

## **A TEI Project**

# **Interview of Don Lee White**

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## **1. Transcript**

### **1.1. Session 1A (January 19, 2007)**

Patterson

We're gonna see (inaudible). I just got mine. I just finished reading my dissertation. It was good to get to that stage of it. Did you ever get to that stage of writing a dissertation? I'm sure you did in this instance.

White

Oh, yeah, Master's thesis. I didn't write a dissertation. My doctorate's honor.

Patterson

I can't wait to talk to you about that, honorary doctorate out of (inaudible)

White

It was nothing spectacular.

Patterson

Well, we'll decide exactly. You might not think it is.

White

No. (laughter)

Patterson

How we doing? Great. What was that -- I know there was some books over in the bookcase that you said you were doing to donate to a college or university.

White

Yeah, all of them. The case. It was called Arkansas Baptist Seminary. It's an old, black seminary. I think it was established in 1880 or something, 1870 or so. It's like a -- what's that college in Arkansas, the black college? See, it came to my mind. I just can't remember.

Patterson

I know we were talking about just the black universities in the country.

White

Little Rock, Little Rock.

Patterson

It was actually up north, somewhere in (inaudible) Ohio.

White

Wilberforce, Wilberforce, mm-hmm.

Patterson

OK, that surprised me. I thought it would've been in the south. OK, are we ready? OK. What's today, the 19th? Did you check the sound levels, Alex, already? (inaudible)

White

But see, (inaudible) that's just something I'm not that...

Patterson

I know, you're a modest person and that's OK. And also, you're important to...

White

What's the matter. You don't have any electricity?

Patterson

Are we ready? We're good. (inaudible) Ready? Here we are. This is January 19th, 2007, with Mr. Don Lee White in his home. And hi, and welcome to the interview series.

White

Thank you.

Patterson

And we're honored to have you. To go back to the beginning of the story, where is your family from?

White

Well, that's the very interesting part of, I guess, my life. I don't know. I don't really have a family. As far as I did do a little research and I'm an orphan. I was a ward of the state, one of the children of the state, and so forth. And when I did some research, I could not find a birth certificate, and further, when I was going to take a trip to Africa the only way I could get a passport was to get my elementary school admission, and so from that -- and I began to find out that there are two different John Lees so listed. One is named Benson and another is named White. I think White or Brown, I can't ident-- I heard from older people, something about they remember when I was brought to this lady who I lived with who I thought was my grandmother, and this is very intricate beginning. So I got a little discouraged and never followed through with my beginnings, so if somebody would like to research that, it will be quite an interesting -- I do have my junior high, what is it, when you graduate. What do they give you, diploma?

Patterson

Diploma?

White

Is it a diploma? Junior high diploma, I'm listed as Don Lee Benson.

Patterson

So you were Benson...

White

No, I never knew anything until at graduation. I was always called White. And in high school, of course, my high school diploma is White, and when I -- lady who said was my mother never had the name White. Her name was Brown, so I have no idea how -- mixed family's got all kind of mixed up. The lady I lived with was named White. Her name was Martha White, and everybody in the neighborhood called her Mother White. And

Patterson

This is the first person you remember as a parent.

White

Yes, mm-hmm.

Patterson

So do you remember how old you were when you went to live with her?

White

No, oh no. I was just a child, just a baby. It was Maxine Waters' mother. She, I think, is 98, 99 or something, and she says "I remember when they brought you to Mother White's house," you know. (inaudible) But she's way up in her nineties. But I don't know anything. My first recollection of existence was whenever the earthquake was in Los Angeles. That was, what, '32 or '33, I remember. That's...

Patterson

You remember the earth shaking(?).

White

And standing up in the crib and so forth, and everybody running out of the house and all.

Patterson

So what was it like living with Mother White? What do you remember about the house?

White

Oh, well, she was -- she had -- she was -- she took care of children from the state. There were other children around. I remember, you know -- it was just, I guess, I knew nothing else so it was a normal existence.

Patterson

Yeah. African-American children?

White

Yes.

Patterson

(inaudible)

White

Yeah, African-American.

Patterson

Where was her home?

White

This was on 49th Street, and I don't remember the address, but it was between Central and Hooper Avenue. We called it "H'pp-er." People call it "Hoop-er" now. But it was "H'pp-er," yeah. We were closer to Central, I remember that.

Patterson

So was it a big house? Did you share your room with the children, the other children?

White

I don't remember sleeping accommodations or anything. I just remember we were in that house and I remember the earthquake and everybody leaving, and I remember after that it was a severe rainstorm. I think it rained for about a month or something, and I'd have to check the weather chart, because I remember the water covered all the curves and everything, and after that I remember -- well, we lived -- after the earthquake we lived outdoors. We

stayed outdoors in the backyard. I remember all of us sitting around a coal stove, you know. We were afraid to go into the house.

Patterson

Yeah, (inaudible) fallen? (inaudible)

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Was Mother White the only adult there caring for you, or did she have a...

Patterson

That was the only adult I remember. I don't know, because as I said, doing a little research, I was somewhere -- I was either born in '28, '29, and the -- '30, somewhere around in there, so I'm 78 or 79 or 77, someplace around in there. But I have a Social Security number and all that stuff, so I don't know when that transpired, but you know.

Patterson

Did she have any musical instruments in the house?

White

No, nobody was musical.

Patterson

Did you listen to the radio?

White

Well, that was the beginning, what I remember. We moved from there. We moved right behind us onto 51st Street, and I remember the move. We'd just - there was a hole in the fence and we'd look through the hole in the fence to the houses right behind us, and that's where I kind of grew up, and I remember more there than on the 49th Street. But on 49th Street, the lady who lived next door, I remember it was a white lady, had a beautiful flower garden between the houses, you know, and I remember that. It was always immaculate with flowers growing and all, and she would always bake a lot and

we were always over at her house getting cookies, I remember that. You know.

Patterson

So the family moved to 51st Street?

White

51st Street, and I remember that. That was 1177 51st Street. I remember that because I stayed there all during elementary school.

Patterson

And what was it like there? Did you -- do you remember your -- obviously, you're a little older now and you're starting to notice your environment, and be a little more...

Patterson

Oh, yeah, a little, because the first black policeman I saw lived on that block, Brady, Elaine -- Brody was his name. Brody. He's two doors from the house, you know, from the girl across the street, played the piano. Her name was Brooks. Next door to her lived a lady who played the piano and she was the first organist at Reverend E. V. Hill's church, Mount Zion Baptist. A woman who was about two doors down at the time played the piano. Her name was Burkhalter. So there was a lot of musical activity. You heard music a lot. And I heard these people playing and so I wanted to get involved musically, but there -- nobody in the house played.

Patterson

So your first musical awakening was your neighborhood.

White

Yeah. Mm-hmm

Patterson

Did you visit any of these musicians and learn anything from them, or was it just you recall being -- having your interest piqued because of (inaudible)?

White

Well, interest was piqued, but during that time everybody was in and out of everyone else's home. You didn't just stay in your own house. If you heard the piano over here, you went over there and sat and listened or, you know -- no.

Patterson

When did you start learning to actually -- well, let me put it this way. When did you actually sit at a piano and begin to...

White

Well, piano wasn't my first instrument. There was an old white fellow who went around the neighborhood and I could see him criss-crossing the street, teaching instruments, piano, whatever it was, and he would carry things, say you'd see him with a trombone on his back or something or a guitar or something, going, you know, teaching. And my first instrument was violin, so he...

Patterson

He had a violin in his knapsack(?)? (laughter)

Patterson

I don't know, but it was...

Patterson

Wow, that is...

White

I wanted to -- and I went to Hooper Avenue.

Patterson

The elementary school?

White

Yeah, elementary school, and I guess the reason why I learned, wanted violin was because I was infatuated with a girl at the school whose name was Eleanor Bujol, who was a violinist and she has a sister who's still living. Her name is Ruth Bujol, who's a minister, was a minister, so I wanted to be near



Eleanor, so I learned the violin and in those days earlier, we had all-city high school or elementary school orchestras. So...

Patterson

So you were in the orchestra playing violin.

White

Yeah, I guess three or four, two years or so after studying, yeah.

Patterson

So Hooper Avenue School was your elementary school, and Eleanor and you and was Ruth also, her sister also in the orchestra?

White

No, she wasn't in the orchestra, just Ruth.

Patterson

So how old were you when you started playing violin?

White

I don't know. I had to be seven, seven or eight.

Patterson

And did you learn to read music? How did they teach...

White

Yeah, I don't know. I can't remember that. As I said, remember, he would come to the house and we went through lessons. I remember playing.

Patterson

This gentleman.

White

This gentleman, yeah.

Patterson

Carrying these instruments to the neighborhood. Tell me more. What else do you know about him?

White

I don't. I've been...

Patterson

Did he get paid for...

White

Yeah, I think it was thirty-five...

Patterson

(inaudible) donations, or...

White

No, I think it was thirty-five cents or fifty cents a lesson, that he went around.

Patterson

Do you remember his name?

White

I do remember. I can't remember it now, but it'll come to me.

Patterson

OK, so did you enjoy playing the violin or you were just thinking about Eleanor?

White

Oh, no, I enjoyed the violin. I played the violin all during elementary school. I became fairly proficient with it. I still have them, my violins. I had four of them all around there.

Patterson

Do you still play?

White

I teach. I can teach it. I don't play well. I can -- I can play it.

Patterson

What do you remember about the first elementary school orchestra? What was it like?

White

I -- I don't remember too much about the elementary school orchestra. I remember the All-City elementary school orchestra, and I don't remember -- I think we went someplace. I think we rehearsed once a week. I think it was on Fridays and Eleanor's mother or father would drive us to wherever we were going to meet, and I looked forward to Fridays because we would leave school around noon and I would go to Eleanor Bujol's house and her mother would have lunch for us. And then they would drive us to wherever the rehearsal of the orchestra, and there were probably 150, a hundred and so kids in the all-city orchestra.

Patterson

Was it a mixed group of children ethnically?

White

Yes, ethnically, yeah.

Patterson

So...

White

It was all-city.

Patterson

So even then, they had integrated this (inaudible) city elementary school.

White

Yes, oh, schools, yeah. They had the orchestra, they had the elementary bands, they had the elementary choruses. They had the middle school orchestras, band of course, and then the high school.

Patterson

Oh, so it was all the primary (inaudible). Elementary, junior high, and high school. And were there -- did they differentiate groups? Or were they all playing together?

White

They all played together, all the players, because I remember our big concert was at the Shrine Auditorium, the only one I played in. I remember I was on the last row (laughter) with my violin, and I wasn't very good, but I played. But I maintained enough to stay in the orchestra.

Patterson

Well, that must have been exciting for you, the Shrine Auditorium.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Did Mother White come and see you?

White

No. I don't remember. I really -- I don't remember her supporting. She was not negative about anything. She was never -- I don't remember attending anything.

Patterson

But she paid that 35 cents for...

White

Yes, for the lessons.

Patterson

So she must have supported you her own way.

White

His name was Baker, Mr. Baker. Mr. Baker. And she was responsible for, I guess, during that time -- all the young people were involved in music, in art, in dance, you know. I wasn't one for sports. So I took dancing lessons. We all took dancing lessons. There were two dance instructors that were mostly popular in LA. That was the Covans, Willie Covan had a studio across from Jefferson High School. And there was Loretta Butler, and I studied with Loretta Butler, tap dancing.

Patterson

Tell me when you started doing that.

White

I don't know. Still in elementary school, yeah.

Patterson

Tap dance! Did you perform?

White

There was a little girl living -- well, not living, (inaudible) now, who I used to dance with, and (inaudible) another person that everybody knows -- not everybody, but I guess we remember, Cheryl Luke. Cheryl Luke is a superior court judge, and we would -- as kids, we took dancing at the same time with Mrs. Butler. Tap dancing.

Patterson

Tap dancing.

White

Tap dancing.

Patterson

Did you do concerts, performances, et cetera?

White

Yeah, we did a lot of performances, uh-huh.

Patterson

So you were really well, very well involved, very much involved in the arts.

White

Well, not -- (inaudible) I don't remember, yeah, I don't remember art, any other art activity.

Patterson

Dance, music, and...

White

And that was during probably in the 30's, the last days of, the heydays of the Lincoln Theater, because I remember dancing a couple of times in recitals at the Lincoln Theater.

Patterson

Is the Lincoln Theater on Central?

White

Yeah, 24th and Central.

Patterson

24th and Central.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And so you did some recitals there?

White

Dance, yeah. Mrs. Butler would always present her revues...

Patterson

At the Lincoln.

White

At the Lincoln Theater, mm-hmm.

Patterson

And what kind of -- what was the audience like? Do you remember who would come and be...

White

I don't remember seeing a soul, because all the lights (inaudible). It was a huge place, I thought at that time.

Patterson

Did you do costumes? Did you have costumes and sets?

White

Yeah, we had little costumes. I don't remember what they were?

Patterson

An accompanist?

White

Well, she played. Mrs. Butler, she was the pianist. She played. When we did the programs, recitals, there was a little band, jazz band or something, if I remember. I'd have to talk to somebody else. A good friend of mine also studied dance with -- I keep in contact with her, an Danellen Joseph, do you know of? An Danellen Mayberry Joseph. It's an old family in the Los Angeles area. She lived on the, what was it, the west side of Central. That was the hoity-toity side. And I lived on the east side, you know, because I can remember those old -- those early days, when you got as far as McKinley Avenue in the -- when you're in the Fifties. That was as far as blacks could go west, and when Avalon Boulevard, you were in the white neighborhood, so you weren't welcome. So this is, I'm talking about 35 and before 40, so...

Patterson

So she was sort of on that borderline.

White

Well, that was your family status. You had a little more financial security than those on the other side of the street, which was like the other side of the tracks.

Patterson

So there were whites that lived in your neighborhood.

White

Yes.

Patterson

But of course, they -- by choice.

White

They were there, I guess, much earlier than the blacks at the time.

Patterson

Did you ever, do you remember ever taking any excursions outside of the neighborhood into the white parts of the city, or you know, going on any trips or special events? Like, where was the all-city rehearsal?

White

I don't remember. I get the -- wherever the board of education was at that time, I think that's where we rehearsed, but as I said, I remember a couple of performances they held at the Shrine Auditorium. Yeah. Excursions, what -- we used to enjoy ourselves. They had street cars, and you could ride a street car for, I think it's ten cents. And on Central Avenue was the U car, and we'd get on the U car, pay our ten cents, and it would go all the way downtown and all somewhere, and it would end up at MGM studio, you know, so we would -- that's an all-day streetcar ride.

Patterson

MGM and...

White

Culver City, yeah. And then we'd come on back.



Patterson

So you got to see more of the...

White

More, yeah. See something, you didn't get off and eat or walk the streets, no.

Patterson

So that was sort of the lay of the land in your elementary school.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And so you've learned violin now, and I imagine you've started to learn to read music a little bit?

White

Oh, yeah. You had to read music to be all-city.

Patterson

So then you went to junior high school. So what was that transition like?  
Where did you go to junior high school?

White

Junior high school, I went to John Adams. It's on, what, Broadway -- Main, Broadway and 30-something, 32nd, in that area. Well, we -- by that time, I had moved from 51st Street to 33rd Street, 33rd and Wadsworth there, on the block between Wadsworth and Griffith, and most interesting, the area at that time, was that I lived next door to the family of the George Beavers. You know the Beavers, who was one of the founders of the Golden State Insurance Company Group, or whatever it was called? And it was his granddaughter, and she played piano, and I used to sit outside under her window to listen to her play piano, so I started piano. (laughter)

Patterson

What was her name? What's her first name?

White

Leola, Leola Beavers, and she's married and her name is Davis. And believe it or not, Sunday I went to church and I was sitting behind this lady and she turned around and they introduced me and everything and she turned around and she says, "Do you know me?" I says no. She says, "I'm Leola," and it was a girl I used to -- the woman I used to listen to play the piano, and then there was another lady at the church, that same -- yes, it was this last Sunday -- who lived on 51st and Hooper. We went to elementary school together. Hadn't seen her in all these years, 50 years.

Patterson

Did you remember her right away?

White

No, huh-uh.

Patterson

Did she remember you?

White

Yeah, she remembered me. When they announced my name, I -- (inaudible) introduced me, at least. (inaudible) she came up and I just threw -- my God, you know, out of the past.

Patterson

That's great. So Leola lived in your neighborhood when you moved to Wadsworth.

White

33rd Street, mm-hmm.

Patterson

33rd Street. And so you were listening to her play the...

White

Piano.

Patterson

And what was she playing? What kind of music

White

Classical, it was classical piano. Oh yeah, very -- oh, yeah. Mm-hmm.

Patterson

Was she a student at the time of piano?

White

Somebody, yes. Yeah. And she was a student just learning it, and I just said (inaudible) I was just in awe at the sound, so I just started piano.

Patterson

Well, you said that your co-classmates, these little girls, were very influential.

White

Oh, yeah, uh-huh.

Patterson

(inaudible) the beginnings of music. (laughter)

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So when did you start actually playing piano yourself?

White

During junior high school. When we went to junior high school, there was the music teacher there. Her name was -- don't remember the first name, but Mrs. Hubbard. Mrs. Hubbard, because I played violin, and I danced, even in junior high school for programs and assemblies. She was interested -- I don't know that I told her I wanted to learn piano, (inaudible) began teaching me piano, and I remember she used to come back to John Adams on Saturdays and I used to have lessons at the school with her on Saturdays and a couple of

times she took me out to her house. It was just a marvelous relationship and experience. I guess, and I have to go back, I guess I started -- I guess I had an interest in the piano. I started piano, and I don't remember playing, while I was on the east side, on Hooper Avenue, because on 52nd Street in Hooper was a music studio, and a woman, black woman from Canada taught most of the students at Hooper Avenue, and I remember going there, taking a few lessons with Mrs. Brooks. Did I tell you her name? Her name was Brooks. I can't remember her first name. But most of the time, she taught -- I remember I was involved with theory, but I don't remember actually playing, because by the time I got to high school, I had theory but I didn't know what it was.

Patterson

So she was teaching you to read music, then?

White

To read music, to write music. I could analyze chords and all that stuff, but I didn't -- I didn't know it at the time until I took a theory class in high school and all of a sudden I said, well, I know that! That's so simple, that's so easy! I thought everybody did, you know. Doesn't everybody do this?

Patterson

So maybe they were teaching in conjunction with performance and it wasn't really sort of an intellectual exercise so much as it was a practical one, do you think?

White

Probably. I don't know, but as I said, I don't remember playing the piano, but I remember other persons there who were performers.

Patterson

So then, Mrs. Hubbard sort of took over from there

White

Yeah.

Patterson

After Mrs. Brooks And your experience at elementary school. And then with Mrs. Hubbard you had individualized attendance.

White

Yes.

Patterson

That's great, then, that you were able to come study on Saturdays, and so at that point you were playing violin and piano.

White

Well, I put the piano -- I put the violin down, you know, because poor Eleanor Bujol wasn't around. (laughter)

Patterson

OK, so you started off learning a classical repertoire.

White

Yes, and I just like anybody, during the period of the era you hear all the other things so you try to play whatever you -- you know, the sounds that are around you.

Patterson

Well, speaking of that...

White

So you know, I would play popular stuff, or whatever, I guess by year. We didn't...

Patterson

So not only were you taking lessons in a formal setting, but you were also experimenting in playing things you liked as well.

White

Patterson

What kind of music?

White

But let me go back, then. But the other thing, I have never really been that interested in popular music or jazz or something like that. I gravitated even at an early age to church music, and I can remember as a little kid in elementary school, when I would walk up and down Central Avenue going to the store or wherever I went to, dance lessons or so forth, they had what they called the storefront churches, you know. You know about those? I'd pass by a storefront church and I'd hear them singing. I would go in, and if I'd see the piano I'd go in and try to play the song and try to pick the song up on the piano. I remember doing that.

Patterson

So you would actually walk into services that were being conducted and interact.

White

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Patterson

OK, so you felt courageous about your musical...

White

I don't know whether I felt courageous. I guess I just wanted to learn. I wanted to be involved.

Patterson

Yeah. So you began to pick out these songs and I suppose gradually learned the repertoire of the church.

White

Of the church, yeah.

Patterson

So you were learning classical in a formal sense, and beginning to gravitate in your personal life towards church music and playing there. Were you reading church music as well?

White

No, no, the storefront church, nobody read any of the music.

Patterson

So how would you describe that church music? (noise)

White

Yeah. (pause)

Patterson

Speaking of your beginnings and being involved in church music, did you have a church that you went to that you became attached to on a consistent basis?

White

Not really. I remember as a kid the Mount Zion baptist church. That was the big Baptist Church on, what was it, 51st, 51st and Hooper. It was a huge church. It was much bigger than it is now. Going there because the lady across the street, kind of catty-corner across the street from where I lived on 51st, was the organist at the church, and her mother was the -- I want to call him -- did the art drawing for Sunday school on a chalkboard, you know, of Bible characters and so forth, and so I would go to see her and hear her and then see the Bible drawings, but I also would visit other churches.

Patterson

Now, was this on your own, from your own motivation, or with...

White

From my -- nobody took me, no, no, no. I don't remember Mother White taking me or going to church at all.

Patterson

Was anybody with you, companions to go with you?

White

No. Unless it was another person in the house, you know. Young, one of the other, we'll call them residents of the...

Patterson

At Mother White's home?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Did you have a particular companion that you played with more than others?

White

No, because we all played outside. The whole neighborhood would just come together and we played kickball or we played hopscotch, do whatever it was. Everybody in the neighborhood would just gravitate to Mother White's house.

Patterson

Yeah, so you were actually just exploring your neighborhood.

White

Yes.

Patterson

And finding this music in the neighborhood and at Mount Zion.

White

At Mount Zion or there was another church beginning and it was Pilgrim Baptist Church. It was beginning, I remember it was on Hooper and they built the church for -- it's now right in front of McKinley Avenue, or what is it, Carver? It's called Carver now. It's a nice, large church. Carver Avenue School on McKinley and 45th or something.

Patterson

You mentioned an organist at Mount Zion. Was that E.V. Hill, or...

White

Well, E.V. Hill, it was the later minister. I can't -- I can't think of the minister who was there during this time.



Patterson

But the organist that also lived on your...

White

The organist whose name was Wilhelmina Lawrence. I remember that. It just came to me, Wilhelmina Lawrence.

Patterson

And so, OK. (pause) Violins sometimes. I don't want to talk about anything that I need to get on tape.

Crew

I'm still rolling.

Patterson

You are?

White

I've started little church orchestras and started younger persons on strings. I can play all the strings. When I went to LACC, I studied the cello and viola. I tried everything, even tried to play in the CC Orchestra, which I wasn't very good, but I played. (laughter)

Patterson

Well, we're rolling (inaudible).

Crew

I would be hesitant to have that sound in the back for any of it.

Patterson

OK. As soon as I start talking, I get stuff that I want to have on tape.

Crew

That's why we'll keep on rolling.

White

OK, you can erase that off.

Crew

Yeah, the (inaudible). As I say that (inaudible). Thank you so much. (inaudible)  
You just look so much like you were just all pent up, just squashed in there. It's  
very nice, the room is (inaudible) all the lights, very nice frame, the pianos and  
the books.

Patterson

Yeah, it's comfortable.

White

But at some place in the documentary, Karen needs to be in there too.  
(inaudible) see her. (laughter)

Crew

Karen's like no, I don't think so.

White

Is he backing up?

Patterson

You had mentioned a couple of people. Do you know Betty Cox by any  
chance?

White

Oh, sure. When Betty Cox was doing her research on Central Avenue, I was  
doing my research on the classical music in Los Angeles at the same time, so  
we decided not to overlap. Well, there would be a little overlap, but my  
concentration was more classical and hers was more the jazz on the history of  
the Central Avenue.

Patterson

We're probably OK to start back where we were, in you being in junior high  
school and starting to explore church music and explore the church music of  
several churches in your neighborhood. And do you remember a point at  
which you actually started playing on a regular basis with the church, or were

you just now in this period of your life just sort of getting accustomed to the sounds of it and experimenting at home? You didn't have a piano at home.

White

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

Did you?

White

Yes, there was a piano. There was a piano. There was an instrument there in the house. But nobody played it but me, I think. But I was just banging. When I was studying the violin, there was a piano, but you sit and pick things out, but I wasn't formally trained at the time. And when we moved the piano went with us, as part of the furniture.

Patterson

So Mother White was somewhere in her life conscious of having the children in her home connect to music.

White

I don't think so. It was a piano there. I don't know. It was just a piano that was there. It was part of the furnishings. Because nobody played it.

Patterson

But did anybody else, did any of the other children play around with the piano? Just you?

White

Not that I know of.

Patterson

So when you started working with Mrs. Hubbard, did she give you assignments that you would practice at home?

White

Oh, yeah.

Patterson

And so you were practicing classical and you were experiencing church music and sort of playing at it at home, like trying to emulate it maybe?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And then you'd walk into the churches and play along with them, you said?

White

No, no, that was -- that was the storefront church, the storefront.

Patterson

Compare the two environments, the storefront church...

White

The storefront church is a mostly informal church. It's a church in its neo -- neophyte, embryo, so there's nothing there. There's about three people in the church, you know, and they're just singing and clapping and you know, as they call it today praising or something. So they were happy that anybody would come in and do -- so I was just...

Patterson

So, and historically...

White

It wasn't a formalized church. It probably didn't even have an -- I don't even remember having -- it having a name. It wasn't called a Baptist church or -- most storefront churches, even today I think, are just holiness churches, Church of God in Christ. That's how they begin.

Patterson

Do you think they become denominational later? Or...

White

Yeah, they become denominational-affiliated, yes, later.

Patterson

But always with a piano. Or would they only sometimes have a piano there in the storefront church? Was it a fixture of the storefront churches? In other words...

White

Yeah.

Patterson

If they didn't have anything else, they'd have some chairs and a piano.

White

And a piano, yeah.

Patterson

And a podium, maybe?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Do you remember vocal music happening? Or just spontaneous?

White

It was spontaneous congregation, because there were no more than three or four people, you know, these little places. And I began to go to more formal organized churches in junior high school. And I heard choirs and that. That's a different music.

Patterson

So you began to connect to the repertoire of church music in junior high school.

White

Yes.

Patterson

Did you join a church at any point?

White

Yes. Uh-huh. And I think the first church I joined I was 12 or 13. It was an Evening Star Baptist Church, which is still in existence. At that time it was on 34th and Central, just east of central on 34th Street and the minister was Reverend Brooks, L.L. Brooks I think, was his name.

Patterson

Why that church?

White

Because it was close. I was a block from where I lived and I could walk and go there and the lady who played the piano at the church, I guess I was attracted to her, became my piano teacher.

Patterson

Who was that?

White

Mrs. Eunice Blackwell. And she lived in Boyle Heights and you know there is a small black community in Boyle Heights at the time, and...

Patterson

So you came into the neighborhood to come to this church.

White

To play.

Patterson

What made her come...

White

Oh, I don't know. I don't know. Well, she was a very good musician and a very learned person. (noise)

Patterson

Come on you guys.

White

He never stays this long, I don't think.

Patterson

(laughter) (inaudible)

White

Is he blowing, or is that just the lawnmower?

Crew

That's the lawnmower, and he actually said he wasn't going to do anything else up here on this side, but I guess...

White

They never cut the bushes back or do anything, you know. (noise)

Patterson

OK, so when you were working with Mrs. Blackwell at Evening Star, she was helping you with piano, right?

White

Well, I was taking lessons from her. I was a student. I would take the B car, B car on Ascot. Went all the way to Boyle Heights and I don't remember the street she lived. You get on the B car at 50th and whatever it was and I'd go all the way out to Boyle Heights to her house.

Patterson

To take lessons.

White

Take lessons, mm-hmm.

Patterson

Was this at the same time you were taking lessons with your junior high school teacher, Mrs. Hubbard?

White

Yes.

Patterson

So you were actually...

