavers, do you have any further comments to add concerning Ralph Bunche, or Mr. Nixon, or maybe any other individuals that you knew that you'd like to bring to our attention?

Beavers

Well, there's another alumnus from UCLA that I mentioned. I think we talked about Jackie Robinson, but we didn't mention Kenny [Kenneth Stanley] Washington. Kenny was a favorite of mine, too. I remember particularly being present at the football game between UCLA and USC in 1939, and the score of that game was nothing to nothing. Nobody scored, but Kenny and all of the players, of course, but Kenny in particular, played a marvelous game. So much so, that the coach gave Kenny the opportunity to leave the field just about a minute before the game was over. It was seconds the way they counted, and I remember that whole crowd of people, the Coliseum was full to capacity, and all those people just stood and gave Kenny Washington one of the greatest ovations as he left the field. It was outstanding, and I was so impressed with that. And I have never forgotten it. And of course I saw Kenny play many football games, and he's remembered as one of the greats in the football field. He was-- Of course, I knew Kenny, and I knew his, I guess it was his uncle. He was on the police force for a long time, Washington. I can't remember first names anymore, but I saw Kenny play many times, and even when he was with the Rams. And of course, I, in the early days, I was a member of the Rams fan club, their board of directors, and so I knew Kenny and his activities in the community. He was good.

Hopkins

What made him an outstanding person? I've heard his name for years myself. And I never-- Other than the fact that he played football for UCLA, what other activities was he involved in?

Beavers

Well, of course, he was involved in-- He had a job for one of the-- I forget which-- He was a salesman for some company, and he was active in the community, and he worked with the kids, and he was seemingly loved by most everybody. He had a good personality and a good record. He used to live up here in Baldwin Hills, over on that street that runs into, oh, what's the name of that street? Down Marianna [Avenue]. Yes, he lived over there when I, when we first moved up here. That was back in the sixties. These athletes, many of them are a real credit to our race, and so many times they don't take advantage of the opportunity to qualify in getting through some type of business where they could be more effective in helping with the problems in the community. Of course, some of them are doing it. More and more we find them recognizing their need for more than just skills in their particular sports, but they need other skills to use when they can no longer use those skills on the football field or whatever. I noticed there's one young fellow that was a star in high school, and this was something that happened just recently. I can't think of the boy's name now, but he refused to leave school and go into--and play football, either football or basketball, until he finished his education. And he was influenced to do that by his parents. And I thought that was a good step in the right direction.

Hopkins

We mentioned Jackie Robinson, I think in the past, but I wasn't sure if we got on tape as to how you came to meet him?

Beavers

Well, I met Jackie-- I don't remember where I first met him. I believe he came to our office once, but my close association with him was in the Freedom Fund fight for the NAACP. I knew of him as an athlete, and I knew of his work, of course, the first black to break the racial barriers in major league baseball, but I knew him personally from working with him on the Freedom Fund for the NAACP. Jack and I were good friends and he was a good leader for that fund.

They raised-- I don't know the amount of money that he raised, but he was very successful. It was-- I remember meeting with him in the NAACP office in New York. Of course I had other meetings with him here, and let's see, there were other members. Who else was there? Let's see. [tape recorder turned off]

Hopkins

Mr. Beavers, we thanked you a great deal in Session VIII for your contributions, and again we have to thank you again for allowing us to have this addendum tape to round out our interview.

Beavers

Well, it's been a pleasure working with you, and I hope we succeeded in covering up the mistakes, and hope this last session will really get the job done. I am very much interested in your work and in your goals, and what you're trying to do, and whatever I can do to aid you I want you to feel free to call upon me.

Hopkins

OK, thank you again.

Appendix A Index

African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1, 5, 15, 30, 39, 65
Alderson, Dorothy, 116
Alexander, P. J., 31
Alexander Hamilton Institute, 85
Allen, Brenda, 69
Allied Organization Against Discrimination in Defense Industries, 22, 93
All Nations Foundation, 38
Alpha Phi Alpha, 130
American Legion, 90
 -Ben Bowie Post, 90
American Life and Health Insurance Association, 73
Atlanta Life Insurance Company, 98
American Life Insurance Convention, 73-74
American Mutual Benefit Association, 41-43, 80-81
American National Insurance Company, 78-79