White

Well, I was paying for lessons with Mrs. Blackwell. Mrs. Hubbard was just volunteering to help me because she felt I had some kind of promise, I guess.

Patterson

Yeah. Well, that was very fortunate.

White

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

To be able to have two teachers to influence your early learning in piano.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And each of them, how were they different? How was learning with each of those teachers unique?

White

I don't know. I never put it together that way.

Patterson

But I'm sure you learned something from each of them.

White

Yeah.



Patterson

Now, was Mrs. Blackwell playing in the church?

White

Yes, she was playing at the Evening Star. She was the pianist, or the music director or whatever they called them at the time. It was a small church, but she taught the choir and, you know.

Patterson

So, were you involved in the musical activities of the church?

White

Not -- not when I was taking music lessons from her.

Patterson

But you were...

White

But what became unique was that she eventually obtained the organist position at Phillips Temple CME Church, which was a large church, so she left and after she left I assumed the position of playing the piano.

Patterson

At Evening Star?

White

Evening Star.

Patterson

And how old were you then?

White

12 or 13 or something, right there. You know, I could read the hymns. That's all they wanted somebody to do, read the music. I could read the hymns.

Patterson

Well, you were awfully young to take that responsibility.

White

And I remember reading -- I started directing, or I was in charge of the youth choir. They all were my age, and I remember going downtown to G. Schirmer's music company, which is on 7th -- 7th and Hill or something, 7th Street. Rode the streetcar downtown and bought my first anthem to teach the choir. That was just sort of a...

Patterson

So it came into your mind that this is something that you would like to do. Were you given free reign, or were you working the minister somehow, as far as what to do with the choir?

White

No, you're given free way. The ministers don't tell you what to do, just as long as -- it was just the kids, so as long as they kept the kids together doing something.

Patterson

So you were self-motivated in this activity. This was like a consistent thing that you...

White

I don't know that it was self-motivated, but I just did it. I don't know.

Patterson

Must have been nice (inaudible) do it, right? Did you just love the music?

White

Well, and also, as I said, the girl that would play the piano every day practiced every day next door, Leola Beavers, and then on the corner of 33rd and Griffith was kind of a Spiritualist church, and it was -- I think this church would only seat 50 people and they had maybe a choir of ten. But I remember it was excellent music, it was excellent and I can't remember the guy's name who played, and I remember it was a woman minister. You know, these were unusual times and it was kind of mystical, but I remember hearing, well, the

Holy City anthems and classic literature there. It wasn't just hymns, so that piqued my imagination for music and creating music.

Patterson

So how was the Spiritualist church different from Evening Star, generally speaking?

White

The music was more classical. Evening Star was just hymns mostly, just...

Patterson

Was the congregation different in any way?

White

Evening Star was a bigger church. Evening Star would seat probably 100 or 150, and the music was just mostly out of the hymn book, and a few little gospel hymns at the time. And the Spiritualist church, they did more classical music.

Patterson

Did they have a director?

White

The fellow that played the piano, yeah, he was the director.

Patterson

So he sort of spearheaded this musical direction that they were having.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And you preferred the music.

White

Yeah. It was on a higher plane, a higher level, more classical all the way through, you know. The songs were classical, sacred songs that people sang. The choir didn't sing just a hymn. They sang just the anthem.

Patterson

And so you went downtown and got an anthem.

White

Yeah, to teach to my little kids, the junior choir.

Patterson

Would you say that was inspired by what you were hearing at the Spiritualists?

White

Sure, yes.

Patterson

And how did it go over? How did you manage that?

White

I don't remember. (laughter) I don't remember. I think yeah, I think we performed, and I don't know whether -- how well we did or anything.

Patterson

So was that a transition for you, as far as moving into the anthem-based?

White

Yeah, probably. It was a beginning, beginning. How can I say -- during that time I was nearing graduation from junior high. It was maybe a little before that. I met -- the name Sam Brown was a very popular musician in Los Angeles. He was one of the first, one of the first black music teachers in the high school, and he taught at Jefferson High School, and I had heard him play. He had come by the house and interviewed and auditioned me and wanted me to come to Jefferson High.

Patterson

How did that come about?

White

Oh, because I was -- I began playing around, accompanying, in the churches, and teas. The entertainment at that time was, any Sunday afternoon people had -- churches had teas and musicals, and you would play on musicals, either a little piano solo, they invite you to play a solo, or people would need an accompanist and I would practice the music and practice with them and then go and play for them, and they'd pat you on the head and say thank you. (laughter) Or sometimes they would give you fifty cents or a dollar, you know.

Patterson

And here you were, a teenager, and becoming known in your community as a pianist. So Sam Brown, teaching at Jefferson High came to interview you in order to incorporate you into his program at...

White

At Jeff, yeah.

Patterson

And what happened with that?

White

I didn't accept, because I had heard an organ, pipe organ, and I was just enamored with this sound of the pipe organ and the only school that was teaching the organ, it was old Polytechnic High. That's the trade tech now. They had a big pipe organ, so I went there.

Patterson

So you decided to go there instead of (inaudible).

White

Yeah, and I had started the organ before I left junior high school.

Patterson

When did you first see an organ or hear an organ and know that's what you wanted to do?

White

Well, a friend of mine, or a friend of my family, I guess a friend of Mother White's who's a young minister who -- probably I was, what, 12 or 14 and he was probably 18, and took me to Eighth and Towne which was -- they call it Fanie now, but the old Eighth and Towne, which is on Eighth and Towne Street in Los Angeles, to a musical and I saw the choir there and the organ and the grandiose of that service and that did it for me.

Patterson

Do you remember what that musical was?

White

No.

Patterson

And so from that moment, you fell for the organ.

White

Yeah. But I remember the lady who played the organ, her name was Elizabeth Bruce. I will never forget that, Elizabeth Bruce, because they were going to do the oratorio, the seven last words on Good Friday, and she died on Maundy Thursday. And I wanted to hear her play that. I remember Elizabeth Bruce also because she played the organ at the Lincoln Theater.

Patterson

African-American woman?

White

Yeah, she was a theater organist who played -- and used to play the organ between movies and all that, at the Lincoln Theater. But when -- the Good Friday when she passed, the choir had prepared to do this "Seven Last Words" and George Robert Garner III was the choir director, and they invited -- well, they -- I guess the only person -- not the only person, the person they hired to play that Good Friday service was a woman named Dr. Irene Robertson, who was the organ teacher at Polytechnic High School and after hearing her play that oratorio that's why I had to go to Poly, so...

Patterson

So at Eighth and Towne, was that...

## **1.2. Session 1B (January 19, 2007)**

White

...quite put it together. In my junior high experience, I met Albert McNeil. You know the name. Now, how and when and where, I don't underst-- I don't know. I can't put it together. But I remember going to Independent Church, People's Independent Church, which was also one of the popular churches at the time.

Patterson

Do you remember where it was?

White

18th and Paloma. It was on 18th and Paloma. Clayton Russell was the minister and the organist at the church was Fanny Benjamin, the very popular and great musician and I studied with her as -- I would've been about 14 years old or something. I remember. I took three lessons, I think, of organ from Mrs. Benjamin and played a Men's Day program at a church. Didn't know what I was doing. And the director of the choir at that time was Jester Hairston. It was just marvelous. I didn't know how to play, really, but I knew -- but I said, remember our years ago, I said in elementary school I studied at this conservatory, Mrs. Brooks, and she taught us theory, so Jester would hold up fingers, say "play the one chord, play the two chord, play the five chord, or the six chord," and I could play those but didn't realize it until I had the opportunity to...

Patterson

To use the...

White

To use the -- yeah. So, yeah.

Patterson

So how did -- let's see. One thing I wanted to ask you about the Eighth and Towne expe-- was there a church there that this happened at, the musical that you...

White

Yeah, the name of the church at Eighth and Towne, was First AME. Yeah, First AME. Earlier days everybody called it Eighth and Towne. That's 'cause that's where the church was. You know, most of the churches like the Wesley United Methodist, Wesley Methodist Church, was on Eighth and San Julian. All the churches were downtown. The black area primarily in Los Angeles -- and I learned this from Mother White -- was north of Washington. That was -- well, the Biddy Mason. She would purchase property and all on Spring Street, so blacks lived north, all downtown. Spring, Broadway, you know. Here, and north of Washington, south of -- say, in the 1900's, so south of Washington were estates, huge estates, forms(?).

Patterson

And so in the 30's then, the black community...

White

Began to gradually go south. Mm-hmm. And the black community went as far as Slauson, and you got to Slauson, 58th Street or whatever it was, 59th, and it stopped, and then from 59th farther south until you got to Manchester. That was all white. And then Manchester going south, that was Watts. That's why I'm so confused now, because they called everything South Los Angeles. You know, you can live in the Baldwin Hills in the south of Los Angeles but that -- you know, that was not -- South Los Angeles was on the east side and south.

Patterson

And granted, the black community kind of spread southward, though, from the 30's.

White

Yes, mm-hmm.

Patterson



So you mentioned Albert McNeil and the People's Independent Church, and Clayton Russell and Fannie Benjamin. How did he factor into this (inaudible) during your teenaged years?

White

OK. Albert was -- Albert McNeil was the director of music at New Hope Baptist Church. New Hope Baptist Church was next door, right next door, to People's Independent. People's Independent was a huge church seating maybe 1,500 with this huge pipe organ. New Hope Baptist was right up against New Independent, which was a house church seating maybe 100 people or 150 people. It was a house converted into a sanctuary and it had a choir of maybe 60, and Albert was a director there, and the woman who was the -- they had an electronic organ and the woman who was the organist got a job that prevented her from playing on Sundays, and so Albert knew I was taking lessons from Fanny Benjamin, Mrs. Benjamin, and so -- and he knew I could play the piano, so he said come and play. And I was bold enough to say yes, and I went and played, and I remember my first job and I made eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents a month, and I was very happy. That was a lot of money. (laughter)

Patterson

So you were in high school.

White

No, I was in junior high. Still in junior high. Hadn't graduated yet. Junior high. I think I was fourteen or fifteen, fourteen I guess, and Albert must have been about eighteen or so, because he was just starting, I think, UCLA.

Patterson

How was it working together with him?

White

Oh, marvelous, because he knew he could play. Albert still plays marvelously well. He was an organist also, plays piano, and he knew music very well, and I guess I learned about teaching from him. I was only an accompanist for Albert for maybe six months or seven months. That's about all, because he left, left me there. (inaudible) this young kid. I knew nothing about, really, church

music and playing and everything else, and he went to Independent, and at that time the director of music at Independent, I don't know if you know the name, was A.C. Bilbrew. Well, she's one of the historic figures in music in Los Angeles. You know, there's an A.C. Bilbrew library on -- can't remember the name of the street, but it's -- I go there to do research, because they have a micro-- microfilms and everything else, all the old newspapers and all. It's a marvelous place to work. It's better than going way out to UCLA. (laughter) And you can't get in the library! When he left, there I was, stuck with doing the music all by myself.

Patterson

At New Hope.

White

At New Hope.

Patterson

And the he was right next door.

White

Uh-huh.

Patterson

So you were now an organist.

White

Well, I'm playing the piano and the organ.

Patterson

The organ and the piano...

White

It was a little small electronic organ. It wasn't a big pipe organ or anything else, but it looked big to me at that time.

Patterson

And you had a choir.

White

A choir of about fifty people, old adults. They must have been 30 years old or so, and here I am, twelve or thirteen, fourteen, you know. I mean, scared to death.

Patterson

How was it to manage an activity like that, with these much older adults?

White

I don't know. I just manage -- I remember I was scared, and everyone was very supportive though.

Patterson

What was the repertoire?

White

The standard anthems that the choirs sang. My very first Sunday, I remember when I was under Albert and when Albert was the director was the Gloria (inaudible), the Mozart, from the Mozart Twelfth Mass, and Albert still tells that story. I sat down at the organ to play and started, and the organ wouldn't play. (laughter)

Patterson

During the service?

White

Yeah, it was during the service! It would go back and forth, and so I said, ha. I was nervous and Albert looked at me and he said "turn the organ on." (laughter) So...

Patterson

And there you go.

White

And I learned (inaudible) under him, through him and Mrs. Benjamin, and just being there. They sang, you know, "Lift Up Your Heads," "All Ye Gates(?),"

"How Beautiful Upon the Mountain," "Unfold Ye Portals," all so many -- "The Holy City," those anthems.

Patterson

Was the repertoire next door (inaudible) the same, kind of?

White

Same time, yes, same kind, but of course, it was a more professional choir, more professional singers, and you had the huge pipe organ to accompany them, and you had the huge congregation that appreciated the type of music. Now, the Independent was the -- what do we call it, the silk stocking kind of church. You had all the movie stars and the professional people belong to...

Patterson

It's interesting to me that these two churches were right next to each other. What would make those people that were at New Hope be at New Hope and not at Independent?

White

New Hope was a Baptist church, and people have alliance -- more alliances to denominations than they have to artistic, I guess, affiliations. So they were Baptists, so they wouldn't dare belong to an Independent. I could actually -- People's Independent Church was a split from Eighth and Towne in -- the church was established in 1915, and so Eighth...

Patterson

And Towne(?)...

White

No, no, People's Independent. It was a split from Eighth and Towne.

Patterson

Eighth and Towne was the earlier church.

White

Yeah, Eighth and Towne was established in -- first black church in Los Angeles, the oldest black church in Los Angeles. That was the one started by Biddy

Mason, so it was 1870, I think. It was 1872. Second Baptist, you know where that is? Have you heard of Second Baptist, which is on 24th and Griffith, is the second oldest -- it's the oldest Baptist church, black Baptist church in Los Angeles, and that was established in 1886, I think.

Patterson

So is Eighth and Towne considered a Baptist church?

White

No, Eighth and Towne is an AME, African Methodist Episcopal.

Patterson

Right, and so, People's Independent was a branch of the AME.

White

No, it split. It split and it became an independent denomination.

Patterson

OK. Now, this is sort of an interesting historical (inaudible) in that AME is of course a well-established, well-known...

White

Denomination.

Patterson

Denomination, and the People's Independent then split from that. What motivated that split?

White

It was a political move, politics. Something had to -- it was dealing with the minister at the church at the time who wasn't given an appointment they were expecting, or something like that, and so he was urged by many people of the congregation to start his own, you know, and that's the way most denominations begin.

Patterson

Clayton Russell?

White

Well, no...

Patterson

That started way before.

White

Before, yeah. I'd have to get my books and all that. I can't remember them, the man's name who started the church. I should know it.

Patterson

So the repertoire among these churches was very similar, even though...

White

Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. They all sang about the same things.

Patterson

(inaudible) same things (inaudible).

White

Yeah. When the -- huh! Reverend Greg, great big -- was the minister who split the church. When he -- the first worship service that they had at People's Independent Church, they had a fully developed choir of 35, and a congregation of about 700 people. So you know, they were all -- it wasn't beginning from nothing.

Patterson

Now, this is all from Eighth and Towne.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And so Eighth and Towne must have been huge.

White

Oh, yeah. Maybe the next time, I can have a picture of it. I have a picture of it and the choir and all that.

Patterson

That'd be great.

White

Yeah, the church was -- would seat, I guess, fifteen to two thousand people, a disused pipe organ, a choir loft that would seat forty people, and it was a church built on a cathedral in Liverpool something, that the minister saw and replicated here. It's a very distinguished cathedral-looking building.

Patterson

And then moving over to People's Independent, was the philosophy different there as far as, you know, how the people were learning their Christian doctrine? What was the difference, really?

White

I don't think there was that much difference, because the Reverend Greg was a traditional -- traditionalist in the AME denomination, to their service was similar. They're very similar, and very high.

Patterson

And when you say celebrities used to go there, do you remember any of the...

White

Oh, yeah. What was it? Louise Beavers, the actress. I remember that Dorothy Danridge -- I can't remember now. Jay Laughlin who was a named soloist, all of the soloists. Ruby Elsie who was a named individual from back East who sang with Hall Johnson. It eludes me now to have to think about it. There was that -- I remember the -- I can't think of her name, the woman who taught English who -- and if you taught English at a high school you were almost head of the English department. She was a big name. She was a member and she had one of the huge houses up on Hobart and north of Adams. You know, that was -- what do they -- the Sugar Hill. She had one of those huge homes. It was three stories. I remember visiting once. The third floor was a theater or was a

ballroom at least. And she would put chairs down and she would have drama productions and speeches in her...

Patterson

Now, what was she teaching?

White

English, and I can't remember her name. She taught at Jefferson High School.

Patterson

Oh, OK. Now, just by the way, speaking of Jefferson, where did Sam Brown go to?

White

Well, he was organist for a while at -- in the People's Independent. He was organist there for a while, and then other than that, I think -- I don't know. Sam Brown became a jazz musician, more involved in jazz I guess I would say, than in church music or the classical literature, because that is what Jeff musically was known for when Sam was there. He was with the jazz band and all the jazz greats came out of Jeff High School.

Patterson

How did you feel about jazz in high school?

White

Oh, it was all right. It wasn't part of me, so I...

Patterson

So you were at this New Hope Baptist, and having your own little choir experience there, which I suppose in some way gave you a broader experience than you could've had if you were involved in a more established church, because you sort of had your own choir. You could do pretty much what you wanted.

White



No, I don't know. I think I would've learned more at a more established denomination than being on your own, not having the background and the knowledge and -- of a tradition.

Patterson

You were working with Fannie Benjamin at the time.

White

Studying. Studying, just studying, learning to play the organ.

Patterson

And she was right next door.

White

Next door. And I used to leave, run from New Hope during the sermon when the minister (inaudible) preach I'd leave and run over to Independent to hear Mrs. Benjamin play, or even sometimes I would play the piano with her, and then I'd come back.

Patterson

This boundary between the Baptist and the AME, and what was that? How would you describe the difference between the Baptists, the Baptist loyalists and the way they did things, or what the philosophy was at the AME?

White

Oh, the Baptists are freer. You know, they don't believe in a structured service. It isn't, and it is. They don't believe in structure, but they have an order of service, you know, and they follow an order of service but it isn't a liturgical order, so everything is not situated so that it has to be done this way. It's more inspirationally produced, or inspired. The inspiring is the production of what goes on, similar to that which is in the Church of God and Christ. But as long as you put things down in order, you say this is what you're going to do at this particular time you're going to take the offering, that's a structure, isn't it? So (inaudible)

Patterson

Different strategies and (inaudible) sensibility. And what was more popular, generally speaking, in the community? I know that this particular church was smaller than People's Independent, but I'm sure there were large Baptist churches as well.

White

Well, like I just said, Zion Hill, they're all a lot of Baptists. Zion Hill, Mount Zion, probably even Evening Star. There was a Morning Star. There was a Pilgrim Baptist. I can't believe -- yeah, see, this is too confining.

Patterson

OK, can we stop? I don't...

### **1.3. Session 2 (January 31, 2007)**

Patterson

OK, we're here with Mr. Don Lee White, January 31st, 2007. And I think we left off where you were a young teenage director of the music program at New Hope Baptist Church, and we were talking about this sort of next-door kind of dynamic with People's Independence Church and you going back and forth and visiting people.

White

Yeah, the relationship was a unique one. At that time, believe it or not, I think I joined Independent. I wasn't a member of New Hope. I had joined Independent and, as I remember, and I think they gave me my first little scholarship, financial assistance to study.

Patterson

Really? Now how did that work? Did they...

White

I don't know. (laughter)

Patterson

Now, you were studying with Fannie.

White

Organ, yes.

Crew

Hold on, please. We're running into a bit of a problem with the camera. They gave me a battery that wasn't charged, which is really annoying. Just a second. That's not me, that's the technical office.

Patterson

You have one? Oh.

Crew

Yes, they always give me two batteries.

Patterson

Did we get any of that?

Crew

Yeah. We got all of it. I stopped right away when we stopped.

Patterson

OK. How's the level on that battery. Is it good?

Crew

Yes, it is. It's good.

Patterson

OK.

Crew

We're rolling again.

Patterson

We're rolling? OK, so you had a scholarship but what did the scholarship allow you to do?

White

I don't remember. All I remember is Clayton Russell handing me a check or something to further my studies.

Patterson

Now, you were studying organ with Fannie, and you were going to junior high school. Where were you going to junior high?

White

John Adams.

Patterson

John Adams Junior High. Were you taking any musical courses there?

White

Oh, I was in the orchestra and I was in the choir, I think. I was still taking tap dancing lessons. I don't know, did I mention that? Tap dancing with Mrs. Laura Butler. I remember dancing in the assemblies. There were several assemblies.

Patterson

At school?

White

At school.

Patterson

Wow, that's exciting.

White

I loved tap dancing. Now, what the scholarship was and with whom I was studying, I think with Fannie -- with Mrs. Benjamin, with the organ, and I was studying the piano at that time with a lady called Mrs. Eunice Blackwell.

Patterson

So you were studying piano and organ.

White

(inaudible) I remember, Mrs. Hubbard wasn't charging me anything. It was just, she was donating her time with piano, literature.

Patterson

And so, did they have a youth choir at People's Independent, or just one big choir with...

White

They had a youth program and a youth choir, but I wasn't involved with that, primarily because of my work right at the next-door church at New Hope, so a lot of time was spent there, trying to develop the music program. So, I thought about it, (inaudible) young kid.

Patterson

So you belonged to the congregation at People's Independent and your...

White

Employment.

Patterson

Employment was next door. Did you -- describe your program. How would you conduct your program at New Hope? Did you have rehearsals on certain days, or...

White

Yes, we had rehearsals for the adult choir, mostly on Thursdays. In the 40's or so, 50's, everybody rehearsed on Thursday night because that was the maid's night off from (inaudible), the chauffeurs and all, they were off on Thursdays. If you even ask Betty Cox about it, in her books on Central Avenue, that's when the clubs were open and everything was bustling on the East Side, was Thursday evening.

Patterson

Interesting. And that was because Thursday night was when all the African-American people were off their jobs when they worked for white families.

White

Yes.

Patterson

Wow. So... (laughter)

White

And (inaudible) the Pullman porters would come in the train from Chicago and New York and all, would pull in on Wednesday nights or so, Thursday.

Patterson

Thursday was jumpin', huh? (laughter) In the church community and in the secular world, everybody was active on Thursday nights. So your choir rehearsals consisted of the youth choir and the adult choir, or just one choir?

White

No, these choirs, I don't remember when the youth choir rehearsed. I think the youth choir was earlier on a Tuesday or Wednesday, and right after school (inaudible).

Patterson

And you were in charge of both choirs. Did you have anyone helping you, any other...

White

No, not when Albert left, Dr. McNeil. When he left me there, I was there without any training or anything! But I had all the music and I had a library, so I just followed what (inaudible) used to see, and gradually, yes, I learned how to teach chorus, teach them things.

Patterson

So, how did you construct the vocal music? Did you have four-part harmony, or was it just free...

White

Four-part harmony, yeah. In earlier days, the choirs all sang good four-part harmony. That is, Dr. McNeil left a good choir. It was really in place, with the standard literature that most of the churches sang.

Patterson

Were there any particular pieces that they were well-known for singing, and of their outstanding -- what would you say was an outstanding piece that they performed, that choir?

White

I don't know. In the community, most of the churches all sang about the same literature, so they used to sing the -- R. Nathaniel Dette's "Listen to the Lambs," the Haydn, "The Heavens are Telling," "The Awakening." Not "The Awakening," the "Unfold Ye Portals" by Gounod, of course "The Sanctus" by Gounod. The Heavens -- did I say "The Heavens are Telling" by Beethoven, also, and Beethoven.

Patterson

So the Baptist Church was singing the same repertoire as the...

White

All the churches.

Patterson

AME. They're all singing the same...

White

All the churches. Unusual was that even the Church of God and Christ, the churches sang anthems.

Patterson

But I know you mentioned that the Baptist approach to the music was a freer, perhaps more improvisational approach?

White

No, I don't think I said that.

Patterson

No? We were talking about the difference between the musical approach, the Baptist musical approach and the AME musical approach.

White

Oh, when you get to the AME, it's the services, and the AME service is more structured, more structured because they have an order of services mandated by the general conference.

Patterson

I see.

White

Not that you have to follow strictly, but there is an order of service that is followed by at that time and most of the churches within the conventional church within the United States, so that when you went to an AME church you knew it because of the order of service. Everybody did the same order.

Patterson

I see, so that's what was really different. But the performance organization and direction was comparable.

White

Yeah, most of it, as I said. There were standard anthems that choirs sang throughout the United States, that you could put a choir together in five minutes, just because they all knew the same literature.

Patterson

Do you recall your soloists and what they were like at New Hope, who they were, and anybody stand out in your mind?

White

No. I've been looking at old programs and there's one name I remember, a lady called Sarah January, and because she had a very high voice, I think Doctor McNeil (inaudible). She was a very high soprano.

Patterson

So she was one of the soloists.

White



One of the soloists. I don't remember the others. Oh, yeah, a lady named Mrs. Wilson, I can't think of her first name, who was the soloist.

Patterson

What about at Independent, People's Independent. Any outstanding soloists in your mind?

White

Oh, yeah. They had most of the outstanding soloists in Los Angeles at the time. It was the choir, the organization to belong to. You must remember there was the Independent Church of Christ -- these churches had the best choirs in the city. Wesley United -- well, it wasn't United. They know it as Wesley Methodist Episcopal, and Hamilton Methodist Episcopal Church, First AME, and I think Wesley, Hamilton Second Baptist, First AME Zion. These were the big churches in with their pipe organs and trained musicians and directors of the choir.

Patterson

Was the pipe organ the only accompanying instrument, or did they have rather more broad performance organizations, instrumentally?

White

I remember seeing pictures, and at Independent, they -- regularly, they had a woman who played violin with the choir and during the services, became very popular violinist in Los Angeles plus in Las Vegas. Her name was Emma Smock, and there's a lot about her in Betty Cox's book. "Ginger," they called her, Ginger Smock.

Patterson

So she would play along with the pipe organ.

White

Well, with the service, whatever the music was for the service, and the woman just passed at Second Baptist who used to play the violin. I can't think of her name. I went to her funeral. Most of the churches had a violinist or a saxophonist, had instruments playing with them. They played with the anthem and with the hymns and so forth.

Patterson

Anybody else stand out in your mind that was playing at either New Hope or People's Independent? For instance, the saxophone at -- that's interesting, saxophone is usually thought of as an instrument that accompanies jazz music.

White

Yes, but they did not play jazz in the church.

Patterson

Right, right. So here...

White

They played more -- as I said, the classical literature.

Patterson

Yes, which is interesting. I wonder if any of these instrumentalists played in the church, but also played their instrument.

White

Oh, yes, they're playing in nightclubs, yeah. But I remember meeting at Independent, this group of a man called Joe Liggins who was a jazz -- I don't know what they called it at the time, but popular recording artist who was a member of the church. I said I'd have to look back and other people after mentioning some names.

Patterson

Was anything ever recorded from that choir, at People's Independent?

White

Oh, yes. Albert should have -- I mean, Dr. McNeil -- probably has maybe whatever recordings. I did have -- I think I gave that recording to Dr. Caldwell. We have --

Patterson

Hanson Caldwell.

White

Yes. I had a...

Patterson

So, can you recall any of the outstanding vocal soloists from People's Independent? Anybody that impressed you?

White

Oh, yes. See, this is where I need to go get notes or so forth. (laughter)

Patterson

Well, just off the top of your mind.

White

Well, there was a very popular woman in town, Hazel Chapman, who was a soprano, who was kind of like a gospel soprano soloist. She was also the soloist at Angeles Funeral Homes, sang for most of the funerals. There was also Marguerite Chapman, who was a soprano soloist.

Patterson

Were they related?

White

No, they weren't related. She was also a soloist at Angeles Funeral Home. She just passed three, four weeks ago, at 96, and she was -- I have her bio, we went -- we needed to look at that, because she was chosen by Gershwin. He kind of -- she was the kind of person he wrote some of the soprano solos in Porgy and Bess for. Yeah. She had that pure, nice, beautiful Soprano voice. Oh, there was a fellow who directed the gospel choir at Independent, William Gillespie, who was a very famous -- well, not famous, but well-trained baritone, who sang -- in the 40's and 50's, the Gospel music wasn't this thing that you hear now, this contemporary thing. People were singing more hymns, they were rhythmic hymns then, not the free improvisational type of music that you hear today.

Patterson

And this was integrated into the...

White

Services, yeah.

Patterson

The services, so some pieces would be more of a gospel flavor, and then others would be more of the classical-based.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And then the soloists of course would be chosen based on their ability to best perform once genre or the other.

White

Correct.

Patterson

Mm-hmm. So as you were moving between these two churches, how did you progress through to the next level of your musicianship and the -- in the church?

White

Well, it probably was because of Dr. McNeil and Independent, because the music was a little more difficult. I had to practice, had to learn that style because I wasn't -- as a young kid, I didn't know what music really was or what church music was. I could play the hymns out of the hymn book, you know, but I had to know how to select a hymn -- or the hymn to be used. So it was the relationship with Dr. McNeil and Mrs. Benjamin the organist, and she would help me, because Albert, now, McNeil was a very fine organist who plays very, very well, still plays well today. And hearing, and then trying to mimic what you hear, so that becomes a training ground.

Patterson

He said the same about you, by the way.

White

What? (laughter)

Patterson

About how fine an organist you are, yes

White

(laughter) Well, I developed into an organist after. Not then! (laughter) I couldn't play, still trying.

Patterson

What would you describe as one of the most challenging things to move from, say, piano to an organ?

White

Well, the coordination. With the organ, you have to play with your feet, both feet, you know, as well as learning the technique of playing on different manuals or different keyboards, you know, an alto(?) register, those things, so that it complements the choir or the voice, and not as -- I guess today when you hear so many of the gospel sounds, the organ's so loud you can't hear the soloist, you know. And that just becomes deafening.

Patterson

Speaking of that relationship between the organ and the vocalists, you were of course initially interested in the instrumental music, and that was your beginning, you would say, is as an instrumentalist and your first interest, but then becoming a choir director you began to be -- your musicianship expanded into the realm of vocal music.

White

Only because of necessity. I had an idea when I was a teenager up and into high school, that I wanted to be a concert organist because I didn't know of any black concert organists at the time. I know organists who played well, but I -- you know, in the scene, I didn't know of any names. But there were people I -- I didn't know them until later.

Patterson

Was there a comfort zone that you found yourself in, starting to work with choirs and voices? Did you begin to give them direction as you became more familiar with the human voice and its production and performance?

White

Well, yes. As I received training, as I developed, and yes, it would carry over into your work with the adults at the church.

Patterson

Did you try anything experimental with the choirs? Arranging things a little more your own way at all?

White

Not particularly.

Patterson

So what happened then, the next post you had, say, as a choir director, as an organist in the church world, after you left New Hope?

White

Well, I stayed at New Hope until I was, I guess, 22 or 24. I can't remember. And I received my first job. Well, my second, third job. I mean, by my first job as a musician. I received an offer from Prairie View A and M College and so I left Los Angeles for about five years and...

Patterson

Where was Prairie View?

White

Prairie View in Texas. Prairie View, Texas, and I was the college organist, which meant you had to practice and learn more literature and play frequently, and then begin teaching. But I'd learned some literature (inaudible) I went to Polytechnic, Old Polytechnic High School, and my teacher there was Irene Robertson, who was the -- well, it's unusual, because Irene Robertson was my high school teacher for organ, and then I went to USC for the Master's program. She was my organ teacher at USC.

Patterson

Oh, so she moved over from Polytechnic to USC at close to the times that you'd moved over there, right?

White

Yes, yeah, so...

Patterson

So when you were 18 or so, you went over to USC?

White

No, no. This was -- no, this was a little -- much later, because my Master's from USC was when I studied with Dr. Robertson.

Patterson

So after Polytechnic, you...

White

Went to City College.

Patterson

Oh, OK. So that's that period.

White

It was during that period, almost everybody went to City College. LACC had the most outstanding music program of any junior college, I guess, in the area.

Patterson

What was that musical experience like? Because I imagine it wasn't just church music, it was some secular and (inaudible)

White

Well, it wasn't church music at all, no. That's where I learned conducting. I learned the oratorios and the anthems. That was interesting because I had the ability to sight read, and so most of the times in all the classes I was playing the piano, I didn't get a chance to express myself as other students did.

(inaudible) in the theory classes, I would play the examples and so forth. In the voice classes I was accompanying the solos, but I was listening and I think that's how I learned a lot about the vocal approach to singing. And, you know, you'd sign up for choir. I didn't sing in the choir, I was the accompanist.

Patterson

Well, how did that happen? Now, you're a student there, but they immediately...

White

Yeah, but I could play.

Patterson

So they immediately sort of put you to work, huh, in the class?

White

Well, yes. (laughter) With no pay.

Patterson

(laughter) With no pay!

White

Yeah, you just became the accompanist.

Patterson

And you had to get your grades just like the other students, but your experience was different than theirs.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So, what was that dynamic like, working directly with these instructors?

White

Oh, it was a great learning experience, because some of the great names of music around LA, Anita Priest, who was the accompanist, keyboard



accompanist, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, taught at LACC, and she directed the choir for several, a couple of years, and during that time I had to -- I was accompanying, but with a great accompanist. Also as a director, though, you were on your P's and Q's because she taught a lot about accuracy and how to accompany. The head of the music department at LACC was Leslie Claussen, who taught theory, who was marvelous. You learned the theory and how to use the work. Conducting, as I said, part of my -- as I said, I accompanied the Opera Workshop, and in charge of the Opera Workshop was Hugo Straelitzer, who played piano fantastically and as a wild-looking German, you know, with the hair all over his head, and would throw things at you and yell at you, you know. Those things kind of rub off on you. You remember doing it, and you know, company I played for so many operas. The piano, when students would sing, and all the (inaudible), to the point where I knew most of the -- well, not most. I knew several operatic arias from memory.

Patterson

What were your favorites? Do you remember any outstanding ones that you loved more than others?

White

No, I just loved opera, no.

Patterson

And so you were very busy with school, obviously, during this period at City. Were you also playing at -- you were still playing at New Hope. You were still conducting there. You were busy!

White

Oh, yeah.

Patterson

What else were you doing in your life? I mean, we're hearing all this wonderful music stuff you were doing. What else were you doing? Did you have any recreational life at the time?

White

Well, no.

Patterson

Like, going out with friends, or...

White

Well, we all had friends. (laughter)

Patterson

Were you going to Central Avenue, and any of that?

White

The clubs and things? No, no, no. I was never interested particularly in jazz and all of that. We would have little parties at my house, or somebody's house, you know. We'd just meet and have (inaudible) as young adults, would meet and party. But I remember in the community on Sunday afternoons, we did -- the churches would have teas or musicals or so forth, so I was the accompanist in so many of them. People would call and you'd say, would you come and accompany for this tea I'm having this afternoon? We'll give you five dollars, or something. I said sure. That was a lot of money, ten dollars.

Patterson

So that was really for you, because you loved it so.

White

It was recreational, yeah.

Patterson

It must have been nice to know exactly what you really wanted to do in life at such a young age.

White

I don't know whether I knew that was what I wanted to do. I was just experiencing a lot of gathering of protocol and information and experiences.

Patterson

Did you not then consider having music be a professional aspiration for you?

White

Not until I received the invitation to teach at another college.

Patterson

So at City you were just collecting your learning and education.

White

Yes.

Patterson

And experiencing of course your life in the church.

White

Yeah, I was just matriculating, as you do, through all the systems.

Patterson

And then you got your opportunity to go to Prairie.

White

View. Uh-huh.

Patterson

And what was it like to be in Texas? And you had never been out of Los Angeles.

White

That was quite an experience. It was quite an experience. Well, I had been out of Los Angeles for almost two years, and I'd have to look again, can't remember. In '48, '49, I was in the Navy.

Patterson

Oh, wow.

White

And so that experience took me from Los Angeles to Chicago to Great Lakes, and I stayed all the time at Great Lakes.

Patterson

I see.

White

And because of my background with church music, I directed the Catholic choir on the naval base for the time I was there.

Patterson

So let me just back up just a little bit. When the war broke out, how did that -- did that change your life, or make you alert to anything else in the world? I mean, you're a young guy.

White

No, I was still in my own world.

Patterson

You were still in your own world. So the war...

White

Well, of course, I remember certain things as a kid, you know, but when the war was, in '44, forty-something, I remember that we had to put dark drapes around the windows and forth, because it was something about you couldn't have any light shining through the window because of threat of submarine attack from the Pacific coast or something. I remember those little things, and having to have gasoline rationed, you know, and I guess food was rationed. I don't know what it was. Just a lot of little things during that war, but I was oblivious to it, you know. I was in my own world until I was, you know, in the Navy for that year or year and a half.

Patterson

What made you decide to go to the Navy?

White

The draft!

Patterson

They drafted you?

White

They drafted, yeah. You have to go!

Patterson

(laughter) That's right!

White

You didn't decide to go -- you went. (laughter)

Patterson

Wow. Wow, yeah.

White

At eighteen, you went!

Patterson

Yeah, it's hard to imagine somebody forcing you go to a war. I just -- kid, and...

White

And I never had been on a train, even, at that time, at seventeen I guess, had never been on a train!

Patterson

So you didn't really see any combat, though.

White

No, I didn't.

Patterson

You were fortunate you didn't have to do that.

White

Fortunate, yeah.

Patterson

And so was it a culture shock for you? How did you adapt...

White

Not Chicago, wasn't so much of a culture shock. The cultural shock came when I went south, Texas.

Patterson

What was that like, then, how did that feel?

White

(laughter) I don't know -- how would you say you felt when you arrived in a city at the airport, and you stood there waiting for a cab and no one would pick you up, and you knew nothing about the place, and it was seven or eight o'clock at night, and then I finally asked the lady, I said, how do I get a cab to go, just away from the airport, and she said, "Oh, you'll never get a cab here. You'd have to walk down there," way down someplace to get a cab. That was my first experience with, you know, segregation, real segregation.

Patterson

You don't remember segregation at all in Los Angeles?

White

No. Well, you know, you knew that it existed but you -- you weren't really segregated.

Patterson

So, because most of your experiences were in the black community, so you didn't have...

White

Well, it was in both communities. I lived in the black community, but I was -- most of my hours were spent at LACC, working in a company, you know.

Patterson

And you didn't feel any racism there?

White

No, and then -- no. And during that time, there was a student, Fred Ohanessian, I remember that name, owned a cafe out in North Hollywood, and he asked me to play the piano out there, and I did because the waiters and everybody sang opera, and so I would play opera in this little, you know, Armenian restaurant.

Patterson

Oh, was it an Armenian restaurant?

White

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

And everyone was always -- they always treated you well?

White

Everyone was always kind, yeah.

Patterson

OK, so you left to go to the Navy and you went to Chicago, and you were in a naval kind of setting. Was there any racism inside of the naval kind of setting?

White

Well, oh, yeah, it was segregated, you know. But it wasn't to the point where it was abusive.

Patterson

As long as everybody stayed in their place.

White

Well, yeah, because you only did what you had to do on the navy base. I directed the choir. We had choir rehearsals, the choir sang.

Patterson

Was the choir multi-ethnic, then?

White

Yes. Uh-huh. And then when we got through with rehearsals, we caught the "L" and went to Chicago, into the black community and I visited a lot of churches and met a lot of famous names of people.

Patterson

Like, anybody you remember?

White

Oh, Robert Anderson, Roberta, what's her name? I need to write things down.

Patterson

And these were all names in the church community and in Chicago?

White

In Chicago, yeah.

Patterson

Anybody stand out? You make any close associations musically in Chicago with any of these...

White

Well, there's Robert Burns. Oh, shoot, I can't remember the -- next time. I have a list I've already made of names and so forth. But you have me trapped so I can't move. (laughter)

Patterson

OK, well, no, we'll get it later. But did you play in any of the churches in Chicago while you were there?

White

Not -- no, because I couldn't commit to any regular from Chicago.

Patterson

Busy with the naval choir?

White



But something interesting did happen to me while on the naval base. They lost my records. (laughter) And for -- I guess I don't really remember, I guess six months or seven months, I was -- well, they couldn't find anything on me, as if I didn't exist -- didn't exist.

Patterson

No records of your draft and...

White

Well, the base was going through a change or something and every -- all the Navy personnel moved out, except me, and it turned into a Marine camp and I was there but I kept checking, where should I go, whatever, and they said, "We don't have any record of you!"

Patterson

Wow, so what happened?

White

I just stayed there. I just...

Patterson

Stayed in Chicago?

White

Well, stayed on the Navy base. I could go in...

Patterson

But you didn't really have to stay, did you, because they didn't have any record of you having to be in...

White

I don't -- I guess not, but I guess I was afraid that they would one day call me or something, but I had a billeting place and I had a place that I was staying, the barracks, and I would go in and off of the base.

Patterson

But there was no real rules governing you, because they didn't have any...

White

No, uh-huh, anything.

Patterson

...record of you having to do anything!

White

(laughter)

Patterson

That sounds good.

White

It was interesting, yeah.

Patterson

Yeah, but you were able to keep your housing and whatever, whatever privileges you had as a member of the service.

White

And I don't remember it, but I guess I must have received a paycheck. I had to exist, because I remember going in and out of Chicago, you know, so I had some money from someplace!

Patterson

How did you find Chicago personally? How did it feel as a different kind of...

White

Oh, it was an interesting city, very nice. At that time, I appreciate how clean Los Angeles was. You know, the downtown area in Los Angeles was just a marvelous little city. You know, you had the -- with the Paramount Theater, the Los Angeles theater, all of these elegant-looking houses, the Palace, the what do you call it, the Million Dollar Theater. These theaters were gorgeous-looking. The streets were clean. You didn't have debris all over the street.

Patterson

And Chicago was different?

White

Yeah, Chicago was still kind of a -- kind of a dirty city with debris and stuff, you know?

Patterson

So you went into the black side of town to visit, and...

White

And tenement houses. You don't have that in Los Angeles, so it was interesting to see people just pile together in these, I guess...

Patterson

Yeah, yeah. What was the best thing about Chicago to you?

White

The people, I think.

Patterson

So you went into the black side of town to visit, and...

White

And tenement houses. You know, you don't have that in Los Angeles, so there was -- you know, interesting to see people just pile together in these, I guess...

Patterson

Yeah, yeah. What was the best thing about Chicago, too?

White

The people. Everybody's very, very friendly. It was very nice, you know.  
(inaudible)

Patterson

And was the church environment -- how would you compare the church environments there and here?

White

Oh, I wasn't that totally involved with the church environment. I went only because I would go to musicals and hear different things. I thought the music was better in Chicago because people I felt were more trained, the persons in charge of the music in the churches.

Patterson

So you left Chicago and then went to Texas and had this culture shock, because now you're in the south, and you finally found a way to get to where you were going. Now you -- going to be part of the student body down there, Prairie.

White

Prairie View.

Patterson

Well, how did that happen to -- how did it come to be that you went there? So you were in the service.

White

Oh, no, I came back and I went to New Hope, and everything. Then a friend of mine who liked to direct people's lives (laughter) filled out an application and sent it to Prairie View and that's how I got the call, because there was a vacancy. I didn't fill it out. He did it for me.

Patterson

Oh, so you didn't have any aspirations to go there!

White

(inaudible)

Patterson

(laughter) What had you planned to do when you came back to New Hope and you finished your...

White

I don't know.

Patterson

Did you go back to City College?

White

Well...

Patterson

To take any courses?

White

I went back to City College and accompanied, and I think the state college, California State was the -- it was California State College and it was beginning, had started on City College's campus. And I knew several of the teachers who had moved over to the college and I became an accompanist for the California State College. That was before it became the state university. So I accompanied there, began, so I was working at New Hope, playing and accompanying at the college.

Patterson

But you didn't enroll as a student at the time.

White

Yeah, I enrolled.

Patterson

Oh, OK. So you were taking mostly music courses.

White

Oh, yeah. Well, I got my Bachelor's from California State College.

Patterson

But you enrolled right at the time that you -- in other words, you enrolled right away or were you playing at that company for a while, and then decided to go on?

White

I never took a full load, I guess, because of working as an accompanist. So it took me longer to graduate.

Patterson

And then your friend applied for you! (laughter)

White

Yeah.

Patterson

To go to Prairie, and you went down and you found this sort of a segregated, more racially...

White

Not some. It was segregated.

Patterson

It was completely...

White

Completely.

Patterson

Yeah. How did that feel. Just talk a little more about that. What -- when you got there, where did you stay?

White

Everybody stayed on campus.

Patterson

On campus.

White

Faculty stayed on campus in faculty dormitories, and there were student dormitories.

Patterson

And was the student body predominantly white?

White

No, all black.

Patterson

All black? So it was an all-black school?

White

All black, and even at that time the person in charge of the university -- I don't think -- I don't think he was even called the president. I think they called him principal at the time, the principal of the university, but I don't remember.

Patterson

And what were the activities like? What was your day like?

White

Oh, it was a regular university! You had your scheduled...

Patterson

It's all the academics and...

White

But everything was self-contained on the university. You had chapel on the university, you know. You had the theater, movies on a certain night, and the - what do you call it, the gymnatorium. The gym was a stage, you know.

Patterson

Oh! (laughter) That's a good term.

White

And you know, they'd put a screen down, and so that's where you had chapel, where you went for the shows, where you had -- they had dances, certain nights. You would dance in the gym. The school band would play, you know. That's where I had to practice the organ. It was in the balcony, you know. So it was a...

Patterson

So was it, was it a church college? Or was it a -- it was a secular?

White

It's an A and M University, A and M College or something. Prairie View A and M.

Patterson

I see.

White

Agricultural and mechanical college.

Patterson

I see. So you stayed in, obviously, a musical mode when you were there.  
(inaudible)

White

Oh, yeah, I was in the music department.

Patterson

In the musical department.

White

Yeah, I taught organ and I taught music education.

Patterson

Oh, you were teaching as well as being...

White

Oh, I wasn't a student, no. I'd been teaching, and I'd had piano and taught piano. There was no piano class. Everybody within, in the department, studied privately with somebody, either piano or organ, or instruments.

Patterson

And how did you find the students? How...



White

Oh, marvelous. I even had some friends that lived here who were students of mine, and had (inaudible) that I keep in contact with and I see every now and then. And there's a big alumni association in Los Angeles.

Patterson

Being in a segregated environment, how did it influence either your life or the lives of your students, living in that kind of world? It was obviously different than it was in Los Angeles.

White

Oh, I don't know.

Patterson

It didn't feel...

White

After -- when you were on campus, you were in your own -- you were in a community environment. When you left the campus, you had to ride the back of the bus. If you went to -- the closest town or so was Houston, and if you caught the Greyhound to go to Houston you rode the back of the bus, you know, and you only went to Houston when they had, well, they had what they call "Negro Day" at the Symphony or they had a football game with another black college, or something. And then you would experience that type of -- you felt that type of segregation. But you didn't do that frequently. I remember a couple of times, taking a group of students, a busload of students to hear an opera or to hear the symphony.

Patterson

But it would be Negro Day.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So you couldn't go on the day that any public...

White

Any time you wanted.

Patterson

It had to be a day.

White

Well, you were an hour away. I don't know how far it was. You were at least an hour away from Houston.

Patterson

So, were the performances on Negro Day the same...

White

Oh, they were the same, yeah, the same.

Patterson

So, the same performers in the same companies in Houston performing communities would give these performances for Negroes, but the performance was the same.

White

Yes.

Patterson

It was just a day when no white people would be out there.

White

Well, there would be white people at the performance, but I guess those who didn't mind being around, you know...

Patterson

Around...

White

Around the segregated (inaudible), the in-crowd, the group or whatever. I don't know.

Patterson

That's -- yeah. So...

White

And I would -- when I didn't -- when I didn't have to be at chapel and Prairie View on a Sunday morning, I would take the bus in and go to church or I would take the bus in on a Saturday to stay over and take the bus back to the campus.

Patterson

Did you make any friends in Houston?

White

Oh, yeah, sure.

Patterson

And you joined a church in Houston?

White

No, I didn't.

Patterson

Or you just would go to...

White

Would go to different churches.

Patterson

Different churches. And how did you find the music in the churches in Houston, say, as compared to LA and Chicago?

White

I didn't make the comparison. I was just -- I guess I would say it was similar.

Patterson

Comparable.

White

Complementary. Comparable. But maybe I think a little better. I think people are -- when you're in a more segregated community, you're a little more trained. I felt that they -- most of the people who were in charge were students, at least had been to the university, and they had backgrounds. They were not people who -- what do I want to say -- who wanted to -- who felt (inaudible) -- people who were untrained. That's all I could see.

Patterson

So, you're saying that they were...

White

Better-prepared.

Patterson

Better prepared because of the segregated world they lived in?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Why, why is that?

White

Because they were competing against their own, I guess, and because -- be competing for excellence.

Patterson

Now, if they had been in an integrated environment...

White

But let's remember now, you know if, what -- in the history of development of music in the black communities, we had our own symphony orchestras at times. We had our own little opera companies. The churches would do their own concerts periodically, most of the churches. But it was -- that was the performing -- that was the outlet for the arts. You know. Now we don't hear of

any concerts with the churches anymore, unless it's a gospel concert. Churches would do operas, churches would do oratorios. So there was always a building on what was there to something better.

Patterson

And you feel like integration diluted that, or ch-- how do you feel like it changed it?

White

Oh, I don't know. I don't think of -- I guess I don't think of integration changing it.

Patterson

Well, you said segregation was better.

White

Well, it was better because I was in it and saw what it was there. That was my only segregated experience, and I took that for about five years and after that I came home. I couldn't last any longer in...

Patterson

Why?

White

I didn't like the not having contact with other races.

Patterson

So it was oppressive to be...

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Even though the music seemed better and they seemed better, whatever, it was just the broader social world was too oppressive, then, to -- yeah, OK. And so when you came back to Los Angeles, how did you find it? Was it different

for you, or you know, what was it like coming back after being gone? (phone ring) Want to stop?

White

Yeah. We can stop for a minute, because I've got to get the phone.

Patterson

Just unclip it. I miss singing in a choir. It wasn't a church choir, but just an ensemble of voices. I liked that.

Crew

(inaudible) for another ten minutes.

Patterson

OK, so let me know. So you're coming back to Los Angeles after being away in this segregated environment, and so you're back to Los Angeles. I suppose you could exhale a little bit and say OK, I'm back home, and I'm not in this oppressive kind of segregation.

White

Well, I don't think it was oppressive. It's just that the -- I was segregated in Los Angeles but I didn't know it. I just was freer because I was familiar with the area. I was at New Hope Baptist Church, which now had developed into something about a, what, two thousand member organiz-- congregation.

Patterson

Did it move? Was it in the...

White

Yes, it moved, and it's on 52nd and Central now. It's a big church, big auditorium, seats about 1,400 people.

Patterson

Was it administrated by some of the same people, so you...

White

Oh, well, some, I guess, you know. The minister had passed and they had a new minister at the time, and so forth.

Patterson

So your knowledge of the world was greater and broader now, and you'd seen Chicago and you'd seen the segregated south, and so you're coming back to Los Angeles with a little more awareness that you didn't have when you left, of being actually in a segregated community but just not having known it before.

White

Yes, correct.

Patterson

So, how did that change your perceptions of your community, when you came back? You just went back into it.

White

Just went back into the work, renewing acquaintances, getting involved.

Patterson

What's the first thing you did when you got back, as far as your involvement?

White

Oh, I don't know.

Patterson

When I say first thing, what association did you get back into, the New Hope?

White

Oh, I went back to the church in a relationship, yeah.

Patterson

And did you become again the director of the choir, or did you just...

White

No, I was an accompanist, just the organist. Of course, I'd been gone, so they had hired a person to direct the choir.

Patterson

Who was directing at the time, do you remember?

White

Her name was Rosetta Alexander, Rosietta Williams-Alexander, and she passed. And then I was called to another church, and it was an experience to learn more about church music.

Patterson

What church was that?

White

Grant AME Church, on 105th and Central.

Patterson

And so what were you doing there? What was your experience?

White

I was the director of music, organist and director of music.

Patterson

Was it a smaller congregation?

White

Oh, no, it was a big congregation, big big church, big congregation. It was another, I guess-- Members of the choir, about.-- When I went there, the choir was, I guess -- well, they had two choirs. The gospel choir had maybe about 80 people in it, and the cathedral of her choir had 70, or 60 people, and a youth choir of about 40 or 50. And...

Patterson

How was it different being there, you know, compared to New Hope?

White



Well, this was the difference. This was the more structured service, because it was a liturgy that you had to follow. And so learning the liturgy, learning the music of the AME church, the tradition, I would say a lot different.

Patterson

So you had the cathedral choir, you had the gospel choir and the youth choir. How did those three ensembles play into the service? Would the cathedral choir be the dominant...

White

Well, it was the choir for the church. We sang more Sundays, I guess, than the gospel choir at that time, when I started I only sang I think one Sunday a month or something, and the youth choir only sang one Sunday or half of a service, you know.

Patterson

And so the gospel choir sang more the hymns and the less formal...

White

The cathedral choir.

Patterson

And how are they different, the gospel choir and the cathedral choir, in the repertoire and that?

White

Well, the repertoire, the cathedral choir would sing the anthem and the hymns and the spirituals. The gospel choirs would sing the gospel music, the Thomas Dorsey type, you know, and James Cleveland and so forth, those type of things.

Patterson

And you directed both? What did you...

White

But the interesting is the minister who was in charge. His name was Henry Murph, Reverend Henry Murph. He -- well, didn't demand. He said, told me,

he says even though it's a gospel choir, I want the gospel choir to sing the hymns well and to sing an anthem periodically at least once a month, or whenever they sang, they would also sing an anthem. It might be a simpler anthem, but there was a standard that the minister -- a philosophy and a standard for church music that he received. You know.

Patterson

The singers themselves, how were they different? Now, you say that they would sing an anthem with something simpler. But were the -- was the cathedral choir those singers that were more proficient, did they need to read music?

White

No. Well, this church was on 105th and Central, and the church constituency was made up of the environment around it, and so most of the people there went to Jordan High School, and all of them has nice(?), good backgrounds. Jordan had a good music department, so they were trained. People could read music in that congregation. The congregation even read. The congregation could sing most of the hymns in the hymnbook, so it was a -- (inaudible) similar to the free, freedom that I found in the Baptist church at New Hope, where we, well, we had a hymnbook I think, but we never sang that many hymns. Even little churches today, a lot of them sing the same fourteen or twenty hymns, Sunday after Sunday.

Patterson

So you had more freedom in...

White

I was exposed to more music, yeah.

Patterson

And so, and the singers were, could sing a more -- a greater variety.

White

Greater variety.

Patterson

Except in the gospel choir, you would say it was less...

White

But they sang a variety also. There were times we would combine the choirs, so they're all at the same standard of music, kind of.

Patterson

So you were singing the Dorsey stuff in the gospel choir. And now the congregation sang with the choirs, when...

White

Yeah, on the hymns, (inaudible) yeah.

Patterson

Mm-hmm. And the youth choir, what was the youth choir like? What ages were they in?

White

Well, the youth choir was the teenagers, high school, junior high, high school or so, and it was just typical high school choir. It was really a high school choir. They sang the spiritual arrangements and anthems and they weren't prone to doing a lot of gospel music. They sang some traditional literature, and they even -- the music that they sang in high school would filter down or over into the church, which was suitable.

Patterson

Did you find that those students were instrumentalists and singers that were taking music courses in the orchestra there?

White

Music lessons in the community and playing at the church, yeah. We even developed an orchestra at the church.

Patterson

A youth orchestra, or just a general orchestra that would play with the...

White

It was a general orchestra, but it was more youth, mm-hmm.