Atlanta, Georgia, 2-4, 8
Banks, Edward, 47
Batiste, Helen, 114
Beasley, Gloria, 114
Beavers, Annie Andrews (mother), 1-2
Beavers, Sr., George Allen (father), 1
Beavers, Helen (sister), 2, 35
Beavers, Leroy (brother), 1
Beavers, Lola Lillian Cunningham (wife), 200
Beavers, Louise (cousin), 36
Beavers, Mary Elmyra (sister), 1, 36
Beavers, Willie Mae (wife), 35, 200
Blodgett, Louis M., 51
Bowron, Fletcher, 124, 140, 144
Bracey, Hayward, 112
Brookins, Hartford H., 39
Bunche, Ralph Johnson, 36, 209, 216-19
California Eagle, 22
Carroll, Maureen, 116
Carver (George Washington) Citation Award, 126, 132
Christian Church, 28
Cochran, Johnnie, 110
Cochran, Jr. Johnnie, 110
Cohen, Mickey, 69-70
Covington, Floyd C., 140, 149-50
Crambly, F. H., 31, 33
Crusade for Freedom, 127
Davis, Lolette, 114
Diggs, Charles, 15-16
Dunbar Hospital, 16
Eisenhower, Dwight, 53, 210
First African Methodist Episcopal church, 2, 6-7, 28, 30, 90, 123
First Independent Church. *See* People's Independent Church of Christ
Flipper, Joseph, 2
Gamaut Club, 36
German-American Bank. *See* Security Pacific National Bank
Gibson, Joshua, 26
Gold Furniture Company, 33
Golden State Minority Foundation, 77, 79, 105, 111, 118

Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, 51-52, 72-75, 106-112, 118-120

- Beavers' role, 54, 61-64, 67-68
- and black power movements, 104-6
- church support, 13, 47, 63-65, 90-91
- expansion, 52-53, 61, 92-104
 - in Depression era, 88-89, 91-92, 100-1
- founding, 19, 21, 41-51, 55-57, 59, 81
- Houston's (Norman) role, 46, 54, 61-62, 68
- insurance licensing requirements, 44, 97-98
- legislative action to prevent creation of company, 48-49, 66
- Nickerson's role, 45-46, 54, 61-62
- original clientele, 47-48
- racial policies, 76-79, 111
- women's roles, 113-118

Good Samaritan Hospital, 15-17

Good Shepherd Hospital, 15-16

Goodwill Industries, 38

Gordon, Wilbur C., 47

Granger, Lester, 179-80

Great Migration of southern blacks, 18, 34, 93

- into Chicago, 3, 18, 96
- into Los Angeles, 3, 18, 20-21, 198
- into New York, 3, 18

Greggs, Napoleon P., 28-29, 38-39, 47, 63, 90

Griffith, Tom, 172-73

Hackett, Mabel, 115

Harris, James Ervin, 84-85

Harris, Lillian Houston, 83-84

Health Insurance Association of America, 103

Hickman, Verna Stratton, 67, 74

Hill, Betty, 218-19

Holman United Methodist Church, 37-39, 137

- Christian Education Building, 137

Home State Braves, 26

Hooks, Benjamin Lawson, 181

Hooper, Leslie J., 58

Hoover, Herbert C., 194

Horne, Lena, 25

Horrall, Clemence B., 69

House Un-American Activities Committee, 153-54
 Houston, Ivan J., 74, 100, 106, 120, 204
 Houston, Norman Oliver, 42-43, 46-47, 54, 58, 61-62, 68, 74, 82-88, 90
 Houston, Jr., Norman O., 83
 Howard University, 196
 Hudson, H. Claude, 12, 171-72
 Hudson, Luther, 47
 Hunigan, Berke N., 67
 Hutcherson, Willie Mae, 7
 Jenkins, Lorene, 116
 Johns, Stephen A., 206
 Johnson, Edgar J., 52, 68
 Johnson, Lyndon B., 193, 196
 Johnson, Marcelma, 116
 Johnson, Simon P., 47, 50, 90
 Johnson, Thomas, 219
 Jones, Calwell, 41
 Jones, Hartley, 47
 Jordan, Frederick Douglass, 123
 Kennedy, John F., 193
 Kilgore, Jr., Thomas, 39
 King, Jr., Martin Luther, 53, 134, 186
 Lafayette Players, 25, 27
 Lawson, James Morris, 39
 Leaders Roundtable Business Conference, 116, 118
 Liberty Savings and Loan Association, 47
 Life Advertiser's Association, 58, 73, 74
 Life Office Management Association, 58, 73-74, 100, 103, 205-6
 Life Underwriters Training Council, 103
 Lockett, Amanda, 114
 Los Angeles-black communities

- appeal for black immigration, 3, 19, 197-98
- black voters' political party affiliations, 193-94, 197
- geographical apportionment of blacks, 176-77
- growth and influence of black churches, 39, 188
- public housing, 140-49, 151, 155-56, 159-60

 Los Angeles-city government

- Community Redevelopment Program, 167-68
- Housing Authority, 131, 136, 140, 166