Patterson

So what was the -- what was the temperature of the environment here? It's sort of pre-civil rights kind of time in the 50's, and was there a political kind of a controversy or energy going on as far as this segregation world, segregated world that blacks lived in Los Angeles? Were there conversations going on about segregation?

White

I don't know, I don't think so. You'd have to talk to someone who was involved in the politics of the time. You had the Watts area and the people, but the people in Watts were the educated people, they were the doctors and lawyers. You had some big homes out there in that area. You didn't have any slums. I don't know how long you've been around in Los Angeles, but there are -- even now, you don't have that, slums like you had in Chicago. And (inaudible) houses where people are packed on top of one another and you know -- and probably now it's a little more segregated because there's no place to go! When they had the riots, what did they do? They burned down their own places, so there are no theaters, you know, there's no entertainment places in their own community, that they destroyed.

Patterson

The church being a central institution in the community, in the black community and in that period, I would think it would be a center for discussions about politics and society and various things. Did they have any other kinds of meetings besides the church meetings?

White

Oh, yeah, that had political forums, oh yeah, a lot of them in different churches, yeah.

Patterson

Out of the church.

White

And NAACP and Urban League and all those places didn't have anywhere to meet but in the church. So that's where they were, but I wasn't particularly involved in that at the time, or interested. The opening of the meetings probably would have the choir perform or something like that. Other than that, you know, my involvement with it.

Patterson

So your world did not really...

White

I was in my own world. As I am now. (laughter) In my own world.

Patterson

The world of (inaudible). (laughter)

White

Enjoying...

Patterson

So you didn't see any of this, any kind of turmoil or any of that going on? it was pleasurable for you in those years to really just concentrate on the music.

White

Well, I can't say that, but you see and you hear but you put it in the background. You know, everyday(?) -- just experiences you go through.

Patterson

And the environment, the neighborhood, the people seemed content? Oh, OK, she wants to change tapes. Hmm, interesting. Henry Murph, how do we spell Murph?

White

M-U-R-P-H.

Patterson

M-U-R-P-H, OK, Murph. Grant AME at 105th and Central. OK. So we're at Grant AME at 105th and Central. And you say that the neighborhoods

surrounding the church, there were big homes and it was a fairly affluent environment?

White

Mm-hmm.

Patterson

Were there any apartment buil-- did people live in apartment buildings then? Or was it mostly just homes?

White

Just homes. I don't think. You'd have to ask -- I -- maybe I shouldn't say this on tape, or you can edit it out, but that's where Albert McNeil lived, was in Watts, on Grape Street.

Patterson

Oh, because he was talking about how the city was different -- or was that you, talking about the city, what we think of South Central, as sort of the more depressed poor part of town now, but then it wasn't.

White

No, it wasn't. It was just an area that was segregated where most of the blacks and I guess the Mexicans lived.

Patterson

Well, where was the poor part of town?

White

There was really no poor part of town, not like you see in New York or Chicago and I guess you don't see it in Atlanta that much. Now. I don't know about years ago. But we didn't have really poverty, though we were poor. But you -- I don't know. We didn't have that cloister of nothingness that you see existing in other cities. Central (inaudible) was a grand place! Everybody wanted to come to Central and see it! It was very nice, you know. Even though we only had two hotels.

Patterson

What were they?

White

The Dunbar Hotel and the Watkins Hotel, you know. But that's where, if you had a little money, you'd go out on a Sunday afternoon or during the week to eat. You went to the hotel. Dunbar had this (inaudible) stage shows and all, and the big bands would come in.

Patterson

What was the favorite restaurant? What favorite restaurants? The hotel restaurants, or...

White

No. As a kid, I don't remember.

Patterson

Where did you like to...

White

I used to go visit a place called the Sweet Dreams. I think that's where we used to go.

Patterson

What kind of food did they have?

White

And then the other was a (inaudible) I can't even think of what it was called. A restaurant at a drug store or something.

Patterson

A cafe, like a...

White

A cafe, like, you know. We go there because I remember I used to always ask my grandmother (inaudible) for 25 cents or something so I could get a waffle and a glass of milk or something, because I was splurging on a Sunday morning. You'd go eat or something.

Patterson

What was the drugstore then?

White

Well, there were two. It was on 54th and Central, and I remember the name, and the other was right around the corner, 49th and Central. I should remember the name. Can't remember the name of the drugstore.

Patterson

Where was Sweet Dreams?

White

About 40 -- around the corner from the Dunbar, so I don't know -- 43rd? 43rd or 42nd. Just east of Central Avenue.

Patterson

What kind of food did they serve?

White

Hamburgers. (laughter)

Patterson

Really. Uh-huh. Hamburgers and fries.

White

Yeah. I don't know whether it's fries or hamburgers. There was an another little place that was called (inaudible) Vernon. That's terrible, I can't remember. I have to write these things down when I think about them.

Patterson

Vernon, OK.

White

Ask me about it. I'll write it down and think about it for next time, because it's a very popular name of a woman that sang.

Patterson



Oh!

White

I even get a job there for two nights or something. I played the piano and -- Maxwell, Maxwell. I can't think of the name.

Patterson

Her last name was Maxwell? And so she -- at her restaurant on Vernon, you got a job?

White

Yeah, I got a job.

Patterson

What year was that?

White

Oh, I don't know.

Patterson

It was when you got back from...

White

Yeah.

Patterson

From Texas.

White

Mm-hmm. I used to go there (inaudible). I used to go there all the time.

Patterson

Don't -- are we still rolling?

Crew

Yeah, I'm rolling.

Patterson

I want to get this, so... Let's make sure we got the mike right.

White

We used to go there every night just so -- and eat. It was chicken. Chicken shack, was the name of it? Can't think of the name of the place. Anyway, we used to go there and you'd get the chicken and they had a piano and people used to sit there and the owner used to say, "Well, would you play something?", so I would play and people would come up and say, "I want to sing this," and so I'd play for them to sing, and I did that and so one day I just said, "Well, since I've been doing it, why not hire me to do it?" So he said sure!

Patterson

How old were you?

White

I don't know. I was just young.

Patterson

Were you still in your twenties?

White

Twenties, yeah. And I played two nights and then quit, because I couldn't even think of anything to play!

Patterson

Well, you were used to church music. Were you playing secular songs?

White

Oh, yeah. Everybody played, you know, a little popular -- Ivy's Chicken Shack, that's right. Ivy Anderson. Remember that name, do you know that name?

Patterson

But you said Maxwell?

White

Maxwell, cross it off. That wasn't the (inaudible). Ivy Anderson, Ivy's chick-- Ivy Anderson was a popular singer in the early days or so of jazz singing.

Patterson

Chicken Shack? Oh, on Vernon. Vernon and what, do you remember?

White

Just east of Central.

Patterson

Uh-huh. And you say you couldn't figure out anything to play?

White

Couldn't think of anything to play! (laughter)

Patterson

What did you like to play, or know how to play, that was secular music?

White

I played anything as a young kid. I guess I was phenomenal. Didn't make any difference. Even if I didn't know it, I could play it, because I was trained in theory and everything else, and I would relate chords as they'd move from one to another. So I played a lot of popular music, because playing for voice classes, students would sing all of these songs. I have kind of like a little photographic memory. I would go downtown to the music store and I didn't have any money, but I'd go there and go to the music store and I'd look at the music.

Patterson

And what was the music store again? I think you may have mentioned it before?

White

G. Schirmer's Music. G. Schirmer's was on Seventh and Grand Ave. or Seventh and Olive or something, and I'd go down there and look at the music and then I'd remember, I'd photograph it, you know, and I'd go home and play it.

Patterson

So people were coming up to you and saying would you play this or that at the Chicken Shack, and you would just sort of wing it. Would you kind of listen to what they were singing and then follow them, or...

White

Oh, yeah, as an accompanist, that's what you have to do. Yeah. But you have to have been familiar with the song, you know. You have to have heard it.

Patterson

What were some of the songs, do you remember?

White

Oh, no, don't ask me that! (laughter)

Patterson

OK, OK.

White

That's so long ago, no.

Patterson

Do you remember any music that you liked that you could talk about that wasn't in the church repertoire from those times?

White

Oh, everybody was singing, like "Over the Rainbow" and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." Those things.

Patterson

Yeah, so those are the kinds of things that they like to listen to at the Chicken Shack. Yeah. And so, where were you living around this time, in your 20's? And you mentioned that someone, your grandmother. So let's back up. What happened to Mother White?

White

She passed.

Patterson

And do you remember when she passed in your life? And what happened...

White

I was 16 or something, 17, 18, I don't know. (inaudible)

Patterson

And who -- what did you do then, you went to live with someone else?

White

No, I lived by myself.

Patterson

You lived by yourself?

White

And it's the lady who I call my godmother who looked out after me, she and her husband. They helped me with my rent and they made sure I had clean clothes, and they fed me.

Patterson

How did you come into...

White

At New Hope. I met them at...

Patterson

You met them at New Hope?

White

Yeah, at Hope.

Patterson

So when Mother White passed away, they were aware of it.

White

Yeah, they were responsible for helping me. They knew (inaudible) about funerals and all that stuff, the church, and -- the church was like a family.

Patterson

Yes, that's great. That was -- yeah.

White

But I remember the man at the church. When I was going to City College, he says, "I have a little doll house you can have and rent, just something..." I forgot what I paid for rent. It was dirt-cheap but it was like a two-room house, had a little kitchen. There was a sitting room and a bedroom.

Patterson

And you were just a little guy, you were just 16, huh?

White

Oh, yeah, 18. No, I was about 18, going to college, 17.

Patterson

Had your own place and you were making money from your work the with church.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So --

White

And accompanying, and doing things around...

Patterson

A working musician. You were a working musician.

White

Well, so I had a job. I had a job. I cleaned up a filling station. I remember that. I'd go to work at two o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the morning

and we would hose down a filling station and then from there I'd on to City College and from there.

Patterson

Oh, wow. So where did you get your work ethic? You know, you were always industrious and always busy.

White

Oh, I never wanted to work. I'm a lazy type. (laughter) But you have to, you have to work to maintain yourself.

Patterson

Did Mother White ever talk to you about work or work ethics?

White

No.

Patterson

Just sort of what your own life took you to and said, hey, I need to do this, so I'm going to get out there. And then the family, do you remember -- of course you do, their names, the people that -- in the church that sort of took you in, embraced you?

White

Oh, my godmother, now? Yeah, her name was Johnson, Mrs. Johnson, Sammy Lee Johnson and her husband -- see, that's terrible, I can't (inaudible), I can't think of his name.

Patterson

And were they musical people?

White

No.

Patterson

But they supported your music and kept up with you, or are you just sort of...

White

No, they just saw that I was...

Patterson

Had what you needed.

White

Had what I needed, and...

Patterson

And so where did you live when you were playing at Ivy Anderson's Chicken Shack? What part of town? Were you right there near Central?

White

Oh, yeah, I was probably -- I lived on Wall, I think, 37th and Wall Street, I think.

Patterson

Did you have an apartment or house, or...

White

It was a duplex.

Patterson

You were by yourself, you lived alone?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

In a duplex, uh-huh. OK. So here you were at Grant AME, and now you're the musical director and you had a gospel choir, you had a theater choir, and you had the youth choir. How long did you stay there?

White

Forty years.

Patterson



Wow. That was home, huh.

White

Yeah. That was a long time.

Patterson

And how did it change through the years? What was it like, being there through time?

White

Well, it was an educational experience. It was training experience. This was an AME church, a Methodist, in the Methodist traditional, and the bishop is in charge of the church, and so there were many different ministers that were appointed, so it wasn't just one man that you had to satisfy, so I went through -- I had many different ministers with different administrative styles.

Patterson

And when you first got there, it was Henry Murph.

White

Henry Murph, yeah.

Patterson

And what was it like to work with him?

White

Great training experience, a marvelous individual. He taught me a lot about church music, administration, and working with people.

Patterson

So he was in a way sort of a fatherly figure in that he was teaching you how to work with people as well as just the administrative challenges of working with the system in the church. What are some of the things that he taught you about working with people?

White

Well, the church, or at least the AME church is a connectional church. It isn't just an individual entity that you're by yourself developing, but you have to develop within the whole spectrum of the general church, and you work from conference to conference, and then to the district conferences and then to the national church. The AME church body only meets every four years, where you know the Baptists meet every year in a convention, but we meet every four years in a convention so within that development you have to produce music for the environment that calls for the different types, structure you're involved with. There's a layman's conference, there's a missionary conferences. Within your conference you might host the bishop's council or a bishop's meeting, or you might host a festival that's designed by the bishop of the district. There are different things. You learned what happened historically and the persons who were the leaders of the educational and musical programs of the time before you, and then you learned to develop something within that structure.

Patterson

So there was a hierarchical structure for the musicians or a musical director within the AME umbrella.

White

Not then when I started. We have a structure now, connectional musical council with a head, so before then it was kind of like a district-wide connection of musicians. If one church was hosting of the annual conference where the churches in a district met, then that person would invite other musicians or other churches to join with him to present the music for the meeting.

Patterson

So the district did do an annual gathering.

White

Yeah, there's always a district meeting.

Patterson

At that time. And the musical ensembles would come together and create one program for that district. Where would they meet? That would be a lot of people, right?

White

Yeah. Well, we used to meet at USC, at Bovard Auditorium. We used to meet at White Memorial Hospital. (inaudible) the White Memorial, what is it, Seventh-Day Adventist Church. They're in East Los Angeles. There was an auditorium on Grand Street. It was called the Embassy Auditorium years ago, the people used to use. When -- do you know the name Brookins, Bishop Brookins? When Brookins was the bishop of the area, we used to meet at the boulevard, Wilshire Boulevard Jewish Temple.

Patterson

Now, that's interesting.

White

Well, he was friends with -- I can't think of who...

Patterson

The rabbi?

White

The rabbi there in the church, so we would meet there. It was a huge place, very nice.

Patterson

And what was the -- OK, so this would happen annually and you would come together. So you were associated with other musical directors in the AME connectional system.

White

Yeah, I mean local. Well, yeah, but the local for that.

Patterson

The district connections.

White

The local for that, the district local, and then they would move to a -- moved it again -- to a statewide. The fifth, Los Angeles or California is in what we call the Fifth District. The whole United States is split up into different districts, so California -- everything west of St. Louis is the Fifth District.

Patterson

East of St. Louis.

White

East of St. Louis, so that's the largest district. Most of the districts within the AME connection consist of maybe one or two states, but...

Patterson

Now, California is in --

White

It's California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho.

Patterson

What district is that?

White

This is the Fifth District.

Patterson

Oh, you mean west of St. Louis.

White

West, yeah, west.

Patterson

Let's get your microphone.

Crew

(inaudible)

Patterson

Did we get that OK, though?

Crew

Yeah, there's just a little bit of a scratching sound (inaudible). If it flips around like that.

Patterson

So when you were with Reverend Henry Murph, you were able to be involved in some of these district gatherings.

White

Yes.

Patterson

Which would be from these states.

White

All the states, or we would meet in the different states.

Patterson

Oh, so you were travelling a little bit.

White

Yeah, he was responsible for taking me with him, you know, traveling with him, several times. Not with Murph, no. But after Murph, the choir began to travel. We became kind of well-known so we traveled to the district meetings throughout the...

Patterson

I see. To perform.

White

The Fifth District, mm-hmm.

Patterson

Would it just be the cathedral choir or would it be the gospel choir sometimes?

White

Well, no. We developed all -- every district within the AME connection has what they call a connectional choir, and so we would -- churches would join together, those members who could travel so there would be a conference choir. So when -- whatever people would come from the different churches and would travel. So when we would go to St. Louis, we would take 200 singers, and they would come from all the states.

Patterson

Uh-huh, and I imagine there were different levels of learning and ability in all these choirs.

White

No, well, I became the director of music for the conference eventually, and so we would send out communications and what we were going to do.

Patterson

What, to rehearse?

White

To rehearse.

Patterson

For everybody to rehearse.

White

And that's when we got together in the city, or... We would meet and rehearse and prepare for the service.

Patterson

So that was like a maturing time for you with Murph.

White

Oh, yes.

Patterson

And you became more steeped in, I'm sure, the repertoire by now. You really know it very well, and did you ever take any liberties with it, or was it pretty much a...

White

I don't know what you mean by liberties.

Patterson

As far as your creative instincts, obviously, you know, the music is composed and standardized to some degree or...

White

Yeah, but every director has to interpret the music.

Patterson

And what was that for you? How would you describe your interpretive style? Were there any things that you liked to do that you would say was emblematic of your style?

White

No, I don't know.

Patterson

Well, you have those recordings, the tape.

White

Well, I don't have the comparative background.

Patterson

Well, no.

White

So I don't -- I don't -- I don't make comparisons. I just do my own style, my own thing, and I don't know what that is.

Patterson

But how would you describe -- oh, OK.

White

I just do it.

Patterson

(laughter)

White

I -- quality. I like -- I want to say there must be quality singing, it must be a good performance. And...

Patterson

So when you say quality, so you were the one who would decide who was able to perform in the choirs. I mean, was there an audition process for the choirs?

White

No, no, there's not any audition. It's still whoever comes and whosoever will, let him come. You try to maintain a standard so people could decide that that's a little too upper-level for me, for what I want. There's always some level of performance standard.

Patterson

That always seems like a tricky thing, because I've belonged to choirs that were really religious based, and we would have to, of course, make everyone feel welcome, but obviously the levels of ability are different. How do you manage that in -- like, say, someone comes in and they're tone deaf. Does that ever happen?

White

Oh, yeah.

Patterson

And how do you manage that?

White



Well, you have to -- depending on the individual, you have to learn that individual's personality immediately and then you can just have -- sometimes you have to say maybe it would be better if you would join the usher board or, you know, work in the kitchen serving meals or something. You have a great personality. Maybe you could write the press release or something for the church or the choir or other things.

Patterson

Did Murph help you with doing some of that, because I imagine that became more of a...

White

No. Well, yes and no. His philosophy was that everybody who came to sing should have the opportunity, whether they could or couldn't, and it was your or my responsibility to teach them.

Patterson

So past that, you used your own judgement.

White

Yes.

Patterson

(laughter) So how did you -- how would you describe your life, then? Was it mostly based on your church activities? Or did you have some other activities in your life that were also important to you that you were involved in?

White

Well, in my accompanying, the accompanying, the school, so I had the educational life. I was still in school trying to obtain the Master's and I went on to graduate school and I went to Stanford. Just back and forth. So everything was, I guess, a learning experience for 40 years, 35 years of it, I guess.

Patterson

So outside of the campus environment, you were at Cal State at this time?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And during the 50's you were at Cal State. By the way, did it move? Did the campus move from city?

White

The campus went out on East L.A.

Patterson

Yeah, it moved while you were there, right?

White

Mm-hmm, because they were building the campus.

Patterson

And what was the school like at that time? Were there many black students? Or what was the racial mixture like at Cal State as you remember it? The music department, say.

White

There weren't very many blacks in the music department. I don't think the quality of the music department was as good as that of City College at the time, because it was just developing. It was in a period of transition.

Patterson

So you watched the beginning states of California State.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

University of L.A.

White

Yeah, I worked under the first choir director they had at Cal State L.A. It was Francis Baxter, who I believe is still alive. I just talked with him maybe a year ago, who would be in his late 90's, but a marvelous person.

Patterson

And what was his teaching style? How did -- what was his emphasis? What did you learn from him?

White

He was the choral director. Oh, choral conducting, choral sound. The vocal sound, and the literature. College vocal literature.

Patterson

So you were pretty busy then, between church and school. Did you have a job outside of that at all, at this time, during the 50's?

White

I guess only the accompanying job. Most of my -- I did one little job -- well, I had that filling station I used to clean up, but when I was younger, a teenager or so, I worked as a grocery boy in -- what do you call it, the produce area. Used to stack the apples (inaudible). Can I raise my hand?(laughter) Stack the apples and oranges and all this stuff, you know.

Patterson

So you just have these jobs here and there that would supplement your income as an accompanist.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

Did you have much of a social life? You're pretty busy. Were you able to do anything else that was -- go to the movies, go to a party here and there?

White

We'd go to the movies probably, yeah, a little party, but as I remember now I was invited to parties only because I could play the piano.

Patterson

They'd sit you down at the piano. (laughter)

White

Sit me down at the piano and play. Everybody enjoyed themselves and I sat there and played.

Patterson

Do you recall any real close friendships that you had during the time, during the 50's?

White

I'd have to write those names down. I can't just...

Patterson

OK. So, you -- after Reverend Henry Murph, how long -- well, how long was he there with you as Reverend?

White

Oh, I think that was only three years.

Patterson

Three years? And then who came after that?

White

After Murph was John Adams. Murph made bishop. He became a bishop, and he was running for bishop at the time, when I went to the church, so I guess maybe it was four years because I went to him, to the general conference with them, when he wasn't voted in and he ran for the next four years and he was voted in. So that was about five, maybe five years, four or five years. And then John Adams came, who only stayed four years and he made Bishop, and so another person came and stayed about seven -- it was, you know, different periods of time.

Patterson

Anybody else make an outstanding impression on you as far as working relationship with the church?

White

Well, all of them, I had I think good working relationships with, everyone who came.

Patterson

Did you learn something different or have a different kind of...

White

Oh, everybody had their own style, you know. So it was different.

Patterson

Any other drastic -- was there a drastic change that happened during that 40 years at any time? Did you notice a shift?

White

Oh, yeah, sure. Musically, you mean, in the church. Musically, yeah. And I guess educationally and experientially, with people. And so I don't dwell on the negatives. I just leave it alone.

Patterson

But just as far as historically speaking, as a church history in your experience there as director, was there any period where the music changed, that you decided, oh, I'll make a shift or I'll change the structure of what I'm doing here, or the direction? SO you were a traditionalist in that sense?

White

I'm a traditionalist, you know, and it's only recently. That's why I'm not (inaudible) at a church now is because the minister wanted a drastic changeover, and it wasn't my style and I couldn't function with that, so I said the best thing is just to leave, because there's no point in me trying to fight the administration, so...

Patterson

OK, so as time changed, and as we're going through the 50's and into the 60's, how did the neighborhood around the church begin to change. Did you notice anything? Because now we're moving into the civil rights era. There was the riot. How did you see the community changing around you?

White

Well, I see more of what they call the immigres moving into the community, and you see more people just hanging out on the street instead of going to school or being productive. During that, I guess that 60's era, you didn't see many people and the church, I guess. They didn't go to church.

Patterson

So you saw a drop off in church activity, or...

White

Not a drop. And by the church in general. There wasn't a drop at...

Patterson

Grant?

White

At Grant.

Patterson

(laughter) There was a drop of the microphone though. (laughter)

White

I'm too captured. I like to move around.

Crew

Yeah, we'll figure out a better (inaudible) for next time.

White

Well, let me hold the mike or something.

Crew

Big old giant mike.

White

Grant was a very unique institution. It was the only AME Church in a -- I don't know how to measure that area around there, but it was a large area, so the congregation maintained itself. It was already -- the church was always packed, no matter who the minister was.

Patterson

Hmm, so where were the other AME churches, as far as regionally?

White

That was the only one in Watts.

Patterson

OK, the rest of them were?

White

Up in this northern area. I (inaudible) northern area. In the central area of Los Angeles, there was an AME church. The closest AME church was in Long Beach.

Patterson

Really? Oh, OK.

White

And from Grant, the closest AME church was on Manchester someplace. Manchester and Vermont or so. But it was kind of an environment where it maintained itself.

Patterson

Yes, and what were the -- the other choices were Baptist and Methodist in the area.

White

Baptist, Methodist, Holiness, Presbyterians and everything else. I guess at that time there were only in Los Angeles, I might say 12 AME churches. The AME church is kind of set up like, you might say, the Catholic Church. The churches

are positioned in areas where there is a communicants that will support the church. You don't just put them up on every corner.

Patterson

So then the...

White

Or they're not established on every corner. If you're in an area, and there's not another AME church -- it's not another AME church couldn't be in that area, but they try to space them so that...

Patterson

It's very centrally governed, you would say, then, the AME system? It's -- there's not as much individual autonomy, it's more of a centralized kind of administration.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So you didn't see much of a drop off in the AME attendance, but when you say "the church," you mean the other -- the black community generally speaking, speaking, people began to stop.

White

Because they began to hang out more. They were on the street. They became more street people, then.

Patterson

In the Sixties.

White

Than church people.

Patterson

Why do you think that was?



White

I don't know. The idea of blackness, and that idea of blackness was individually, was individualism, I guess that was it.

Patterson

So you would think it would be more of a unified kind of, because we're black and we can develop a unified consciousness now as black people.

White

Yeah, they were developing that unified consciousness, but being out on the street and doing your own thing. But not being governed by a tradition in a church situation. Because I can remember my teaching experiences in Los Angeles. When I started at Cal State L.A., even, when -- during that kind of freedom era, people would come in the classroom using all kinds of language, because you couldn't do anything about it. You couldn't stop them from using it. You know, so they would say, who, horrible things, you know. And I would just say, well, I don't like that kind of language in this classroom, but if you think that's the only way you can express yourself, then express yourself. They were waiting for some means to cause a confrontation.

Patterson

Would you say there was anger in the black community?

White

Not the black community. I can't blame it on the black -- it was just on individuals. They walked around with chips on their shoulder, waiting for a confrontation.

Patterson

Generally speaking, in the student body.

White

Generally speaking, mm-hmm.

Patterson

So the whites and the Latinos and the blacks as well.

White

Sure.

Patterson

So the climate was changing in Los Angeles generally speaking.

White

Yeah. I can remember when I asked a student to go next door to get a couple of chairs for the classroom, because so many people. "I'm not a janitor!" Those kinds of answers and so forth.

Patterson

So, now, but the church, but the congregation, you didn't notice this kind of change? It was sort of like a time capsule, so there was less change?

White

Oh, yeah, they were in a time capsule, less change, yeah.

Patterson

But the environment around was changing. Did it physically change at 105th and Central? What was going on on Central Avenue in the Sixties?

White

Well, you must remember, they had the riots in there, some (inaudible). All around the church there was some -- a lot of devastation. There were some burned buildings and right across the street from the church was a market that they had burned down and everything. A lot of blight, that's all. So it was a little depressing.

Patterson

Yeah, the music scene on Central Avenue, how did it seem to you in the Sixties? Did it just completely go away, the auditoriums and the theaters?

White

Well, yeah, eventually. You got to talk, read Betty's book on that, Betty Cox.

Patterson

No, I know, but just from your eyes.

White

Well, I was thinking about that. I don't know how I developed it, but I was never interested in that music scene on Central Avenue. I was never interested in jazz and all that stuff, so I...

Patterson

So the environment just sort of changed without much -- you weren't much interested in how it was changing or -- you just sort of went to church, and that was your world.

White

Well, I went to concerts. I went to (inaudible) the Philharmonic Auditorium. I went to USC to concerts. I went to Cal State L.A. when they had concerts there at City College. You know, UCLA, even. "Even!" (laughter)

Patterson

Even. You say that like... (laughter) That was sort of...

White

We went to concerts. I was interested in hearing the singers. I wasn't interested in hearing the blues. I was (inaudible). My thing was a different focus. I wanted to hear pianists. I wanted to hear organists.

Patterson

Yeah. So did you move from where you --

White

We were? Oh, yes, I moved so many times I think I've lived all over Los Angeles.

Patterson

Really? Did you move out...

White

Well, let me tell you about the -- when I say 37th and Wall, 37th and Wall Street, I was living in a duplex. On the other side of the duplex was a woman and her son -- oh, (inaudible) it was the founder, the wife of the founder of the Wings Over Jordan choir. You've heard of them? His wife lived there.

Patterson

So they weren't together.

White

No, they weren't together. He had passed, I think, at that time. And because of that relationship, She moved, (inaudible) moved someplace, and she had a friend who had a house, so they had a chance to move at a place on Bronson and 24th or something Street, and during that time I met some very important people and -- well, the important people I felt. And then she -- I kept saying I wish I could own a house. I remember mentioning it to her, and she says, well, you can have my house. And I said, "I can't afford that!" And she said, "You never know until you ask." So I made an offer to her and she sold me her home, which was on Marvin just south of Venice, a very very nice place. (inaudible) little things.

Patterson

Yeah, what was the wife's name of the -- the director of the (inaudible).

White

I can't remember.

Patterson

OK. And then when you moved to Bronson, you moved to Bronson, and the woman who sold you your home on Marvin is a neighbor.

White

Settle. Settle, S-E-T-T-L-E, Settle. Her name was Mildred Settle.

Patterson

Mildred Settle. Now, what was...

White

And that was -- Reverend Settle was the founder of the Wings over Jordan.

Patterson

But that wasn't the woman who sold you the house on Marvin.

White

Yeah! It was Mrs. Settle.

Patterson

Oh, she sold you the -- OK. And so, how was the neighborhood different there? Did you find a different feeling?

White

Well, the black community was beginning to move west. This was way west, so it was still an integrated neighborhood and more white than black.

Patterson

Was it just as comfortable?

White

Oh, sure!

Patterson

So, did anything un-- you seem to have a very orderly and -- an orderly life. You didn't have a lot of bumps in the road. You had a good relationship with the reverends at the church and the choir was pretty much -- stayed in a good equilibrium with the church, and you were fortunate in your friends and associates.

White

Yeah, well, at that time, Albert and I were -- McNeil, Dr. McNeil and I were good friends. In fact he was really training me. I was learning a lot from him, and whenever there was a concert or something, he would pick me up and take me or something, or a banquet or a dinner or anything else. These things, we were together a lot. Mrs. Benjamin and other people within the community who were involved musically, that was the relationship.

Patterson

And those resumed when you came back from Texas.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So you had associates that you were able to go to concerts with, and experience the music in L.A. A lot of that is based on university productions or university-based performances.

White

Yeah, I guess so.

Patterson

So...

White

At USC, all of the teachers or professors who were in the music department also had performing organizations out in the community and you were involved with that. You either could sing with them or play for them or you'd just attend that thing, you know.

Patterson

In your career at Grant, who were the soloists that stood out in your mind as the most outstanding?

White

There were (inaudible) outstanding. I have, I guess a little different philosophy. I don't use a lot of soloists.

Patterson

I see.

White

I think it's a choir and everybody works together, and so when it came time for the solo parts or something, I taught the solos to the whole section.

Patterson

Well, there's a stylistic uniqueness.

White

The sopranos, all the sopranos sang it.

Patterson

Oh, uh-huh.

White

I remember at a performance, it was a unique performance of Handel's Messiah. I had the whole section sing the solos.

Patterson

OK, OK. Now that's the kind of -- that's what I want to hear about...

White

So it was sort of a learning experience for them, so they could leave there and go be a soloist with somebody else, but I found out early in working with choirs that I didn't want any more prima donnas.

Patterson

(laughter)

White

Or prima bussos or bassos or whatever it is.

Patterson

That's interesting, yeah.

White

And so I said no, I don't want people coming to join because I'm a soloist. You come and sing with the choir. You work with everyone else.

Patterson

And what was the instrumentation around your choir performances?

White

Mostly just organ.

Patterson

Just organ?

White

Mostly organ, or special occasions when we did the Messiah. Our very first Messiah at Grant, there was a Watts symphony and I even have a picture of it. I'll try to find it and show you.

Patterson

Great, yeah.

White

We sang with the Watts Symphony. But most of the time, I always open the oratorios open to the community, and the persons who knew the work, and could join and sing in that performance. Other church choirs, we invited them to join with us, and frequently we would have guest conductors, those who were more experienced than I.

Patterson

So, you were generous in your invitations.

White

I wouldn't say generous. It was just open. (laughter)

Patterson

Well, I mean, you didn't like that prima donna attitude. In other words, you didn't have to open up your space to others of the musicians and the community ensembles, but you did. That was...

White

Yeah.



Patterson

Or was that a tradition in the AME church?

White

No, that wasn't a tradition.

Patterson

That was you, that was what you saw it as, as the way to work it. The Watts Symphony...

White

Well, I think I also, I kind of learned that from Albert because when Dr. McNeil would do his big programs at People's Independent Church, there were always other persons who'd join from the community.

Patterson

What was the Watts Symphony like? Who was in charge of that?

White

A man named Pinto(?), (laughter). It was sort of like a high school orchestra. (laughter) As far as I remember.

Patterson

But so as a community...

White

It was a community orchestra.

Patterson

Community activity, so he, Pinto, put this together himself? Or was it a tradition he was following as well? The Watts Community Orchestra at the time?

White

Well, at the time in, I guess, in Los Angeles, there -- the county or the city sponsored community orchestras, because there were community choruses

and community orchestras. And I don't know how it was funded, but there was some kind of funding and there were some professionals who played with them, and most of them were students. Of course, students are -- well, they were jazz musicians who played in the orchestra. So, you know, who played the orchestral literature.

Patterson

And were they young people, basically, like teenagers? Or young adults?

White

There was a mixture, intergenerational.

Patterson

And did they have a choir, or just the instrumentals?

White

Not in Watts, not a Watts choir. It was just an orchestra.

Patterson

How big an ensemble was that?

White

I'll show you the picture. It was about 25, 30, 30 instrumentalists.

Patterson

So other than that, you usually just worked with the organ.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And was there an occasional violinist, or any other percussion instruments? Did you use percussion in your ensemble work at all?

White

Sometimes, if they've called for it. Like percussion, only -- say, like, timpani. Somehow or another, I don't like -- I guess I don't like because I don't really

use it, but the trap drum and stuff. It's just -- to me it doesn't fit the music. I hear drummers that play incorrect rhythms all the time when they're playing with choirs.(inaudible)

Patterson

What do you mean incorrect?

White

They play the same beat for everything. And so I call it incorrect.

Patterson

So...

White

And I fault the directors, because the directors are not drummers, so they don't know how to tell them what to play, so the drummers are left free to interpret the rhythm as they understand it.

Patterson

So no handheld percussion ever? Did you ever use?

White

Well, we developed, you know, like handbells. We had little bell group.

Patterson

Oh, what was that like?

White

Amateurish. (laughter) I used the mothers of the children in the church, you know, and used the children to learn. It's a learning process, learning to read music.

Patterson

What kind of bells? Describe them.

White

Well, we started out, right, just using little Christmas bells, little tiny bells you bought at the five and dime store, and then we developed to larger bells.

Patterson

So you had a group of people that were just responsible to play the bells?

White

Well, not regularly. On special anthems and special...

Patterson

Special occasions, OK.

White

Yeah, and the...

Patterson

Any other special ensembles you've put together to play with the various pieces?

White

Well, as I said, we developed -- we developed an orchestra at Grant. Remember, I said my first instrument was strings, and so I used to teach strings at the church. I asked the congregation when I started the program, I said "Most of you might have instruments at home you're not using, they're just stuck away in a closet, so give them to me." So I ended up with about 14 violins, a couple of trumpets, a couple of trombones and all these different things, and then I asked people at the congregation, if you used to play this and you still can remember, come help me teach. So some follows, a fellow who was a member of the choir, was a band director in the Army. He came out and taught trombone. Another fellow played trumpet in a jazz band, so he came out and taught trumpet. I could handle the strings, and another friend of mine would play flute.

Patterson

So you had a little faculty going on from time to time, in and out, huh?

White

Well, yeah. They volunteered their time and we came and we rehearsed and we would play simple little things periodically in a service or on our program.

Patterson

But that was sort of an aside ensemble. It didn't accompany the larger choir as a regular activity. Mm-hmm.

White

No. When finances permitted, we would have a regular ensemble. How did you -- yeah, we -- a couple of times, we hired an orchestra and engaged instrumentalists and paid them to do a program. Most of the time, we would call on friends, you know. And I -- a couple of times, the instrumental faculty from Cal State LA came out and played some programs. Of course, then we were all friends. I said we're coming out, we're going to do this. And they came and played.

Patterson

So on those occasions, they would play the church repertoire.

White

Well, this was a program, a concert.

Patterson

Special programs, or special concerts.

White

We would do, like, the Brahms Requiem or a program of classical compositions.

Patterson

So the church administration allowed a budget for the musical programs.

White

No, not necessarily, no.

Patterson

So this was contributions.

White

Well, we'd have to raise the money for that, the choir.

Patterson

I see, I see. So in-house, now, you talked about the district gathering that happened once a year, but what about the Grant Street ensemble, or the Grant AME ensemble? Would there be regular special programs that were consistent through the years?

White

With the church, with that -- yeah. Christmas, Christmas, Easter. We used to do gigantic -- when the Crystal Cathedral started their, what was that stuff. You know, the...

Patterson

What cathedral?

White

The Crystal Cathedral.

Patterson

Oh.

White

Schuller. Out there in Orange County. When they started doing their Easter and Christmas Cantatas, spectaculars, they called them, I started in that branch(?). Why go out there? So we didn't have flying angels, but were all (inaudible). We did things. I wrote the plays and...

Patterson

So you were...

White

We made the costumes and everything. We would rent lights and whatever it was.

Patterson

Yeah, and it was all on donations?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So you were writing some original works for...

White

The stage plays, the stage presentation. Not the music.

Patterson

OK, what would those be like, or what would you write? Describe one of the works that you wrote.

White

I'll show you pictures next time. I'll find them, yeah.

Patterson

OK. We're out of tape. Wow, that went fast to me.

White

Yeah, me too.

Patterson

That went fast! I'm sorry that you're tired, but it was a... OK.

White

(inaudible)

Patterson

Thank you. OK, wow. That didn't seem like two hours. You're that interesting. Monsieur Don White! (laughter)

Crew

I will let you free.

Patterson

(laughter) Off the leash.

White

(laughter) Let me free! Think about the -- maybe let me -- I'll just hold it, let me hold it.

Patterson

You know what we should do? We should have a glass of water for you.

White

Oh, no, I don't drink water.

Patterson

Well, whatever you drink.

White

Well, I don't...

Patterson

Just something to wet your throat while we're talking next time. No? OK.

White

This is what I (inaudible) singers that I mentioned. A lot of singers like to always have a glass of water (inaudible) moist. But it constricts them.

Patterson

Well, I don't mean cold. Some tea or something? No? OK, all right. Well, I appreciate you taking the -- all this time and getting all -- in that. I don't want you to be too tired. Wow, that was great. Good stuff. My mom was finally able to (inaudible). She's like, my god, she says I've been laying down all week.

White

I have to do a (inaudible) lecture presentation at Holman [Methodist Church] the last of next month, so I've been going back and finding all this stuff in my files. So we've got some singers and all. I have -- this is my folder for opera and concert artists and so forth.



Patterson

A lot of singers of note. Oh, see, now, that's what... OK, what we are going to want to do is go through the album.

White

Well, this is national. This is a national thing. I have one on local persons.

Patterson

Oh, yeah. (inaudible) You're going to want to -- because these are lists. I don't know. Yeah. You don't have a scanner, do you. What should we do? I know this is important stuff. There's a thing that...

White

(inaudible) also have pictures to see, the artists and all the people nationally, and I take them out and put them in and do local presentations of the local singers and so forth.

Patterson

This is a lot of stuff, too. Adrianna, all this stuff, yeah. I have to think. Maybe I'll ask the professor, because there are some things in here we would want to have accompany, because it's part of your work, you know. Yeah. But there's so much.

White

(inaudible) there's just too much and that you're through. (laughter)

Patterson

Uh-uh, I'm not going to say that! (laughter) Don't say that! (laughter)

Crew

(inaudible)

Patterson

Oh my gosh, all this stuff you've put together. So you're making a book, though, you're doing a book.

White

No, I just collect. I'm a collector. I'm a clipper and collector. Everything I see of interest, I will clip it out of a newspaper or...

Patterson

So this is -- these are your...

White

I did a presentation on black opera singers.

Patterson

But has anybody written this? I mean, do you think it should be a book?

White

Well, not, there isn't a recent book, but (inaudible).

Patterson

But what about as far as what you've done? Have you done -- is this sort of a repetition of some of those things?

White

(inaudible)

Patterson

OK, OK, that's fine.

#### **1.4. Session 3 (February 7, 2007)**

White

Who was the founder of the Wings Over Jordan choir. You know, they had a national radio broadcast.

Patterson

Sixty, hmm, OK. I have to ask you about this. Ready for me to -- what's today? The 7th? OK.

Crew

7th?

Patterson

You ready?

Crew

8th. Oh, no, 7th. (laughter) Yeah, we're good, we're rolling.

Patterson

OK, all right, here we are. It's February 7th, 2007, with Don Lee White, and we left off where we were talking about your career at Grant AME, and you started there in '58. And you say you were there 40 years. So it was a long-term post there at Grant AME, right?

White

Yeah, well, I was there -- I was there for one year, and then I returned to teach in Texas because that's when I received my Master's. I came and finished my Master's. (inaudible)

Patterson

So when you came back from Texas, you started at USC.

White

I didn't start. I think I had been going previously on and off. I don't know.

Patterson

Before you went to Texas.

White

Yeah, because I was only back for that two semesters or something, and then received a Master's, and then I went back because I had to pay them back for that...

Patterson

For that education, mm-hmm. So you worked at Grant for the time you were here going to USC to complete your Master's, and then you -- and then you...

White

Oh, I was going to -- I guess maybe I might have been going to USC before I went to Grant.

Patterson

Right, but then you went to Texas, and when you returned from Texas you started...

White

Back at Grant.

Patterson

Back at Grant, and also started at -- returned to USC. Right?

White

Did I? I don't know. But I don't remember.

Patterson

So in other words, when you went to teach at Texas there was a break in your career at Grant, and then when you finished teaching in Texas, you returned to Grant.

White

No, no, no. OK, you have it a little backwards. I wasn't at Grant when I went to Texas. I returned to work on the Master's degree at USC, and during the time I was here, I was hired by Murph at Grant, but I told him I had to return to Texas for about a year and a half or something to pay them back for paying for the education, allowing me at least to take that time off.

Patterson

And then when you went to Texas to teach, how long did you stay?

White

Five years.

Patterson

Oh, you taught five years. OK.

Crew

I'm going to (inaudible).

Patterson

OK.

White

What did I do? (laughter)

Crew

What did I do, is the problem. I'm going to have you move a little bit, because I'm just going to see one side of your face, and I don't...

White

Which side, that's the good side? (laughter)

Crew

Can I move your chair a little bit here, and so you're a bit more in the light.

White

No, I'll move it. I'm movin'!

Crew

And if you could sit closer to this side of the chair.

White

More like that? Or do you want to...

Crew

There, that's good. And if you could sit right here. (inaudible) a really difficult situation because it's very dark on this side and very bright on this side. So I need to get you halfway.

White

Move the chair, or move over here?

Crew

Over there is good.

White

You want me to sit this way?

Patterson

Thing is, you'll be facing me.

Crew

Maybe we can be a little bit...

Patterson

OK.

Crew

And you know, the dark (inaudible) on the background really doesn't, because the dark (inaudible) is right below your face. We lose (inaudible). Like, your face just (inaudible).

Patterson

Let me get out of the way here. OK.

White

We can put napkins on the piano then?

Crew

No, it looks good and pretty now. Wonderful now.

White

Time's up! (laughter)

Patterson

It's not funny! (laughter)

White

You spend all that time moving chairs! (laughter)

Patterson

What did I do with my bag? Oh, there it is. (inaudible) OK, so you're back from your teaching post in Texas. While we're at that period, how was it different to teach at Prairie View than it was -- was there any difference that was significant for you, from being the student at Prairie to being a teacher at Prairie?

White

I was never a student at Prairie View. I wasn't a student.

Patterson

Oh, you didn't do any graduate work there. You were strictly -- OK, strictly a teaching post.

White

Yeah, it was a job.

Patterson

OK. And then you're back at AME and you're doing your Master's work at USC. So how did you manage your time there? You were in school during the day, and you were rehearsing the choir in the week, and also studying and being fully employed and engaged on Sundays, obviously. So what else was in your life at that time? Was that pretty much the only thing you were doing?

White

Oh, I don't remember. I think I still went back to accompanying, back to -- I think at that time, I think I might have gone to Cal State L.A. Cal State had started and I think I was an accompanist there.

Patterson

And it says also in '61 you were also teaching voice and music appreciation at L.A. City College.

White

LACC? OK.

Patterson

And...

White

You do everything trying to survive. I think...

Patterson

You were so busy!

White

I think I even had a job at...

Patterson

Jefferson High School.

White

Taught evening, adult school, and there was a school downtown on Venice Boulevard, I think. It was called from Metropolitan Business College, and I taught music there. I was just all over, just trying to make some money.

Patterson

You were at Trade Tech. You were at Trade Tech also, huh?

White

No.

Patterson

Instructor of choral music, Trade Tech, '62 to '63?

White

Did it say that? Trade Tech?

Patterson

Trade Tech, uh-huh. Maybe it was called -- was it called the Business School then?

White

It was probably called the Business School then.

Patterson



It may have changed its name. I'm going to check that.

White

I may have -- is that on the resume?

Patterson

Yes, Trade Tech.

White

OK, so it was Trade Tech.

Patterson

Ok, so were any of these posts outstanding for you? Did you have any incidents or experiences in any of these teaching posts that stand out in your mind?

White

All of them were interesting because they were firsts. I was finding myself. To establish a choir at a business college was very interesting, because -- I think I had a choir of about 60 or 70, which was large. I have a picture someplace of the choir. And it was very -- the president was very supportive and so were the faculty members. And I remember we ever put on -- I think we did South Pacific. I was only there two years or three years, I think. And then we did a Christmas oratorio, the Saint Saens Christmas oratorio. (inaudible) being active and productive musically, so it was all the -- it was kind of beginning experiences for me.

Patterson

Now, this is a business school, so the students were obviously not geared towards music fundamentally. They were doing something that was additional or supplemental to their business.

White

This was their fine arts requirement.

Patterson

But they did have fine arts at the business school back then, so...

White

Well...

Patterson

Because they were getting an Associate of Arts.

White

Yeah, they were giving an AA degree but the principal wanted a real music program. And it wasn't a real music program, it was just choir. There was no theory or individual voice lessons or piano or anything like that, no instruments, it was just the choir.

Patterson

Did any of your students stand out between the Trade Tech experience and the Jefferson High School experience and City College? Does anybody stand out in your mind, any outstanding students that you worked with or accompanists, assistants to you, or other staff members that were helpful to you?

White

There were a lot of people that were assistant, you know, helping to establish that music program, but I can't recall their names or...

Patterson

Nobody stands out in your mind, mm-hmm. And what about at the experience at USC? What was that like, getting your Master's degree then, and that was at the end of the 50's, going into the 60's, right?

White

Oh, that was -- to me SC was a thrilling school, so thorough with music, the instruction and the professionalism of the teachers. I was enthralled and primarily (inaudible) was because my high school teacher, organ teacher, was also my organ teacher at USC, so I felt very comfortable.

Patterson

Connected.

White

And at that time, the big name out here was Dr. Charles Hirte, H-I-R-T-E, who was head of the music, the choral department I guess, at USC, was director of the music at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, and everybody just gravitated toward him and his choir at Hollywood Presbyterian was spectacular and then the choir at USC was just as -- you know, it was professional and we -- many times the choir at SC sang at his church. So that was -- and that church, I guess, would seat two or three, two thousand or something, to go and see the church packed, you know, and hear the -- and since I was studying organ and here that organ there at the church was just marvelous.

Patterson

Were you part of the chorus, or were you playing...

White

Well, everybody -- no, everybody had to sing in the choir at USC, as part of your -- so I didn't accompany them.

Patterson

What was your Master's program like? What kind of courses were you taking there?

White

You're going back so far, I don't know.

Patterson

Anything stand out?

White

We had to take the regular things, conducting, advanced conducting, advanced theory, you know. You had to do organ juries every quarter, study voice. You had to take history classes, the history of oratorio. I guess most -- the most outstanding class was to take the baroque class. It was a comprehensive baroque study, and the teacher was Alice Aeylers, who was a harpsichordist and maybe learned the musical practice of the period. She was antique, too. (laughter) But a marvelous woman.

Patterson

What was the student body ethnic makeup in the music department. Were there very many blacks?

White

No, very few.

Patterson

Very, very few.

White

Very few.

Patterson

What about Asians and Latinos and other groups?

White

I didn't pay any attention. I didn't feel any discrimination if that's what you're trying to say, no.

Patterson

Just wondering.

White

Not at the time.

Patterson

This is pre-L.A. riot time, and it was just sort of -- the civil rights movement was just sort of peeking its head up and just before then, or just after then. But you didn't feel any political climate on campus?

White

Campus, no.

Patterson

That spoke to the racial issues?

White

No, I think at the time, no, everybody was just as friendly. I think O.J. was a big star on campus or something. I remember that everybody was gravitating toward him and following him around. But I wasn't into sports so I didn't go to -- well, I did go to a couple of games, but I... Most of the time it was, you know, you have to practice and you're down in the dungeons researching.

Patterson

So you're at Grant and you have your own choir at Grant, and how did you -- how would your choir differ? Of course, it was probably a much smaller choir, but did your repertoire compare or contrast with the things that you were hearing at a school?

White

Oh, they were completely different because we couldn't do the type of literature that the school choir was doing, and then the choir was a service choir for worship services, so we had to sing the gospels hymns and hymns and gospel music that was indigenous of that area where the church was established, but even though the choir was still very -- was quite good when I went there, when I went there the fellow who was in charge of music was named White. His name was Jerry White, who was a graduate of Redlands University, a very fine organist and fine director, and so they had a -- really, it was a large choir.

Patterson

So he had built a choir.

White

Built the choir.

Patterson

What was the reason that he left?

White

It was during, what do you call it, the -- the -- what was it, the war industry, was working at a munitions factory or something, out here or something, and his job moved to northern California.

Patterson

OK. So in that time period, and now we're in the early 60's, how do you remember the early 60's in your personal life? How did you feel? Now, you're coming back and you're starting off as a professional. Did you feel like you were clearly directed, or were you trying to find your place? Did you have any aspirations that you wondered about and didn't follow through with, or...

White

Oh, I still wanted to be an organist. Still wanted to be a concert organist.

Patterson

And so you were clear about your direction.

White

Yeah. But not really having the -- enough background and study, and then not having the instrument. You know, not -- many of the black churches might have organs or pipe organs or so in them, but they're so inadequate. So you didn't get a chance to play the literature that you were studying in the school that you might have at your fingertips, at the time, and the same I think happens today to all the kids who study. Not kids. Those who are on the bring of a professional career, where do they perform? There is no outlet, and so if you don't have the tenacity to keep pushing and keep pushing and keep pushing, and then you fall by the wayside. The next thing you hear, most -- a lot of them have gone into a jazz nightclub or something. You have to make a living. You have to support yourself.

Patterson

And the organ is really an instrument...

White

Has a limited venue, you would say, because most of the organs are in churches or school auditoriums, or college auditoriums.

Patterson

So you -- what kind of a -- how would you describe the instrument that you had at Grant.

White

Oh, Grant was nothing but a Hammond organ. It was a very little small one.

Patterson

Hammond B3?

White

No, they didn't have B3's at that time.

Patterson

Oh, B3's came later.

White

And B3, you can't play the literature on it. It's just too small. They don't have the full pedal board.

Patterson

What did you have?

White

It was a small Hammond. Just a little...

Patterson

So the only time you really got to play the instrument that you loved was at school.

White

Yeah, when I had took a lesson, had a lesson. But I did substitute -- there's a church called Mt. Hollywood, Mt. Hollywood Presbyterian Church on North Vermont. I did have an opportunity to play there several times. It was very interesting, because it was... I loved it because it was a pipe organ.

Patterson

Were you playing -- practicing there, or you were playing during the service?

White

No, just played the service.

Patterson

And what kind of church was that, as far as a...

White

I think it was a Presbyterian, Mt. Hollywood Presbyterian.

Patterson

I mean, as far as the...

White

Small congregation.

Patterson

African-American?

White

No, no. Caucasian.

Patterson

So how did that come to be?

White

Oh, the teachers. You know, when they -- like many churches even now will call universities for somebody to substitute or to play an oratorio or something, and they would send a student who could do it, so I got the job.

Patterson

So these...

White

Making money, surviving.

Patterson



Yeah. So the churches that were in Hollywood or in the white parts of town were more likely to have larger organs, the funds to have a larger instrument.

White

Well, what can I say. The larger churches have the large organs. There are still myriads of small churches in the white areas that have inadequate instruments, you know.

Patterson

Who had the best organ in the black community, a black church?

White

Second Baptist.

Patterson

They had the best organ. Did you ever play there?

White

Oh, yeah, Second Baptist. Even as a young pre-teen, I guess, early teenager I was so enthralled with the organ until, you know what a ciphering on an organ is? It's where the sound just keeps emanating from the pipe and that means the pipe is stuck or the air is stuck in the pipe, so I used to climb up into the chambers where the pipes are and find the pipe and pull it out so it would stop that ciphering.

Patterson

So...

White

I met a man in Los Angeles named Sullivan, and he was a pipe organ installer and builder and when I was just in early teens or so, I think he had a son. I think his son and I were friends. And so we'd go with him on jobs to different churches, installing the instruments, you know. We'd see and learn the little things, little bit about the workings of a pipe organ, but I never knew really the ins and outs.

Patterson

So Second Baptist had their own organist on a regular basis while you were at Grant, but would you attend just to be around the instrument, or ever go there to...

White

Oh, I went to programs, of course. Went to programs and, yeah. But also, before that is when I started at New Hope, and I would go next door to Independent. Independent Church had a pipe organ, large pipe organ, not as large though as Second Baptist. So I had an opportunity to play that instrument. Of course, that's the instrument I learned on with Mrs. Benjamin, and also my first teacher, pipe organ teacher.

Patterson

In your opinion, who was the premier pipe organist at the time that was performing in Los Angeles?

White

Black or...

Patterson

Both. Black or white.

White

Well, I guess the organist -- I guess it was Mrs. Benjamin, Fannie Benjamin. Fannie Wilson, Fannie Evelyn Wilson Benjamin was the premiere organist. She played all over town and I guess Albert McNeil has mentioned her in your interview with him because she was his accompanist for years.

Patterson

So even in the white churches she would be called to play.

White

Oh, yes.

Patterson

And she was the best, you'd say?

White

In the black community, yes. Well, it's kind of a -- I guess she was very, very good.

Patterson

I mean, in your view, you know.

White

Well, there was the organist who was at Second Baptist who was very good, Luvenia Nash. She had a long name, Luvenia Harper Patterson Dones Nash Freeze.

Patterson

Harper Patterson Dones...

White

Dones Nash Freeze, mm-hmm.

Patterson

(laughter) Where did all those names come from?

White

Marriages! (laughter)

Patterson

She was busy! She even had one of my names!

White

Yeah, there's a woman named Katherine Lindsay, who was -- Councilman Gilbert Lindsay, that was his wife, his first wife, so she played the pipe organ, old Zion Hill Church, she was very very good. And at Eighth and Towne, the first AME church at Eighth and Towne was a marvelous organist. Her name was Robert V. Edwards.

Patterson

Robert?

White

Robert. I have never known any other name. I've researched and it's always called her Robert V.

Patterson

She?

White

She.

Patterson

Not Roberta.

White

No! It was Robert.

Patterson

(laughter) Was she Mrs. Robert V. maybe? Edwards? Mrs.?

White

She was Mrs. Edwards. She was -- do you know the name A.C. Bilbrew? She was A.C. Bilbrew's daughter. So her maiden name really was Edwards. Robert V. Edwards. No, yeah, because that was her... Her maiden name was Bilbrew, Robert Bilbrew Edwards. She was married to Edwards, and then she married a fellow named Lucas, Robert V. Edwards Lucas. But everybody called her Robert V., and that was A.C. Bilbrew's daughter, one of them. A.C. Bilbrew also had twins who were entertainers.