- Mayor's Citizen Committee To Study Zoological Problems, 166
- Mayor's Committee on Major League Baseball, 164
- Los Angeles-county government
 - Board of Supervisors, 137
 - Conference on Community Relations, 128
 - Grand Jurors Association, 69
 - Redevelopment Association, 168
- Los Angeles Angels, 26
- Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 73, 122
- Los Angeles Community Chest, 128-30, 133
- Los Angeles Dodgers, 154-56, 163-65
- Los Angeles Foundry, 8
- Los Angeles High School, 6, 10-11
- Los Angeles Home Builders Association, 193
- Los Angeles Sentinel, 22
- Los Angeles Times, 193
- Los Angeles Temple, 219
- Loyalty Group, The, 87
- Markham, Charles Edwin, 202
- Marshall, Louise, 116
- Mays, Benjamin, 188, 202
- Mechanicsville (section of Los Angeles), 2
- Merchants and Manufacturers Association, 122
- Metropolitan Insurance Company of Chicago, 98
- Miller, Brenda, 114
- Ministerial Alliance, 30
- Morehouse College, 188
- Morgan, Mary, 115
- Morris Brown College, 201
- Murray, Cecil, 40
- Murray, Philip, 136
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 22, 68, 124, 136, 169, 171-72, 175-78, 181-85, 190, 192, 211, 222
 - Freedom Fund Fight, 222
 - Legal Defense Fund, Hollywood division, 182
 - Los Angeles branch, 169-71, 183-85
- National Association of Media Women, 138, 140
- National Insurance Association, 71, 99, 133, 134-35
- National Negro Insurance Association. See National Insurance Association

Negro baseball leagues, 26-27
 New Age, 66
 Nickerson, Emma Pool, 79, 85
 Nickerson, Sr., William H., 79, 80
 Nickerson, Jr., William H., 42-46, 54, 61-62, 68, 79, 81, 87-88, 90, 147
 Nickerson Gardens, 146-47
 Nixon, Richard M., 209-10, 213-15, 219
 North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, 75
 Oakland Outlook, 85
 Occidental Life Insurance Company, 58, 73
 O'Malley, Walter F., 158-59
 Pacific Electric Railway Company, 46
 Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, 58, 73
 Pajaud, William E., 74
 Parks, H. B., 29-30
 People's Independent Church of Christ, 13, 27-31, 35, 38-39, 41, 47, 63-64, 90, 219
 -Board of Trustees, 29
 -Young People's Lyceum, 35, 37
 Perry, William, 128
 Phi Beta Sigma, 127
 Pinson, Helen, 116
 Potter and Sons, 87
 Poulson, Norris, 140, 144, 146, 156-58, 163-65
 Prentice, Bessie F., 31
 Prudential Life Insurance Company, 58, 73-74
 Reagan, Ronald, 193
 Rheingold Beer, 131
 Rickey, Branch, 26
 Roberts, Frederick Madison, 49, 66-67
 Robinson, Jackie, 26, 218, 222
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 121, 194-95
 Santa Fe Railway, 5
 Scott, Robert, 71
 Second Baptist Church, 39, 90
 Security National Bank. *See* Security Pacific National Bank
 Security Pacific National Bank, 8-10
 Selective Service Board, 14, 18, 121
 Shackelford, J. H., 31-32, 34, 48

Shell, Ernest, 111, 118
 -Ernest Shell Pioneer Award, 118
 Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 190, 192
 Southern Pacific, 82
 Spencer, Kenneth, 36
 Stevens, W. Bertrand, 15
 Stuart, M. S., 72
 Teasley, Larkin, 106, 204, 206
 Thompson, Erma L., 116
 Torrance, T. A., 51
 Towles, Henry H., 47, 50, 90
 Truman, Harry S., 122
 United Negro College Fund, 78
 United States Congress- House Committee on Un-American Activities. *See* House
 Un-American Activities Committee
 Universal Life Insurance Company, 98
 University of California, Berkeley, 83, 85-86
 University of California, Los Angeles, 54, 68, 78, 128, 219-20
 University of Southern California, 54, 78, 127, 219
 Upton, John H., 46
 Urban League, 17, 22, 68, 71, 170-71, 179-80, 183-84, 190, 192, 201
 -Guild, 201
 -Los Angeles chapter, 179-80, 183-84
 Voting Rights Act, 215
 Wallace, George C., 212
 Warren, Earl, 86
 Washington, Booker T., 3
 Washington, Kenneth Stanley, 219-20
 Washington, Leon Harold, 22
 West, Mae, 183
 Whitley, G. W., 31, 33-34
 Whittaker, Leon, 35
 Wilkins, Roy, 210
 Wilkinson, Frank B., 153
 Williams, Paul R., 6-7, 149, 176, 209
 Wilson, Doris, 116
 World War I, 8, 13, 20, 83, 87, 198
 World War II, 18-19, 179, 197
 Yorty, Samuel W., 140, 161

Young, Charles, 86

Young, Whitney, 179

Young Men's Christian Association, 11, 175, 177-78

Young People's Christian Endeavor Society, 6

[Parent Institution](#) | [TEI](#) | [Search](#) | [Feedback](#)

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