Patterson

So she was an organist at Eighth and Towne, and good.

White

Yes, very very good. And she was there for many years and then I think she left and was organist at Philips Temple, CME, and at the time CME was Colored Methodist Episcopal.

Patterson

Why did they make the difference between African Methodist Episcopal and Colored Methodist. Was it a different system altogether?

White

Different system altogether, a different reason -- CMEs were founded in the south, and the Methodists, to keep control of their colored population, they let them found the church and they called it the Colored Methodist. The AME Church was founded in Philadelphia in 1791 or so around there. And the AMEs came out of the White Methodist Church in Philadelphia, and at the time all the coloreds were Africans, so they named the church African Methodist, because they wanted to stay in the Methodist tradition and denomination, so it was African Methodist Episcopal. And then in New York, when the slaves pulled away from the Methodist Church in New York, they called their church African Methodist Episcopal Zion, AME Zion Church.

Patterson

And that's out of New York.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And then the CME, did that start later? Must have started later, coloreds.

White

A little later.

Patterson

That term, terminology.

White

But that was the -- out of the South, though, remember. All that's in -- you'll find them in the Carolinas and going south, Tennessee, you know.

Patterson

So then there was -- the CME moved into Los Angeles. Did you say that...

White

Well, it's a church, yeah, but you know, you establish churches all over the United States.

Patterson

Right, so, mm-hmm.

White

So they're all...

Patterson

And they had an organ at the one you mentioned?

White

Oh, Philips Temple, yes.

Patterson

Philips Temple.

White

Well, I guess I could say that before the 50's, 40's and 50's, almost every church, every black church in Los Angeles, most of the black churches I guess you would say had pipe organs, but they were small. The either had a pipe organ or a piano. The Hammond organ hadn't become the big thing.

Patterson

So was that based on denomination at all? I mean, for instance, the Baptist churches, would they be less likely to have an organ or...

White

No, no.

Patterson

They would have...

White

They would have pipe organs.

Patterson

So you learned to maintain the pipe organ as well, from...

White

Oh, no, I didn't really. I'd just stop a cipher or something. Pull a pipe, stick a piece of chewing gum in a hole or something. (laughter) Not maintain, no.

Patterson

Yeah, so the pipe organ at SC, I'm sure was...

White

Not a good one, believe it or not.

Patterson

Really!

White

It was a theater organ. It was a large one. It was a theater organ. But that's where we learned. The same -- almost the same now. USC, which grants a doctorate in organ and all does not have a pipe organ.

Patterson

We have one over at...

White

Yeah, UCLA.

Patterson

Have you played the one at UCLA?

White

No, I haven't played that one.

Patterson

You've seen it.

White

Oh, yeah, I've been to concerts there. Yeah, SC has to use a church organ in Pasade-- not Pasadena, in -- where is it? Can't think of the area where -- (inaudible), way out.

Patterson

So they haven't...

White

Glendale. They go to Glendale. The students have to go to Glendale to take lessons.

Patterson

So even from then, and from that time that you were there to now, they haven't replaced that organ.

White

No.

Patterson

They give a Ph.D. in organ.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

How would you compare the organ at UCLA?

White

Oh, it's marvelous. Oh, that's a huge instrument. You know, the -- Alexander Schreiner used to play that instrument and I think he was on the faculty at one time. Alexander Schreiner was the -- for years, for many years, the organist at the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, before he went to Salt Lake City. He was the organist at UCLA, and also there was a huge church in Los Angeles on Eighth and Hope. That was First Methodist and would seat, I guess, in the 5,000 seats, huge place, and a choir loft that would seat about 150. That was a white church and this huge, big pipe organ and that's where my organ teacher from USC was playing, so I got a chance to play that instrument (inaudible).



Patterson

How did that instrument compare to the organ at Eighth and Towne or Second Baptist?

White

Oh, huge. It was much larger.

Patterson

So that -- out of all of the organs in Los Angeles, where was the superior organ at that time?

White

Well, at that time, and even today I guess, the largest organ in Los Angeles was at the First Congregational Church. That's on Sixth and Commonwealth. It is also known as the largest church organ in the United States.

Patterson

Really. Have you ever played it?

White

No, I've never even touched it. It's huge.

Patterson

Now, speaking of the organ itself as an instrument, what happens to the sound as you move from, say, a little small Hammond into these larger organs, culminating in an organ like the one at First Congregation? What happens to the sound? What is available to those larger organs in sound, in your description?

White

Well, you have everything to work with. You have all kind of sounds, and you can play from the minutest murmur of the pipe organ sound the sweetest sounds that you can -- that the pipes can make to this thunderous roar that could be almost deaf-- deafening. You know, it has everything. And the largeness doesn't always mean the volume of sound. It means the organ has the sounds, the stops that you pull, the combinations that will -- you can use

with the different styles of composition, during the periods that the compositions were written. You can play Bach on the sound that Bach actually emanated, or you go to the Romantic periods and Vito or Schumann or something and you have both sounds that you can play the literature for there, and contemporary period, Barber or Stravinsky, you have all those -- (inaudible) the different sounds that you can pull, but then all of them could be merged together to make a glorious, thunderous...

Patterson

So there are more components to the larger organ.

White

Oh, yeah, to the pipe organ, where a little Hammond doesn't have all those components. It's just loud. For me, I'd have to say it's just loud. You know, they use the vibrato or the whatever it is you call it, the B3, that people like to hear. And so...

Patterson

So in the church that you were at, at the time, through the years at Grant, did you -- how did you feel -- did you enjoy playing the Hammond? Did you find your way on it? Or did you ever play piano by choice?

White

Oh, my choice, same as when I started at New Hope with McNeil, but (inaudible) the hymns or the anthems the choir would sing, we'd use the organ, even though it was a small instrument, would use the organ and then for the gospel songs or so, you'd move over to the piano and play.

Patterson

And then in the theatrical productions that you did at AME, would you use the organ interchangeably with the piano depending?

White

Well, when we started doing all the theatrical productions, by that time we had had a minister who purchased a very large organ for the church, and so we had a large pipe electronic combination, a Rogers which was very nice.

Patterson

So, you're cooking with gas.

White

I felt like I was playing the First Congregational, or the Riverside Church organ.

Patterson

So you were happy with that, when was that? When did they get the new organ? Is it later in...

White

Now, they just -- a date I... I don't remember.

Patterson

But later on.

White

Yeah, but it was after Murph. It was after Murph made bishop and then the man came in, Oxley, Reverend Oxley and he purchased the large Rogers organ.

Patterson

And so the productions that you were doing, you were writing these plays.

White

Along with other persons in the choir who...

Patterson

So you'd get together, you'd have a compositional sort of meeting where you'd sit down and you'd create...

White

Create, well, you used the Bible of course, the stories in the Bible. It was just Christmas and Easter, primarily, so the Christmas story, we'd take it and interpolate it into a modern, you know -- depending on the, you know, the time. And we used music that we knew, and then music that we would have to learn.

Patterson

Were you composing songs for those?

White

Not for those particularly, no.

Patterson

Were they writing original scripts or books for it?

White

Original scripts, but not music.

Patterson

So, and then you would just choose soloists and performers from the congregation. Did you ever invite guests, like performers? Guest performers? Any celebrities? Any people that were well-known in the community?

White

Yes, but they're -- they were not -- celebrities in Los Angeles, and I'm doing a little (inaudible) but a presentation about this month at a whole bunch of United Methodists churches. You might -- they are celebrities within their own realm and their sphere of influence, but many -- the general public does not know these names, the names of people, unless you become a stellar name. If you say Fred Hammond or something -- you know that name? Everybody knows Fred Hammond. But if you say Marion Downs, nobody'd even know the name, but Marianne Downs had a very successful career, a very very popular singer, opera singer. We seemed to only be in one little kind of category. We don't learn the names in the arts.

Patterson

Well, who was she, Marion Downs? Talk about her. Was she in the AME?

White

No, she was United Methodist, or Methodist. She was a young girl, came here from Arkansas, a soprano, and married a Methodist minister but she studied at Julliard and Oberlin and all the schools and had a very glorious soprano

voice and sang around in about four different states, and well, well known, and I have a beautiful picture of her. And her husband was pastor of -- can't think of the name of the church.

Patterson

A Methodist church.

White

Methodist church in Pasadena, for a long time.

Patterson

Marion Downs.

White

She performed in many operas.

Patterson

So she was one of these people that was well-known in her circle of Methodist church performances.

White

And in the classical venue of performance.

Patterson

So even though she was -- now, she wasn't AME. She was in the Methodist... But do you share...

White

Yeah. Just because you were in one denomination, as long as you performed well, you were used everywhere. I don't really...

Patterson

So Marion Downs was one. She's a soprano, and did she ever come and sing with your productions?

White

No. I never had her with my production.

Patterson

But she was well-known in Los Angeles.

White

Yes.

Patterson

Anybody else during that time that you can recall was someone, say a favorite vocalist of yours that was working in that church system at that time?

White

(laughter)

Patterson

Did you ever have a favorite vocalist? I know you said you liked to use more ensemble...

White

Oh, that's with my choir, with the church choir. I didn't really use a lot of soloists, because I wanted to establish an ensemble. I wanted to -- I didn't want any prima donnas.

Patterson

Made it easier on you.

White

And most of the time, if I wanted to use a sololist, we were going to do a major work and use a soloist, I'd bring somebody in who knew it or either could learn it with a coach and that was already prepared, because it was enough work trying to prepare the choir.

Patterson

With all the other stuff they have to be responsible for. So, you got an award in the 60's, Outstanding Musician's Award, Georgia Laster Branch of the National Association of Negro Musicians. How did that come about?

White

I don't know. I don't even know who (inaudible). Don't remember.

Patterson

You've got all these acknowledgements, recognition plaque from the NA -- from the National Association of Negro Musicians, a resolution from the city council, the Tenth District, resolution from the City of Los Angeles. What was that about?

White

I don't know, I don't know. I was playing, I was playing all around. I knew everybody, you know. Tom Bradley was a personal friend, you know. Believe it or not, Tom was a member of New Hope Baptist Church when I was a kid, and his wife Ethel, they were -- and their father belonged to New Hope, so I knew Tom Bradley and all these people and the council, Gilbert Lindsey and his wife and all, and I was playing for Mrs. Lindsey's teas and different things, you know, so -- and they're accompanying people.

Patterson

So were some of these secular activities that you were playing?

White

Oh, yeah, they weren't in church. They were just afternoon programs. The NAACP meeting, you know, the Urban League would meet or a banquet or something.

Patterson

And for these you'd be playing piano or...

White

Yeah, piano.

Patterson

Piano. And more classical-based music or popular?

White

Popular, anything. Whatever a person would sing.

Patterson

So you had singers working with you that would do those?

White

No, I worked with the singers. They didn't work with me! No, they -- as you know, when you present a banquet, your sorority or your -- you invite a singer or somebody who's going to draw a name. And so you hire an accompanist.

Patterson

And then you would get these recognitions from...

White

From the different organizations after a period of time.

Patterson

And with Mayor Bradley being an African-American mayor...

White

Well, he wasn't mayor then.

Patterson

Oh, this was of course prior to him being mayor, but starting to move in these political circles.

White

So he, I think, he was just a policeman or something. Wasn't even commander or anything.

Patterson

So before you -- you started working in the political arena.

White

Only as an accompani-- I wasn't political at all. No.

Patterson

But how did that happen? It was like you said, you knew Major Bradley so much later.



White

He was a member of the church, so...

Patterson

But I mean politically, you were -- before he was major, you were doing some of these activities in the city that were for political...

White

Not for political gain, no. They were just

Patterson

No, I'm just saying it's a different circle than the church circle and I was just wondering how you got involved with that.

White

Because they invited me to accompany.

Patterson

And they were part of the church community as well as...

White

Yeah, as a political community, you know. Everything didn't -- well, the venues for most African-Americans even today is the church. Most of your constituents that you're going to invite to the AKA's soiree or something has got to be coming out of the church.

Patterson

So in the church service, would they talk about the politics of the day?

White

Well, sure.

Patterson

So...

White

Not constantly, but the church was the venue for the political venue.

Patterson

Right. Well, Martin Luther King was...

White

Yeah, that's how he became famous, because the church would invite him.

Patterson

So this was -- at this time in history, for African Americans all over the nation, the church was really the seat for political action.

White

It was the auditorium, the meeting place.

Patterson

And was there any change in the climate during this time that you can remember as far as it becoming this venue for political activism, the church? Was there an increase in the activities of the church because of this civil rights movement that was growing?

White

Uh, not as much, I don't think as much in the west in California as you might find in Texas or Alabama, Louisiana because the segregation's more blatant, I think, there than here. You know it existed here, but you didn't -- it didn't slap you in the face all the time.

Patterson

Right, but then when we had the riot in '65, did anything change in the church as far as the emphasis on politics?

White

Oh, I don't know. I couldn't...

Patterson

Because you were in that musical world.

White

You'd have to talk to the minister about that.

Patterson

OK. So, it says also the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, you had a recognition award much later. This was in '74. Were you -- did you work with the...

White

I did? (laughter) (inaudible). I don't know.

Patterson

OK. Because I'm looking at all these wonderful commendations that you had, and so you were being recognized, certainly outside of just the church communities.

White

Well, I can do -- I don't know, maybe -- I don't know what this -- maybe this was '74, I don't know. I think I have it. Zubin was this -- Zubin Mehta came into the community. When was this? Yeah, that was '74. OK. And we did a community presentation of an oratorio, the Seven Last Words, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, and there were -- I forgot. This (inaudible) article. Five or six churches joined together and we had about a choir of 200 or so, and I don't remember whether I was appointed or how I got the position, but I trained the choir for the performance.

Patterson

How'd it... how was that different for the members of the church? Were they...

White

This was exciting to sing, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. This was -- and we held it at Trinity Baptist Church because that's the largest church, I guess in the black community, before Blake put up his huge cathedral. Because Trinity seats 2,000 or 2,500 people. It's a huge place.

Patterson

So did Mehta come to the venue?

White

Yeah, they brought the whole orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra.

Patterson

Wow, that was great.

White

They all came in, Mehta, you know.

Patterson

So what was it like to work with him? How was that...

White

I didn't work with him. I taught the choir.

Patterson

OK, so you didn't connect.

White

I didn't, I didn't. Well, we just talked, you know. We knew each other, but I didn't -- you know, I didn't work with him. You know, he conducted. It was his show.

Patterson

So is there anything else that during the 60's you felt was important in your life, that happened to you? Or that you went through personally in the 60's, or that you remember about the 60's that was important to the church community or the city for African-Americans?

White

No. (laughter) I don't live periods or dates or anything. I just exist, you know.

Patterson

Well, just say generally in your memory, you know. What were some of the things that you would describe as the high points of your life, the things that have happened to you along the way?

White

I don't know. I haven't even...

Patterson

What's the most exciting thing that you have ever did musically, for you?

White

(inaudible) I don't know.

Patterson

It was just all good, huh?

White

Yeah, it's all good. (laughter) No, I've had many opportunities, but I don't remember the date, the whole things, you know.

Patterson

Even without the dates, you know. The scenes in your mind.

White

I remember applying an organ concerto with a Hollywood orchestra. There was the Southeast Symphony Orchestra or something at Hollywood High School, playing an organ concerto at this large instrument out in Hollywood, it was just marvelous.

Patterson

You were at Hollywood High School playing. And did they have the organ on campus?

White

At the auditorium, they have a big -- large pipe organ.

Patterson

Oh, Hollywood High, huh?

White

But also at, what was it, Polytechnic High School, which is now Trade Tech, had a large pipe organ. That's why I went to school in Polytechnic, because of the organ, and that's where my organ teacher Irene Robertson, who was the organ teacher at the high school, reason for going there.

Patterson

So any other -- any other times?

White

Oh, there's so many other things I don't know of.

Patterson

Just anything that pops out to you.

White

No. Nothing pops out.

Patterson

Nothing pops out. (laughter) OK, well, let's stop the tape, Adriana, for a second, because I'm thinking if -- do you want to get started doing some of the other? Because I'm thinking it might -- you might recall some of the things as we look through your materials.

White

No.

Patterson

You want to do that.

White

OK. (break in tape)

Patterson

What did you do then? When you left Grant as director of the choir, or you have left?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

What did you decide to go forward with, then, musically?

White

Well, I started my own choir. I have a community choir, and so we'd perform and keeping the tradition of the spirituals, the Negro spirituals alive and performing them kind of traditionally, and then doing -- presenting extended compositions by black composers.

Patterson

So, and that's not attached to a particular church.

White

No, it was not attached to a church. The people come from all different churches, people who want to sing a different type of literature than the literature that's currently being performed in churches.

Patterson

Well, how would you compare and contrast the literature that you're using and that that's in the (inaudible) churches?

White

Well, they're more classical, the more classical compositions other than the spirituals that we do traditionally.

Patterson

Do you use the European composers and American Composers?

White

Well, we use some. Most of them are the classical compositions by black composers. And that's why I said they extended there the Oratorios that black composers have written.

Patterson

I see. And some of those names would be...

White

"The Ordering of Moses" by Nathaniel Dette. "I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes" by Adolphus Hailstork. Samuel Coleridge Taylor.

Patterson

And where do you perform them, usually?

White

When we're invited. At Churches. (inaudible)

Patterson

Any other venues, besides the sacred venues? Any secular venues that you performed -- the schools, or?

White

Well, yeah, we have performed the Hailstork composition with the Carson Symphony Orchestra at the -- well, that was at Domingus Hills, yeah. Domingus, with Dr. Francis Steiner. We performed with the Southeast Symphony, but that was at Wilshire Methodist Church. As I've said, we've been out to Simi Valley. We were invited to the Methodist Church up there. But I guess we have -- I don't like singing in hotels, because the acoustics are so bad. They had all the carpet and all that stuff and it's just not suitable for choral singing.

Patterson

So you know, you mentioned that the philosophy or the direction of music in the sacred setting, generally speaking, has changed somewhat.

White

Well, today, I guess, almost every church has (inaudible) in this -- we'll call it a praise mode.

Patterson

And how would you describe that?

White



The praise singing, the praise -- that's just (inaudible). The jubi-- not jubilee. Jubilant type of songs, that are sung by small groups and congregations, and with -- it's more rhythmic, it's more upbeat.

Patterson

So when did this change begin to happen, as you see it?

White

Oh, I guess ten years ago it began.

Patterson

So what did you...

White

With the advent of these megachurches, not only the mega black church but the mega white churches, they all started more praise -- no choirs. More congregational singing, where everybody would raise their hands and just sing and clap their hands and everybody'd want to jump. It's just like when they started all the -- what are those, those rock concerts, when they sing. I've never understood that. They all jump up and down, you notice? All like jumping jacks. They don't listen to anything. (laughter)

Patterson

But they're participating, I think.

White

But they're participating, yeah. And I think this is what was brought into the church trying to get people in the congregation to participate more and not listen, so they all started the same thing they did in the rock concerts.

Patterson

Do you see that as not as valuable, or just different?

White

Just different.

Patterson

How do you evaluate it?

White

Well, I don't like it personally, but I can't evaluate it because I'm not into it. You know. I don't think that they get an in-depth approach to the Biblical tenets of what they're singing and why they're singing it. They're enjoying the rhythm and the energy that's being exuded from the song.

Patterson

But they have their own way of building ecstasy or the ecstatic condition, which is different than, say, someone sitting in the audience and listening to a more formalized...

White

Yes.

Patterson

So then, looking at the idea of participation, it's more Africanistic, and its sort of traditional performative style, and then looking at the more European kind of performative style, which is geared to performance and then an audience that it attends to.

White

Yeah, but I think people tend to think that the African aspect is not structured. And it is. Everybody just doesn't do whatever they want to. Not in the African...

Patterson

But this performance, I mean participation, the concept of participation...

White

But they participate in unison, you know. You've done some more studies probably than I. But they -- they dance -- if they're doing the dance, the dance is meaningful, and it's going in a direction, and everybody knows the dance and what they're doing in that direction. Even with the drumming, it isn't just drumming to make noise. It's drumming because it's a communicative aspect of it. And then, other persons might join. But they join and then whatever was

going on before leaves. And it's just like a play. But -- and the megachurches, where it's just this praise and worship, everybody's kind of doing their own thing.

Patterson

Have you ever considered, or maybe you've actually done, some performative directions with Grant, where it did include the congregation and (inaudible) participatory kind of...

White

Oh, sure. Well... Yeah. For I guess about 14 years I was the choral director of congregational -- leader of song for the Hampton Ministers' Conference, and this is something like five thousand ministers and I had a choir of a thousand, or eight hundred to a thousand, and what I was supposed to do was congregational singing. But it's different when you have people who come who want to sing, than in a situation where people come to church and they say, "Make me sing."

Patterson

How do you mean that?

White

Well, people go to church and they sit there and look at you and you say, everybody, we're going to sing this hymn today, you know, and they just sit there and look at you, or stand and look at you and say, "Make me enjoy it," or "make me sing," or "make me learn it," but at a real -- at a church conference, at a minister's conference, people come geared to worship, to participate, to learn, so they come ready to be involved. So it's just an easier outlet for music. And it's not only just exuberant praise music, it's all types of music, whatever is presented. Their minds and bodies are opened for the reception of the styles, the different styles.

Patterson

So that would've been a -- we're out of tape? Oh, OK. Wow, that's fast. We were almost out of tape. (inaudible) I want to ask... (break in tape) OK, we were talking about some of the performative and stylistic differences between the praise kind of activity in the churches in the last ten years and what you

prefer as a composer and a director for church music, and I was going to ask you about congregational participation and how -- what you were saying, your preference is a more organized participation with the congregation so that they -- they're systematically involved rather than just individually, improvisationally expressing. So, when you were involved in this congregational kind of -- was it a series of meetings that you had about implementing congregational? Or more participation from the congregation?

White

Implementing more congregation participation in a more formal way. You mean at Hampton minister's conference, yeah.

Patterson

Yeah, yeah, so you were discussing how to do this in the AME system.

White

No, the AME system, you must remember, is still more organized. It's still -- it has a kind of liturgical setup, more so than the Baptist, which is freer.

Patterson

Right. So this conference that you were involved in...

White

Well, it's inter...

Patterson

Interdenominational.

White

Interdenominational, so -- but most of the people, I guess, are ministers that come there from a Baptist denomination and it's more of an East Coast workshop.

Patterson

So you attended as a representative from the West Coast.

White

I was on the faculty. I was the choir director and the congregational leader

Patterson

So did you create compositions that could be implemented that way, or...

White

No, I didn't do any -- well, I did. I composed maybe compositions for the choir, but we kept the tradition of hymn-singing, (inaudible) kept the hymn singing tradition for the congregation. And that's what they wanted. And I'm more of a congregational leader, hymn leader. I've done it for many, many years, and...

Patterson

Do you -- how do you feel about including improvisation in that congregational setting, musical setting?

White

What do you mean improvisation?

Patterson

In other words...

White

More freer, just everybody doing their own thing?

Patterson

Well, no, maybe if it was designated a couple of people who would add more improvisational components to the hymns that the congregation were singing, in a more standardized form of performance organization.

White

I don't know what you're trying to say.

Patterson

In other words, if there were say for instance two singers that would be designated to add a more improvisational component at their discretion, you know -- in other words, almost functioning like soloists inside of the performance organization. Has that ever happened, like we know that Mrs.

Jones is going to be adding some improvisational element in a (inaudible), does that ever happen?

White

Oh, yeah. Well, I hap-- I guess it -- it's done, but it isn't, it isn't -- how can I say it? It isn't done where it gets unwieldy. It's still structured. There still has to be one person in charge of whatever it is, the direction.

Patterson

So in the praise, in the megachurches, what they've done is just sort of let everyone...

White

Everyone just...

Patterson

Add what they...

White

What they want to.

Patterson

Are they basing it on a hymn fundamentally, and then just letting it become free?

White

I don't know. I've gone to several workshops on praise singing, and I still don't understand what they're doing, what praise and worship is, as you hear it a lot. So I'm not sure if they really know. (laughter) But if you -- I don't know your tradition but if -- years ago, before -- particularly in the Baptist church before the worship service began, the deacons of the church would always come out and sing several songs and praise several times.

Patterson

And that would be...

White

That was the praise and worship for the church, and that was kind of like the prelude to the worship service.

Patterson

And what style of performance would they be using?

White

Oh, old leader hymns, and just the hymns of the church.

Patterson

And when you say praise and worship, would they be more having -- would they approach in a freer way?

White

Yeah, it was free, very free.

Patterson

But that was...

White

It was all unaccompanied, no instruments would play with it. It was unaccompanied, and they would sing the old style, kind of like the slave songs, early slave songs. And the moans, and people would participate if they wanted to. If they didn't, the younger people, I remember as a young kid I didn't participate. I didn't know the value of learning that style then, you know, to use for lectures and for history, for today.

Patterson

Is that -- does that echo into what they now call praise and worship?

White

Yes, that has taken the -- superseded, has taken the place of where the deacons would come out and sing. Now, they have this group of singers all on mikes that would come out and sing, but they're not singing hymns.

Patterson

What are they singing?

White

They's singing the new -- the new song, the contemporary songs.

Patterson

That are just new compositions completely.

White

New compositions, yeah.

Patterson

That allow for this freer kind of approach, right.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So, with this free praise kind of worship musical content that has sort of taken over, as I understand it, you say...

White

It's more prevalent.

Patterson

More prevalent. So it's not that it has replaced, but you're seeing a trend in church music as moving towards this more open praise worship kind of model.

White

Yeah, because people see it on television a lot. If you ever look at Channel 40, you see nothing but praise and worship, they call it, and it's called praise and worship.

Patterson

Are they directed by anyone, or is it...

White



Well, there's a leader. There's a leader. There's, say, Fred Hammond or I can't think of the names of people who were the featured soloists. Donny McClurkin or something, you know.

Patterson

So they are actually vocal leaders. In other words, they just sort of do -- is it more of a call and response kind of dynamic between them and the...

White

No, it isn't really call and response. It's some call and response, but it's more of the leader as a soloist, leader as the featured person for the service, for the music part of the service and the ensemble is just to give him, I guess, vocal support, the backup, the support for it.

Patterson

What would you say the emphasis on harmonics, the harmony component...

White

Oh, very contemporary, very -- the sounds that you hear today, like the rap beats and so forth, the music that has the contemporary beats and contemporary harmonies. And the rhythms, definitely the -- it isn't just the beat, it's the earthy rhythms you hear.

Patterson

So for your aesthetic sensibilities, that isn't your preference. And you prefer...

White

Oh, my preference of course is classical music. I don't know how I got -- but I prefer classical music. Even in my car, when I'm driving down the street, I think I'm the only person with a classical station on. I never hear any other cars drive by with the same station.

Patterson

What are the churches that do maintain that more classical? Are there any that stand out to you right now? Maybe somewhere else that you would prefer to be engaged than, say, what Grant is doing now?

White

Oh, I'm not at Grant.

Patterson

No, I know. I'm saying, is there somewhere else that you would prefer to be, that may be using this style that appeals to you more.

White

Well, I think Grant is still doing a traditional worship service. Most AME churches, I said they have an order of worship that they have to follow, which is kind of more traditional than other denominations which are freer.

Patterson

So even now, they do less praise and worship than, say, the other churches.

White

Mm-hmm. Second Baptist is kind of a traditional worship service with a little contemporary. It's not overly contemporary. It's traditional. They sing the anthems still, they sing the hymn, the traditional hymn and they might then do a gospel or something with the drummer. I've noticed sometimes on the radio they have a saxophonist who's playing along, they have a flautist on Sundays that's playing, you know, gives you that feeling of being in a nightclub. (inaudible) (laughter) But I also went to the -- there's a Lutheran church. You know, we have a black Lutheran church in Los Angeles. It's on Adams and Eighth -- Ten, Eleventh, Eighth. Yeah, Eighth Avenue. St. Paul Lutheran. Pretty nice traditional service but it's still spirited and they do Gospel plus they do the traditional Lutheran service. We have the AME Zion Church, the AME Zion Cathedral which is near -- it's on Adams and Vermont, which is traditional. Most churches that have Methodist in the name, in its name, sing a more traditional service mixed with the contemporary. But a lot of them, most of this depends on the minister who's in charge and the direction that the minister selects for the congregation.

Patterson

Is there anywhere that appeals to you right now, if you went back into directorship at an AME church? Is there anywhere that you would like to be involved?

White

In here in Los Angeles?

Patterson

Or anywhere.

White

Oh, there's several churches. There's a marvelous church where I did a workshop a couple of years ago. It's called Friendship Baptist Church in North Carolina, involved -- well, when I did the workshop, the church would only seat maybe about twelve hundred. They had built a cathedral like West Angeles, a church that seats five thousand and they put in -- I guess it might be the largest pipe organ in a black church in the United States, huge instrument made in Italy, and the choir's just marvelous and they do the whole gamut of music in the services. When I was there, they had three services and the first service began on Saturday night, and the church was just crowded, packed, and then Sunday mornings one service is over they lined up in the halls and out in front of the church and ready to come in for the next service.

Patterson

Is there anything like that emerging in Los Angeles?

White

I'd presume -- well, the only other church I could -- crowded like that is West Angeles. They have two services and the church is packed. And it's a good service, and they believe in a (inaudible) almost more traditional than some of the other churches. Bishop Blake has a choir that sings nothing but spirituals and anthems, classical music. And then they have the other choir that does more traditional Church of God and Christ rhythmic psalms, I guess you could call it, and they have a praise team also, but they only sing at their particular section. It isn't constant noise, I call it, the noisy sound that you hear on the radio, on the TV.

Patterson

How do you feel like the television and radio have played into stimulating...

White

They have influenced -- they have influenced the style of thinking of the persons who are in charge of music and the worship services. They have influenced them greatly.

Patterson

Anybody in particular on television and radio that have influenced the L.A. praise worship kind of trend? Any particular television personalities that you can think of?

White

Well, those -- Channel 40, all of that stuff is national, so even though -- I don't know where the people are from, but you know...

Patterson

That's interesting that the media has influenced the church just in the last ten years. Radio as well, you say.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So if you could direct any choir in this city, which one would it be?

White

My own. (laughter)

Patterson

Is it Grant, is it Grant?

White

No, no, I have my own choir.

Patterson

Well, I mean in the church setting.

White

In the church?

Patterson

(inaudible) a community setting, isn't it?

White

No, well...

Patterson

In other words, let's put it this way.

White

You have to train. You'd have to train the choir again to my style and presentation. My style is (inaudible).

Patterson

But the vocal ability and the adeptness of a choir, where would you say the best voices are? Any particular choir that is outstanding?

White

No, I couldn't say. Holman has a good choir most of the time. You know, the people, they have their ups and...

Patterson

They come and go, huh.

White

Have you been to Holman Church?

Patterson

No.

White

That's on Fourth Avenue and Adams Boulevard. It's a huge church. They have a huge choir. And in fact, you should try to go through the 24th and 25th of this month, Saturday and Sunday they do a Negro spiritual festival in two days, where the choir just sings spirituals and those two programs are packed.

Patterson

So they have good voices over there then?

White

I don't say it's good voices. I -- they sing the spirituals during this time. And then they have another choir at the church that two years ago won the MacDonald Fest, so they do more the contemporary choir, the other choir. But the church is still quite a traditional church. They have about eighty or ninety in the choir. I haven't been to First AME, but that's a large choir I hear. Second Baptist has a smaller choir, but they sing the traditional music.

Patterson

So have you thought about going back into...

White

Oh, no. After -- I couldn't take the high energy pace that you have to establish. Going the same place every Sunday at the same time and three and four services and all that, and all the rehearsals.

Patterson

A lot of work.

White

Yes.

Patterson

So going on to composition for you, do you -- where does composing fit into your life?

White

Oh, I'm not one of those insatiable composers, but I do compose. I've written oratorios. I've written organ compositions. Most of it is choral music for worship, for the worship service based on the Scriptures, Scriptural texts.

Patterson

Are you doing more of that now that you've been away from the...

White

Yeah, well...

Patterson

The grind, so to speak.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And the community choir you have now, they're singing more of your compositions?

White

No, not -- no, I don't impose my compositions on the choir that I have been involved with.

Patterson

Oh, what are your plans for your compositions?

White

Oh, they're published. I have a publisher. And they're published. Luckily, you know, some of them -- some of the compositions are selling, so I get some residuals.

Patterson

Have they been performed anywhere?

White

Oh, yes.

Patterson

Who's performed them?

White

Mostly back East.

Patterson

Really?

White

You find -- I think you find the choirs are more traditional in the East and Midwest and the South.

Patterson

So the West is more...

White

I don't know how to (inaudible). The West is still kind of virgin territory. I think we're still experimenting. We're still new. And it isn't like a Boston atmosphere. We're not even like the San Francisco atmosphere. That's more classical, you know.

Patterson

Now, how do you view that? Is it -- do you see it as an innovative...

White

What, the classical, or the areas?

Patterson

No, no, the way that Los Angeles approaches music, you say it's virgin territory, but does that mean also that it's a place for innovation?

White

It's learning. It's in the process of learning. It's trying to find itself, particularly in the black community.

Patterson



Well, where does innovation come in, as far as you're concerned? Do you feel like that innovation should -- does it -- does it have a place in the church? Or do you feel like that's a place that should remain traditional?

White

Well, I think there should be innovation within the religious community, but what and how you innovate is -- should have some structure and should be -- how can I say it? And the learning process, it should be structured, or it should have some depth.

Patterson

Based on...

White

Based on the theology of the whatever religious structure you're coming from.

Patterson

So then if I understand you, you mean that the musical innovation should be inspired directly from the theological. In other words...

White

Well, yeah. Music should -- music and theology go hand-in-hand, and music should not be alien to the theology and at times now some of the songs that are being sung in the church should -- well, I feel -- many people feel (inaudible) going to discuss in this workshop this month. They're -- what do you call them -- entertainment songs, entertainment worship songs. Sometimes this praise and worship is just entertainment. It's kind of like the pre-acts to vaudeville. They're waiting for the star to come out and do the meat of the show, which I guess translated over to the religious church or so, it's the preacher. Of the stuff goes on before the preacher comes and does the sermon.

Patterson

So then what you're saying then is that you feel as though there should be some vigilance about where the inspiration is coming from so, in other words, it doesn't become recreation so to speak inside of a church environment. Is that what you mean?

White

Yeah, I can go along with that, yes.

Patterson

So does that mean that...

White

See, the reason why we have the different denominations is because each denomination has its own tenets of beliefs, and when you mix that all up then you don't know what you believe. The hymns are the theology of the church, of the denomination, and you can't take one denominational hymn and just put it over here and add a beat to it and just because it's loud and it's energetic, the words are not what is advocated by that denomination.

Patterson

How do you think that happened? Is it that the education, the theological education has not been as attended to in the -- among the congregations?

White

Well, no. I don't think it's the congregations.

Patterson

The preachers? The ministers?

White

Well, sometimes a minister or the leader of a church in trying to obtain the education and training necessary for the leadership role in a church has gone to a seminary or a theological school that isn't of the denomination where he is going to be involved. So it has gotten a little confused.

Patterson

Why? How did that happen?

White

Well, same way as when you were going for your doctoral degree. You go where you can afford it. If you don't get a grant or something to help you with

that degree, you go to maybe a lesser school. So the degree then gives me an open door into the position that I want, but I have to have the degree.

Patterson

So the theology has sort of gotten mismatched to -- in other words, somebody went to a more Baptist type of training, through a Baptist training and ends up in a Methodist...

White

In a Methodist Church or a Lutheran Church or something.

Patterson

And so because of that, the musical or the liturgical effects have become mixed-up.

White

Yeah, changed also.

Patterson

So then I understand that what you may be saying is that this has happened in recent years more so than it used to happen.

White

Correct, yeah.

Patterson

Does that mean that they have less money to go to the schools that they should go to?

White

Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

Patterson

Why did this happen?

White

I don't know.

Patterson

Yeah, yeah. I'm sure you're discussing -- hold on. Should we stop?

White

No, you can (inaudible).

Patterson

Are you discussing these things when you say you're having these conferences?

White

Yeah, I guess -- yeah, they're going to. But I don't know how -- how interdenominational this meeting is. It's sponsored mostly by the black Methodists.

Patterson

So the Baptists and the Methodists are sort of getting their wires crossed then, in these larger more recent churches. We're not seeing the pristine following of the liturgy and the theological approach.

White

Well, I don't know. I'd get in trouble I guess. You have to look at -- most of the megachurches are not denominational churches. This guy in, what is it, Houston that has this -- the -- took this football field or something, has the thing, had this huge church. Just they're not denominational. T. D. Jakes or whatever his name is. It's not denominational. That's his own thing. Like, over here, with the (inaudible). These people with the... Kenneth Ulmer, even though he is a Baptist, he's always kind of changes the direction of his church, but he has a big following.

Patterson

And so you consider these more entertainment than actual...

White

No, I don't say... No, I'm not going to put that on tape. (laughter)

Patterson

But there is a philosophical difference then, happening, and that you feel has changed...

White

Developed within the worship experience.

Patterson

And do you hear any feedback from some of the congregation that are just coming into their church experience and how they're really learning music now in the church, or not? What would be the difference? When you would see, say, an 18-year-old coming and joining a youth choir, what would be their mindset as compared to that of an 18-year-old, say, when you were at -- working with Independent, People's Independent? Is the mindset different?

White

Oh, I don't know. No, I don't -- I think they're all about the same. A teenager's a teenager. We join because the girl next door was joining. We would go to the church or we would join because that was where most of the students from our high school went, or so -- and we had a relationship with the...

Patterson

So this is more the social reasons to join and so -- but their expectations musically -- in other words, they would learn whatever you gave them to learn, you feel like. They wouldn't...

White

And I think students today will do the same, but when we took music out of the schools we found that we didn't have teenagers that could sing. So they started -- and no, I'm not going to -- just a little bit. Most of the rap artists that you hear, none of them will ever sing. You know, and I call it spoken -- kind of like a spoken poetry with no tone. And then, it's kind of doggerel poetry. It isn't the best poetry you can hear.

Patterson

So then you're saying that secular education influences what they're capable of doing in a church choir when they come into it.

White

Religiously, yeah.

Patterson

Which would be obviously then less than what it once was, when there was more music in the schools.

White

But now, there is a denomination that is very strict, and they're still very traditional. That's the Church of Christ. Have you heard of Figueroa Church of Christ? It's a big building, Figueroa Church of Christ, and they're to the point where they don't have an instrument in the sanctuary. No instruments at all. They sing without the instruments and they sing traditional music, still, and it's a big congregation.

Patterson

Is it a classical, or is it hymns?

White

Hymns, hymns and...

Patterson

Who's in charge over there? Who's training?

White

Oh, I don't know, I've never visited the church to worship.

Patterson

I see. So getting to your community choir, what is your objective? What do you want to see for your choir going forward?

White

Oh, I don't know. I would like for them to travel. I'd like for them to -- I'd like for other persons to hear what was done or what can be done with voices, not only just the older voices, but even -- there are some young people who are training, who are taking lessons and who like the literature. And they keep

traditional style, being performed. It can't be current, but it's being performed. So you don't let the compositions just die out.

Patterson

And do the arrangements stay pretty much...

White

The same.

Patterson

The arrangements stay the -- so the voices will change but the arrangements stay the same. And so how would you factor-- do you factor in any kind of a change, creative change or parameters of choice when you teach the music? In other words, do you alter anything at all in any area, whether it be an accompaniment or the way the solo is approached or the organist's (inaudible) voice?

White

Well, you alternate according to performance style. My style of performing the piece, my interpretation of a piece (inaudible) have studied the interpretation - how the interpretation should work. Or how I have heard the interpretation, and want to recreate that.

Patterson

Is that expressed mostly in the variation of the dynamics that you use, or would you -- how would you describe your interpretation? Does it come within the realm of dynamics rather than arrangement and organization of the voices?

White

We don't rearrange that which is already written or arranged by somebody. That's kind of set. How you sing so the composition has an emotion in it.

Patterson

So then that's dynamics, then.

White

Well, it could be, yeah.

Patterson

From the conductor's...

White

Point of view.

Patterson

Yeah.

White

There only could be one interpretation, and that's the person who is conducting at the time.

Patterson

And so you'd like to see a choir travel, and have you made any moves towards having that happen?

White

Oh, sure. We've been to St. Louis and as I said, we've been all around to the different communities around here. We're going to San Diego. There are many organizations who sponsor festivals of African-American song and so we -- and there's an organization for the preservation of the African-American song -- yeah, preservation of African-American song, so we're trying to preserve that music which was written and performed.

Patterson

And going back to this -- you stated that you have compositions of your own, but that you don't use them in the choir.

White

Not my choir, no. Not the choir -- I don't just sing my compositions.

Patterson

Why wouldn't you teach your choir your...



White

I want them to stay interested. My style, the way I write, might get a little boring, you know. So we do a variety of things. That's -- I have to keep their interest. I want them to come whenever we rehearse.

Patterson

Well, why wouldn't your compositions be interesting to them?

White

I don't know!

Patterson

What would be the...

White

Oh, I don't know! I just would -- I wouldn't just do only my work. My works with the choir.

Patterson

OK.

White

I didn't do that even with the church choir. We just did two or three, I think. They only did two or three things at a...

Patterson

Yeah. So you have two pianos in your living room. Why?

White

Because I have friends who play and so sometimes when they come over we play two piano.

Patterson

You play duets?

White

Yeah.

Patterson

And what kind of...

White

Compositions as written for two pianos.

Patterson

OK. So who writes for two pianos?

White

Well, all your major composers.

Patterson

But just for two pianos, then? So do you do that as a ritual in your life, something that you enjoy doing on a regular basis?

White

Oh, no, it isn't on a regular basis, but whenever somebody calls and says -- like, I have a friend, my friend in Chattanooga who visits once a year or so, and when he comes I know we're going to play two pianos. Just had a friend visit this last weekend that plays, and we pull out some music and we just sight read and just (inaudible).

Patterson

Is that one of your favorite things -- oh, go ahead, you were about to say something.

White

Oh, then I do coach with some students every now and then. And it's important that while they're playing and interpreting, then I can show them or play at the other piano immediately what I hear and can correct.

Patterson

So you're teaching keyboard and do you teach vocal and keyboard here?

White

Not regularly. I don't want anything that's regular. (laughter) Every now and then if somebody says I'm having difficulty, would you -- or I'm in school and I have to learn this piece and I'm having just -- you know, it's getting to me and I can't work it out. Would you see what you can do for me and with me on these. I said, we'll come over and we'll see what you're doing.

Patterson

Who are your favorite classical and romantic composers?

White

I don't have a favorite.

Patterson

You don't?

White

No, I just like all of it. Depends on the time, the time of day or what I want to hear.

Patterson

What's your favorite opera?

White

It changes, varies according to what I'm -- what I want to capture at the time. Right now I'm thinking about Turandot, because I want to do sections of it with my choir, so I've been listening to it, and that's the Puccini, and so (inaudible), and I like that final act of it, so I'm trying to put that together. So I listen to Puccini a lot, but I listen to every Saturday, you know, this opera program, and the opera broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera is on every Saturday. Not now, but...

Patterson

Do you have any favorite voices with the opera? Traditionally so, just through time, any vocalists that stand out in your mind as...

White

Well, there's so many that are so good.

Patterson

That are personally...

White

No.

Patterson

No?

White

Well, I love Leontyne Price's voice. Years ago, I was a kid. I used to hear Bidu Sayao and I loved that voice, Placido Domingo, and all the -- the voices, depends on the songs you hear. That's a...

Patterson

Are there any that you feel like don't fit the bill for you, that just became great without really having the ability, like, misplaced?

White

No.

Patterson

No critiques of the opera world? (laughter)

White

No critiques of the opera, no. No, I -- periodically, this is about the fourth or fifth year I went to the Metropolitan Opera auditions they have locally, (inaudible) USC and there's just some marvelous voices, young voices, you know, people that are coming along. It's, you know...

Patterson

So the black opera world, I know you've collected all kinda of information about the community of black operatic sings from Los Angeles, and so would you say then that there was -- I think you did say that there were opportunities in the black church for these opera singers that they would not find in the professional world of opera.

White

Well, for singers, just for singers, you know, for those who have studied, yeah, for singers.

Patterson

So they've been sort of confined, then, in a way because of the lack of opportunity in the opera world.

White

Well, yeah.

Patterson

Who are those people that you feel like would have -- did have the ability to make fine and comparable opera singers in the professional world, that were in the Los Angeles opera community or...

White

Can I refer to my list then?

Patterson

Please.

White

There was a fellow -- some of these people are deceased, now. I think I mentioned Marguerite Chapman who was a marvelous soprano. Gershwin kind of designed Porgy and Bess around her voice, which is a marvelous soprano who needed -- you know, if we had some support in the community, some of our -- I always feel like the sororities and fraternities and these insurance companies and I call them the Mystic Knights of the Sea, the Elks and -- these people come together and have money, and if they put it behind these culture, some of the cultural aspects, then the people would have an opportunity to at least be in the limelight, to be heard. It takes more than just study. You can study and have the finest voice in the world, but you have to have -- particularly for a woman, you have to have the costume, you have to have the dress. I guess those dresses are expensive to present yourself, even a recital on stage, what you have to do to your hair or -- and the makeup and all

this stuff becomes expensive, more expensive I guess for a woman than a man. You can't just wear a gingham dress for an audition or to do a recital. You try to look your best.

Patterson

So it's the preparation for recitals that put these singers in the black community in a position to be seen or not seen.

White

Yes.

Patterson

By the professional world that would have welcomed them in or not.

White

Yeah.

Patterson

So do you feel like -- and I suppose race as well as finances plays a part. Anyone else? You said you were going to refer to -- you mentioned Marguerite?

White

Oh, I guess I have so many.

Patterson

There's so many. I guess I was just looking for those that stood out in your mind through time.

White

But you see, my mind has so many people, and I -- nothing stands out there! (laughter)

Patterson

They're all in there.

White

They're all in there. (laughter)

Patterson

But she stood out.

White

Well, she just came because she just passed.

Patterson

So do you feel like she never really got...

White

Got into her own, never really.

Patterson

Where did she study, do you know?

White

No, I have to go back and look at her bio.

Patterson

Her bio.

White

But she was born in Los Angeles. And she's -- she graduated from Jefferson High School, and studied at different conservatories around in L.A. I don't know where to start.

Patterson

That's OK, I just -- you know, was trying to get whether or not you have somebody that stood out like Marguerite did, and maybe a male that stood out.

White

Well, there's a young fellow coming along now. His name is Hamai Sharp, he's a tenor, and the boy has an excellent voice, sounds like Furrucio Talliarini, it just rings. But he's about 26 or so.

Patterson

A young black singer?

White

A young black singer, but you need support. You need financial support.

Patterson

Where -- is he in a particular church choir?

White

No.

Patterson

He's at a school, or... how do you know him?

White

I've heard him sing and I've heard him audition. He auditioned for the Met Opera. He's been invited to sing. I belong to an organization called African-Americans for L.A. Opera, and we invite these young people that we hear who are studying who have potential to perform at a luncheon for us periodically, and we try to influence the L.A. Opera company to hire them even in the chorus, and hopefully they can audition for a lead. I mean, I can't think of the boy's name.

Patterson

Hamai Sharp. So has he then been one of those young singers that your organization has...

White

The L.A. Opera, they have had him sing for them several, couple of times. And we try to give them enough money so that they can continue to study, because coaching costs money.

Patterson

So you fund-raise. This organization is fund-raise...

White



We fund-raise, yeah, so that when we ask them to perform for us, we can give them a little stipend. And he's going to do Sportin' Life in Porgy and Bess. That's one that's coming up soon. It's going to be here in Los Angeles, I guess at the music center or something. They just did a Porgy and Bess in Orange County. It was a concert version and they had some phenomenal singers. Well, there's the woman I just talked to yesterday, Henrietta Davis, who has a marvelous, marvelous soprano voice. You probably have seen her. She was the black girl who was featured for a year or so on the Crystal Cathedral. She was a featured soloist. That girl can sing.

Patterson

Henrietta Davis.

White

We have a young girl -- well, not -- she's just in her 30's, I guess. Yolanda Mitchell West, who's a soprano who has a terrific voice, but she needs the opportunity, you know, she needs the funding so that she -- she works every day. It's like playing the piano. People think you just play the piano, you don't have to practice. But to be a concert pianist, you have to sit at that piano twelve hours a day, so that the technique is there and you can play the things. You can't just every now and then play it.

Patterson

Yeah, and these are young people who have loved it and come through it based on just their own volition, their own stick-to-it-iveness and they're born and raised -- like Henrietta Davis, was she from L.A.?

White

No, she's not from L.A., but she's been in L.A. a long time now. Yolanda is from someplace up in Northern California. I don't know.

Patterson

But they came here as young people.

White

Yeah, they're living here now, and Sharp is from I think Chicago, but they came here to study and...

Patterson

So they've been in the university system.

White

Yeah, they all have degrees and they sing well, they're coaching. They're just waiting for that opportunity to be heard by the right person. There's another guy who's -- what does he do. He's a teacher. He's in charge of grants and whatever it is for the university, for Domingus Hills, baritone, the guy. Michael -- I can't think of Michael's last name. Michael -- marvelous voice.

Patterson

And he's not even in the opera world on a day-to-day basis, he's just..

White

No, he's busy working hard, so you know, you have to be involved with it. Then of course, you fall in love and you get married and you have children.

Patterson

Especially if you don't see this as an outlet that you can pursue with a success.

White

Well, you keep at it. You keep forcing yourself to try to...

Patterson

So in your experience over your life and career, would you say you've seen a lot of African-American young performers that had the ability and just weren't able to get -- (inaudible) that's been prevalent then in your experience in Los Angeles?

White

Yeah, oh, yeah. Mm-hmmm.

Patterson

OK, yeah. We're out of tape? (laughter) Pretty much. OK. So next time, if there's anything that you feel like we didn't cover that is important to you to

document about your life, you know, let me know because we want to make sure to get it.

White

I don't talk about me. I don't know what I do.

Patterson

I know, but if you can think -- just if you can stand away from yourself.

White

No. (laughter)

Patterson

For a minute!

White

I like me! (laughter)

Patterson

No, I mean in a good way! In a good way, stand away and look at yourself and say what are the things I would want to know about me, if -- look at you! He's already sayin' no, I haven't even finished. (laughter)

White

Haven't even finished! (laughter) I don't talk about me, (inaudible). I already talked enough.

Patterson

I mean for next time, because I don't want to miss anything that's important to you about your life.

White

I don't know.

Patterson

OK.

White

You just have to ask the questions (inaudible) important to you. As I said, it would be helpful, though, if you had three or four questions just you can call me or leave it on the message machine. I'm going to ask you...

Patterson

OK, and then you can prepare.

White

Kind of prepare something. And then (inaudible)

Patterson

OK, I'll do that, I'll do that. And we'll be able to get your dates and times. OK, I'll do that then and leave it on the machine. And then next time...

#### **1.5. Session 4 (February 28, 2007)**

Patterson:

Um, can you check if it's turned on (inaudible)?

White:

I don't know where it is now.

Patterson:

OK, we're going to talk about all that. Oh, this view. I didn't realize we could see the snow.

White:

Now, I take the...

Patterson:

I'm going to miss it, but if we have to turn it off...

White:

Oh.

Crew:

I'm sorry, I have you tied down. You can't get away!

White:

Put it back, because I don't know where it is!

Crew:

Oh, no, we can't turn it back on!

Patterson:

You're ready? It is -- it is February 28th, 2007. We're with Don Lee White again, and we're going to walk through and look at all of the wonderful archival materials he's collected over time, over his career. This cabinet has -- I see a whole top. The whole top of it is -- there's a collection of Bibles.

White:

Yeah. And different editions and translations of the Scriptures. This of course is not a Bible but it's the commentary. This is usually used by ministers, Matthew Henry Commentary on the Scriptures, which gives a good explanation and I use that a lot when I'm writing compositions.

Patterson:

To interpret...

White:

Interpret and make sure -- interpret the mood of the Scripture and that the music is also interpreting the stylistic sounds that is...

Patterson:

So you're going from word to musical concepts.

White:

Both, back and forth.

Patterson:

Back and forth.

White:

Back and forth, yeah, uh-huh.

Patterson:

What is the brown one? It's a pretty binding.

White:

This?

Patterson:

Yeah.

White:

This is another kind of commentary which is analysis of the Biblical scriptures.

Patterson:

Is that a plate just inside of the cover? What is that? Oh, I see. Mm-hmm.

White:

(inaudible) And as I said, most of these, in the different translations I use while writing or try and become inspired by a Scripture text to write, so this is just analysis of...

Patterson:

So when you read this, it translates in your mind to...

White:

To the music.

Patterson:

The the music.

White:

Uh-huh, yeah.

Patterson:

Oh, wow, yeah.

White:

And I have to sit and meditate, you know, to see which way I'm going to go musically.

Patterson:

Does that inform both your arranging and your composing, then, huh?

White:

Yes. Mm-hmm.

Patterson:

And then what are some of the other...

White:

Well, these are just -- this is the King James version of the Bible that everybody uses. It's a translation. And this is the Bible that has the Concordance in the back that is helpful. The concordance is if you have a word and you're trying to find the Scriptures, then you just look up the word, and it gives you all the Scripture references to the word.

Patterson:

So that's helpful too, with writing.

White:

Yeah. And I think this is the recording of the Bible.

Patterson:

Oh, OK.

White:

And I think it's just the New Testament, I don't know. I have (inaudible).

Patterson:

So it's a spoken?

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

OK.

White:

And like I said...

Patterson:

And that text that you showed me earlier, the German...

White:

Oh...

Patterson:

And what about that one?

White:

Well, this is the -- when I was young, I studied German and...

Patterson:

What does that say in there?

White:

I don't even know who Timothy Dwight is. Timothy Dwight. Timothy Dwight is a minister someplace.

Patterson:

So did he give you that one?

White:

I guess so! That's what it says! This Bible is...

Patterson:

What does it say?

White:

I can't read it. I don't have my glasses. What does it say?

Patterson:



This Bible is a window in this present world through which we may look into eternity. And he presented that to you apparently in 1965, November 29, 1965.

White:

When I was studying German, I used to read this and translate it and get a different interpretation, insight into the Scriptures, when you read them in a foreign language.

Patterson:

How long have you had that, since 1965.

White:

Since 1965.

Patterson:

Uh-huh. And then you -- this is since you studied German. Did you study German throughout the years, after you received that?

White:

Only four years. Only four years.

Patterson:

Four years of German.

White:

And, well, as an accompanist, you have to study languages, so I studied Italian, French, and -- well, Italian and German, not French. I haven't any concept of what French sounds like. You know. And then everybody, the Good News Bible, which is a new translation, is -- I don't like it, but it's all right.

Patterson:

Why don't you like it?

White:

It's too contemporary, so people like it. You get caught up with the King James.

Patterson:

What is it about the contemporary? Does it change the mood for you?

White:

I don't know whether it changes -- it doesn't flow well to -- with literature, with the what do you call them, the poetic phrasing. Like, what would you say, the Lord is my light and my salvation and whom shall I fear, and (inaudible) contemporary translation I say the Lord is my pavilion -- the Lord lives in the pavilion and he is the light of my being, or something, which to me -- you've learned it for 40 years one way, and it's hard to retranslate to something.

Patterson:

Anything else up there that we should know about?

White:

No.

Patterson:

And another concordance, I see?

White:

Another concordance, yeah. Well, this is a more complete concordance. I found this in an old bookstore, which is (inaudible). Just look for the keyword and it gives you all of the...

Patterson:

All of the Scripture that relates to that word.

White:

Relates to that word, mm-hmm. And then of course the other thing, these are very helpful, the Children's Bible which is translated in very simple language and then a simple translation of the Bible. I don't have any particular Scripture that I like.

Patterson:

But these are also helpful in your writing process then, because it gives you the essential...

White:

Well, helps understand, yeah, understanding.

Patterson:

Understanding the essence of...

White:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Patterson:

OK, and then what are some of these other ones you have here?

White:

And then I have an insatiable appetite for hymns. I love hymns and I (inaudible) being an AME, African Methodist Episcopalian, we have our own particular hymns that we developed in the denomination, and didn't realize that each denomination has its own kind of familiar hymns, and so then I started collecting the different denominational hymnals to find out what they included and what was the difference or so forth, and I have them kind of -- well, they were arranged alphabetically. The A -- these are the AME hymnals. I guess this is the... This is the Eighteen -- I guess this is the 1818 hymnal. It was published in 1818. The first hymnal for the African-American church was published in 1801.

Patterson:

So this is a reproduction of...

White:

And that was just a word hymnal. It didn't include music, and so I don't have a copy of that, but this is the 1818 which included some music and so forth.

Patterson:

Wow. So when did you -- when did you get this?

White:

Oh, I don't know.

Patterson:

And I noticed you had some notes in the front. Some notes. Those are...

White:

I don't know what... Oh, this just is in going through them, I'm finding certain hymns and hymn tunes. I don't know, depends on what I was researching at the time. I stick it in the book.

Patterson:

So you've taken -- so you take some of these old hymns and rework them before your contemporary choir.

White:

Yeah, the hymns almost stay the same throughout the years, you know. They haven't changed that much, but it's just the hymnal includes maybe one or two new hymns or new tunes, and so -- and these are just different editions of the AME hymnal, one, two, three, four, five, six. This was a 1954 hymnal. Most of these are AME. And then the book for worship for the AME church, which people don't follow anymore, I guess. But at least indicates how the procedure for setting the worship services.

Patterson:

I see. So the oldest hymnal you have on that shelf then is the one that you showed us.

White:

Yes, 1818. And then that's an AME collection.

Patterson:

I see you have...

White:

And next to that is the Baptist hymn books for it.

Patterson:

Now, you have the AME Zion. That's another branch of the AME.

White:

Well, not at the AME church, but a denomination. The AME founded their church in Philadelphia, and the AME Zions were founded in New York, came out of New York. This is a modern...

Patterson:

Do they emphasize different hymns than the AME Philadelphia? Or pretty much the same, or...

White:

Well, it depends on the period of the congregational singing. You'll find a lot of the same tunes in all the hymnals.

Patterson:

What would you say is the fundamental difference between the two, the Zion and the New York version and the Philadelphia?

White:

You mean in the hymn book?

Patterson:

Yeah, or any outstanding differences that come to mind.

White:

Well, no, there isn't no real outstanding differences. It's just in its structure and its hierarchical structure with the bishops. All have their own discipline and their own books of rules, you know, for the governing of their societies, the AME and the AME Zions. You know, and then during the same time you had the CMEs, a little later, but the CMEs were primarily in the south, and that was called "colored" at the time, colored Methodist, Episcopal.

Patterson:

Do you have a hymnal of those -- a collected hymnal of the CME? Or -- and what would you say about the music and the hymns? Are the hymn collections...

White:

They're all about the same. It's just that they're very...

Patterson:

Still the same.

White:

Yeah. They try to, what do you call it, support and -- can't think of the word. I can't think of the word. Publish more of their own composers in the hymn book, as you find, where in the National Baptist you find a lot of songs my Margaret Deaureaux, you know, who was Baptist, but you will find one or two songs in all of the hymnals, maybe one or two of her songs.

Patterson:

Now, there are older hymnal, because Margaret is post-Sixties. Her compositions.

White:

Oh, I don't know when she started writing, yeah. But of course, you're not going to find her in an 18 or 19...

Patterson:

Right, so do you have any of the older ones, then, of the Baptists?

White:

Oh, the Baptist hymn? Well, no, the Baptist hymnals didn't -- the first Baptist hymnal wasn't until about 1920 -- the African-American Baptists. You didn't have a hymnal until about 1921. The other hymnals were published by the white Baptists, and so in the north and the south.

Patterson:

And what is this one?

White:

This was published by the National Baptist Publishing Board. This was the black Baptist, and this was 1961. I have had one. It's here someplace. The 1924, '21, 1921 Baptist hymnal.

Patterson:

You have it somewhere, huh?

White:

Yeah, it's up here, or should be. And then they publish other books before the -- you might say the convention or the -- decided to publish one hymnal. They publish a lot of little books, songbooks for the church services by the National Baptist Publishing Board for when this is -- they're a publishing house, (inaudible)

Patterson:

Where do they publish...

White:

It's in Nashville, Tennessee.

Patterson:

Nashville, Tennessee.

White:

And so was the AME publishing house. They're almost kind of like across the street from one another, and it's interesting that a lot of the publications you find from the AME's and the Baptists do not have a publishing date. You have no date on it, on the early publications. And this is the new Baptist hymnal.

Patterson:

21st century edition.

White:

Yeah, and I -- I don't know when this one came out.

Patterson:

So there's new composers that have been included in these.

White:

2001. And it's just more...

Patterson:

I see you marked off some words from the publisher. Was there something special there that resonated for you?

White:

Well, yes. These are just -- I don't know, but I read everything when I get a book, so I...

Patterson:

"In fact, for hymns and songs to be meaningful, they should have their foundation in the word of God. The conception and publication was for a twofold purpose. First, to enhance all aspects of our worship, second to preserve our great religious heritage and music for generations to come. So those are inspirational phrases that speak to you...

White:

I can use -- uh-huh. And I guess, and the other thing that's interesting, in the Methodist tradition, the first hymn in every hymnbook will be "Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing." It's because it was written by Wesley, Charles Wesley, and this was his kind of cradle, this, that -- if I had ten thousand tongues, I could not explain the wonders of Christ and all of what he has done for me, and this is...

Patterson:

So that's a tradition in...

White:

All Methodist churches, Methodists, so you will find that as a first hymn in the hymnbook.

Patterson:

I see. That's a tradition, then.



White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

And I see you have African-American heritage hymnals. What are those?

White:

Now, this is a contemporary hymnal. This is a new publication. This is very popular in a lot of churches, African-American churches today, and it's just -- it's not really a hymnbook. It's a collection of favorite songs that you will find in the African-American tradition in their worship services, and people sing.

Patterson:

So which of them, for instance, would not be hymns that would be included?

White:

Well, I don't -- well, like here, this "Emmanuel, Emmanuel," this is just a little chorus that's included. This is old Gospel song.

Patterson:

"He Calmed the Ocean."

White:

Yeah, it's not a hymn but it's an old Gospel song they put in. It was popular at the turn of the century for the African-Americans and the older people remember it. Well, here, "Take the Name of Jesus With You," you'll probably find in every hymn book you open up, whether it's black or white. It's a popular song. And another one, "It Is Well With My Soul," you'll find in almost every hymn book.

Patterson:

Whatever denomination.

White:

Yes.

Patterson:

(inaudible) for a second.

Crew:

On a song, any song.

Patterson:

Yeah, hold up the book.

White:

And this is another gospel song, old gospel song, that I think you'd find in a black church that people like very much, "There's a Bright Side."

Patterson:

Would you explain to us the difference between a Gospel song and a hymn?

White:

The hymn is -- the hymn itself is a hymn of praise toward God. The text indicates praise to God. The gospel song is more of a personal interjection of oneself into the text. You will find the personal pronoun, I, me, or so forth, but in the hymn it's always "we praise thee oh God," like "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," "O Worship the King O Glorious," it's a hymn showing your adoration and your recognition of God.

Patterson:

So it's a more communal.

White:

Well, yeah. Of course these are used in corporate worship, so, supposed to be inclusive with everybody, not that I do something like that. "I want to," "I praise you," no, "we."

Patterson:

I see. Is that a two-volume set or is it just a duplicate?

White:

No, it's just two, yeah.

Patterson:

OK, and what about this?

White:

Oh, that's in alphabetical. That's just Baptist, A, B. Here, a Catholic hymnal. Catholic hymnal.

Patterson:

Oh, and how would you describe the difference in the Catholic hymnals? Is there less influence of African-American tradition?

White:

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, you don't find it in the African-American -- African-influenced, particularly, because the Catholic Church was -- kept the tradition of chanting as part of the singing and the service, and congregational singing was not the act for worship, particularly in the Catholic tradition.

Patterson:

Would you pull one out, one of the Catholic ones?

White:

Well, this is a newer. This is the Cath-- (inaudible).

Patterson:

So what would be...

White:

This is a new hymnal, the Catholic.

Patterson:

So the congregation would not sing. You would have the...

White:

The priests and the -- what are called the acolytes, those, the deacons and so forth. They were those who would perform the Mass, you know. It was later during what is seventh, eighth, 17th, 18th century, when Martin Luther

decided he wanted to bring more congregational participation in the worship service that we have the congregational hymns, you know.

Patterson:

Would you find any of the same materials at all?

White:

No, no. Probably. One or two songs, not very many. Or like, here this song is -- wait a minute, where is it. I don't have on my glasses. This was, what is it...

Patterson:

There's one of your pairs of glasses right there.

White:

It doesn't matter. I don't know who...

Patterson:

"All Glory, Laud, and Honor."

White:

This is 19th century, but this is -- Theodolpus was written back in the 12th century or so forth, and this hymn has found its way into almost every hymn book. "All Glory, Laud and Honor," (singing). It's an old, ancient hymn based on a Gregorian chant. Sort of...

Patterson:

So how do these works in the Catholic hymnal for you resonate as compared to some of the other hymns? How do you feel about them, personally?

White:

Oh, they're beautiful hymns. They're beautiful hymns, but the words are magnificent projection of the glory of Christ and of his wonders, so that the music is unmarred, I feel. It's just fewer...

Patterson:

Do you ever use it in yours? Use those materials in your performances with your choir?

White:

Oh, yeah.

Patterson:

Oh, OK. Even though it's not traditional to use them in an African-American Congregational setting.

White:

Well, you know, we have African-American Catholics.

Patterson:

But I mean, in your church performances, or...

White:

In a concert, proper, a concert proper you would use some of the Catholic Gregorian chants or...

Patterson:

But not in the actual church service.

White:

Yeah, not in -- well, that's hard to say, but a Methodist church has a tradition of chanting also. Methodists and Presbyterians chant. Well, even Baptists, they still chant the Lord's Prayer in many Baptist churches now, in the old style.

Patterson:

So there'd be some crossover.

White:

Yeah. There's a little crossover.

Patterson:

And what are some of these others?

White:

Here's a Christian Science hymnal, over there, and then of course the (inaudible) Catholic, Christian Science (inaudible). And these are the Episcopalian here, Episcopalian hymnal, and this is the Church of God and Christ. They published a hymnal for their church, even though many of the Church of God and Christ denominations don't use the book. You know, their church was not founded on particular hymns, seeing it was more Gospel or spiritual or inspired, spontaneous gospel singing.

Patterson:

What would some of those songs' lyrics look like? In other words, they would be more of the first person, I, kind of...

White:

You mean in Church of God and Christ?

Patterson:

Uh-huh.

White:

Oh, not in the hymnals. The hymnals are all...

Patterson:

Going to be the same. OK.

White:

...introduce more corporate worship of a congregational style. But you still find...

Patterson:

Gospel songs in there?

White:

Yeah. Some gospel songs. And historical persons, like C. Albert Tinley, Charles Albert Tinley, who was really the father of gospel music, or gospel hymns before Dorsey, and he is given credit with writing the early gospel songs, congregational gospel songs, congregational gospel songs.

Patterson:

The congregational gospel songs. So there's the more personal gospel songs, and then there are the congregational gospel songs.

White:

Well, the personal ones are those that are -- Mahalia Jackson, was it Mahalia Jackson, sang and the, what is it, Martin and Morris, or Roberta Martin composed the gospel songs for performance.

Patterson:

What is the "His Fullness" songs? What is that?

White:

"His Fullness," this is another black denomination that's sort of a -- this is the Church of Christ Holiness, and these are the songs that were written by Charles Price Jones, who was the founder of the denomination. We have a large, well, several -- three or four large churches here.

Patterson:

Here in Los Angeles.

White:

In Los Angeles. He moved to Los Angeles and I think he died here. He founded -- well, the church was originally founded in Mississippi, in Jackson, Mississippi, and he was a Baptist to begin with. He had a different realization and, you know, where is it -- the Lawrence Church is -- well, the first church he founded is called, you will find it in most cities. Christ Church. It's called Christ Church. Christ Temple, Christ Temple or Christ Church. In every church, we have a Christ Temple here on 54th and Crenshaw, 54th and 10th Avenue or something, is the denomination. It's an old church. It's over on Adams and Hooper Avenue. Bethel Church of Christ Holiness, which is Charles Price Jones.

Patterson:

And so he's written most of these.

White:

And these are most of -- yeah. He was inspired to write hymns for his congregation, hymns and anthems for his congregation, hymns and anthems for his congregation to sing.

Patterson:

And where did his materials hail from? Where they his?

White:

They were his realization that came to him as he was inspired by Scripture and so forth.

Patterson:

Ah, I see.

White:

He -- fortunately, I was able -- a girl I knew who was my associate when I was at Grant who played the piano for me and so forth, her mother was kind of Charles Price Jones's secretary, and so she gave me -- I don't know whether it was Charles Price Jones's handwritten interpretation of his songs, or whether she wrote them, but I have the old copies.

Patterson:

Oh, you do? Where are they?

White:

I don't bring those out! They're someplace.

Patterson:

Oh, that would be great to see. What was her name, the secretary?

White:

I can't remember. I just asked her yesterday, her mother's name. Let's see. Plumber. Her name is Plumber. I can't remember their first name. Mrs. Plumber. There's a big Plumber in the Church of Christ Holiness. There's -- that's the big name. And this is what I cherish, that I've found. While I was in Salt Lake City, I went and picked up the Mormon hymnal. So this is it, the Mormon hymnal. I don't hold them long enough so that you can see, but...



Patterson:

How would you describe the...

White:

Well, these are hymns. They're not hymns that you would find in a hymn book, in a hymnal. These are hymns written by Mormons for Mormons. And so they express the -- their hopes and aspirations for, what is it, for the Kingdom of God, through the Mormonist as they are -- were inspired by Moroni, which was the angel that guided, you know, what's his name that founded the Mormon church. I can't remember. (inaudible)

Patterson:

So then these are...

White:

So these are their hymns.

Patterson:

And they lean towards a certain realm of thought.

White:

Yes.

Patterson:

That come from that particular inspiration. How would you describe that, and compare and contrast?

White:

Well, and traditional, they're in traditional hymn form. They're in hymn form. The text is very, very simple, you know, and there's some things you -- well, we'll say that many churches now have adopted that Mormon hymn and they sing it, "Come, Come Ye Saints." You know, they sing them now. It's in their hymnbook.

Patterson:

So there's some borrowing in it from between the denominations.

White:

Yeah. And then you have your United Methodists, or it was called the Methodist Episcopal Church originally, but now it's the United Methodist, and this was the...

Patterson:

Songs of Zion.

White:

That was the Black Methodists, just wanted to put out a book specifically for -- that included particular hymns for the black congregates.

Patterson:

Would that be related to the AME Zion?

White:

No, no, this is just the Methodists, United Methodists.

Patterson:

So the United Methodists with their black sort of leaning...

White:

They have a just -- it's not a black denomination Methodist. The Methodist Church is not. The AMEs came out of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Patterson:

Right. But they did create a hymnal that spoke to their black...

White:

No, they didn't. Their black constituents, you know.

Patterson:

Would that predate...

White:

We have a tendency all the time, when we join, we're in for something, we have to have a black caucus, you know, so we have that little black caucus, and when we decide to design something for...

Patterson:

And interpret the music based on...

White:

Well, no, they just felt that there were -- you know, (inaudible). I don't know how to put it together in words, but these were just typical songs sung by blacks in worship service, and they felt that they weren't using these particular songs in the white denomination, so they wanted to use them more in their Black Methodist churches.

Patterson:

I see. They have more of the black vernacular and the spelling, "Dere's no Hidin'."

White:

Well, no, this is a spiritual. That's an old spiritual. That's why I guess.

Patterson:

So they're including that.

White:

Some spirituals, more spirituals than you find in the traditional hymn book.

Patterson:

So these were included in the Methodist service.

White:

In the black congregations, those, not particular -- and the white Methodist congregations.

Patterson:

Songs of Zion. Is that one next to it another version of that?

White:

Oh, no. This is a -- what do you call it, a companion to the hymnal. And you'll find many denominations put out a companion to the hymnal, which is an explanation of the hymn and where the hymn came from. It's history, and when the hymn came into existence. And that's what you find is just the writings about the hymn, the hymn writer and the hymn (inaudible) and sometimes how to perform the hymn.

Patterson:

And how much would you use a book like this? Do you use this particular one often?

White:

Not particularly. No.

Patterson:

Does the history of the song ever inform how you...

White:

Oh, yes. You use it in teaching. I would assign a student to go and if they didn't know anything about a hymn I told them to go and look the hymn up, the history, who wrote it, what the hymn is. The hymns have tunes and why the hymn has this particular tune, what is it associated with, and all. So there are (inaudible).

Patterson:

"Lift Every Voice and Sing." What about that one?

White:

That's the...

Patterson:

Looks like a Volume Two of it?

White:

Yeah. This is the -- this hymnal that was published by whom? Can't remember.  
This is the Catholic, the Catholic Church published a hymnal.

Patterson:

An African-American hymnal, published by the...

White:

By the Catholic Church.

Patterson:

What was the motivation to do this?

White:

Well, you know, in the Sixties when they had all these uprisings, everybody wanted their own thing and they wanted to do their own thing, and many of the denominations felt that there wasn't enough black presence in the worship service, music particularly, so they wanted to add more.

Patterson:

So then this was a Congregational element.

White:

Book of worship, yeah, songs.

Patterson:

So the Catholic Church adopted that congregational kind of a setting for music.

White:

Well, for those congregations that were predominantly black.

Patterson:

I see, and this is Curtis Winfield Cisco(?), creative liturgist, gifted musician, devoted priest. (inaudible) I see. Interesting.

White:

As we have with those churches that are predominantly Mexican or Spanish, you'll find more hymns devoted to -- and in the language that they can understand and written by Spanish people.

Patterson:

Was this something that came out of Los Angeles?

White:

No, no, no. This came out of the National Conference.

Patterson:

The National Conference.

White:

And these are Presbyterian, I think. These are the Presbyterian hymnbooks. OK, and another book that I love very much, and I found in an old bookstore when it was a new book.

Patterson:

A Shaker hymnal.

White:

Mm-hmm. You know, the Shaker religion was back in the 18th century, back in I guess the backwoods of Philadelphia, and these are unusual hymns and psalms.

Patterson:

How so? Talk about the Shakers.

White:

Oh, I don't know anything about them. I just bought it to be more knowledgeable. I don't know that...

Patterson:

And what do you love most about that?

White:

Because it's old.

Patterson:

Yes.

White:

History, it's history. I haven't really studied this, so I don't know the songs nor the composers.

Patterson:

And when did you say these were written, then? How old are they?

White:

You can't say when they were written. You have to look at each one.

Patterson:

But you just know that they were old, from an older period.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Where do you go and shop for these special treasure books? (laughter)

White:

I don't shop. I'm always on workshops.

Patterson:

You said you found it in a bookstore.

White:

In a bookstore. I go and look at old books.

Patterson:

Do you have a favorite old bookstore that you go to?

White:

No, it's whenever I've been in a city. When I'm in a city downtown or just walk around and find a bookstore, old bookstore and just go back and wherever they are. Where it's smelly, and that's where you'll find a good book.  
(laughter)

Patterson:

Are there any in Los Angeles that you like?

White:

Oh, no, I don't know. I haven't found any.

Patterson:

What else do you have then, anything else?

White:

No, well, these are just stories, hymns, stories, books in hymnology, hymn story and so forth. This is the Hampton Book of Negro Spirituals and just things for research.

Patterson:

Yeah. And the bottom shelf?

White:

The bottom shelf is mostly the publications from the American Guild of Organists, their monthly publications and so I...

Patterson:

Can we see one?

White:

I save them all because it has interesting articles. I'll take these in the back. Interesting articles and pictures. Pictures of organs. I just love pictures of organs.

Patterson:

Beautiful. OK.



White:

And helpful information for the organist and for the director of music of the church and so forth, articles about programs. So I have -- it was about two or three years of...

Patterson:

Of issues down there. And what about those black binders on the right?

White:

Oh, those are just the, what do you call it, the directory. The directory of organists in Los Angeles and the American Guild of Organists. Churches and the organists.

Patterson:

Of Los Angeles and Los Angeles area, southern California looks like.

White:

Yeah.

Crew:

Would you hold that up again?

White:

Some might be national. National.

Patterson:

Central, Coast, Inland Empire, Kern County, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Orange County, Palomar, San Diego.

White:

Just names the churches and who the organist is.

Patterson:

Yeah, so these come in the mail to you?

White:

Yeah. Well, you have to belong to the organization.

Patterson:

I see, great. Wow, lots of stuff there. And then we have this other bookcase over...

Crew:

(inaudible) (laughter)

White:

I'm tired of talking.

Patterson:

How long have you been talking?

White:

Two hours.

Patterson:

No...

White:

Yeah, this is two o'clock!

Patterson:

Yeah, but we didn't start until 12:30 and then we didn't start...

Crew:

It's not two o'clock! Is it two o'clock?

White:

Five minutes to two. Four minutes.

Crew:

We've been recording for...

Patterson:

An hour.

White:

Look at your watch!

Patterson:

Just 40 minutes? Are you tired, though? Do you...

White:

Yeah, (inaudible) talk.

Patterson:

OK! If you're tired...

Crew:

We've been recording for 40 minutes.

Patterson:

Recorded 40 minutes. OK. Well, do you want us to just come back next time to do the other? Or do you want to... It's up to you, Don. It's up to you, it's up to you. I don't want to wear you out.

White:

Well, we can talk about that. I guess talk about the closet.

Patterson:

OK, so this is the two areas and then we'll stop and we'll do the rest another time.

White:

Because I don't know interesting these things, and so...

Patterson:

Well, then it won't take long. (inaudible) Something might pop out when Adrianna feels better. We'll get your arms back in shape. So this is...

White:

Well, can't you put them... put your elbow up here and put it on the piano.

Crew:

You're just not going to look very pretty if I go that low.

White:

Well, don't put it on me all the time! (laughter)

Crew:

It's on the books. It's on the books a lot, on your hand. It's very nice.

Patterson:

OK. So, OK. I might as well write down the information there. For St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

White:

I should -- I thought I had a brochure. Would've had the address down.

Patterson:

March 18. What day of the week is that?

White:

That's Sunday.

Patterson:

Sunday.

White:

I don't know what I did with all the brochures.

Patterson:

OK, I'm going to write on here where it is. St. Philip's is where, now?

White:

2801 Stanford, Stanford.

Patterson:

Stanford?

White:

I have to educate everybody.

Patterson:

Where's the cross street?

White:

You put that under me.

Patterson:

Oh, I'm so sorry.

White:

Yeah, when you write, because it comes through.

Patterson:

Oh, it'll scratch. I'm so sorry. And cross street?

White:

28th Street and you know where Griffith is? OK, you know where Adams is, Adams Boulevard. Adams and Griffith, you know where Adams and Griffith is?

Patterson:

I know where Adams is.

White:

You know where Central Avenue is.

Patterson:

Uh-huh.

White:

So it's probably, well, we'll say one block west of Central. This would be two blocks west of Central on 28th Street, two blocks, and is about three blocks, three or four blocks north of Jefferson Boulevard.

Patterson:

OK.

White:

There's an elementary school there, and I can't think of the name of that elementary school right by the church, they use for parking, for parking.

Patterson:

OK.

Crew:

(inaudible)

White:

Three o'clock.

Patterson:

Three p.m. Sunday.

White:

Now, we're going to sing for Margaret on her -- it's the 26th of this month. A Monday night performance. Did she tell you about that?

Patterson:

On the 26th? No. I had to do jury duty on Monday, so I couldn't keep my appointment with her on Monday.

White:

Yeah, every Monday of next month she has a program for her Heritage Foundation.

Patterson:

Where is it going to be?

White:

At the Church, New Bethel.

Patterson:

New Bethel.

White:

New Bethel Baptist, and it's 99th and Flower. Now, that's in Inglewood. So that's one block west of Prairie and one block north of Century.

Patterson:

OK.

White:

That church is right on the corner.

Patterson:

That would be kind of cool, Adriana.

Crew:

You'll be singing with...

Patterson:

They'll be on the same program, Margaret and...

White:

And a couple of other, I guess, groups or so.

Crew:

Oh, that's wonderful. We will...

Patterson:

We should show up Monday.

Crew:

(inaudible) And that would really give us a (inaudible).

Patterson:

What we're doing, yeah. So what time of the day?

White:

Seven p.m.

White:

Seven p.m, Monday night.

Crew:

I'm going to a (inaudible).

Patterson:

OK, let's just quickly do these two areas and then we'll let Don go, release him from his bondage. (inaudible)

Crew:

He's, like, looking at the leash all confused. (laughter)

Patterson:

So here are your two pianos with your music and you practice here and play and give lessons occasionally?

White:

Yeah, or coach. I don't want anything where I'm confined, I have to be at a certain place every day at the same time. Not anymore. (laughter)

Patterson:

And now and then you have a guest pianist sit with you and...

White:

Oh, yeah, and we play two piano or use also with teaching, showing strength. Flexibility. And evenness of scales sometimes.

Patterson:

So you can demonstrate them and then they can...

White:

Demonstrate immediately while you hear something when this tune is playing.

Patterson:



Gotta be helpful. Do you have a favorite partner pianist that plays with you?

White:

No.

Patterson:

No? Just different people from time to time? And what are the materials behind you on the bookshelf?

White:

Over here in this case, it's hard to say what this is. Here I have my collection of spirituals and every time I buy something, the spirituals. These are the solo spirituals, not choral spirituals, is the Hall Johnson. You can come over closer if you want to. This is a Hall Johnson collection of spirituals. These are solo spirituals, and this is just published and so if -- it's interesting, because it also has a CD with it for students who are learning, so they can learn the interpretation. Just a lot of information, a lot of notes about the performers and the spirituals.

Patterson:

Would you talk about just briefly, just sort of a brief description of the -- or brief explanation of the difference between a hymn and a spiritual?

White:

Oh, no, you can't. (laughter)

Patterson:

Just real simple?

White:

Well, the spiritual is a non-composed musical composition that developed out of slavery, out of the emotions and the conditions of slavery. And most of the spirituals even though they were downtrodden and all, but the (inaudible) spirituals in with some feeling of hope and the security of being in Christ, so and...

Patterson:

And what else do you have there?

White:

The traditional collections in here, the Burleigh collection of spirituals, Harry T. Burleigh, who was a very famous tenor for many years at a white church in Boston where he sang and he made arrangements, artistic arrangements of the spiritual for performances. And this is his collection, and there's many solo collections. This is another famous person, Edward Botner in New York, who was a collector, or he arranged spirituals for solo and chor-- mostly solo voice and choral. There are a lot of people but I...

Patterson:

What are your favorite?

White:

Oh, there are no favorites. I just collect them. People call me and want to go, well, do you have -- have you heard of this spiritual? And I say, well, maybe not, so I look through the collection to see if it's listed. (inaudible) And then J. Roseman Johnson. I have the other, his collection. And I had a habit of loaning my music to people and then you never receive it.

Patterson:

What are some of those other papers up there? The things that you...

Crew:

(inaudible) wonderful place to place things, under this light. Looks really nice. We might want to shoot it.

Patterson:

OK. Yay, just impromptu.

White:

Well, I had a collection of -- well, here's a collection of Negro art songs, which is published by Willis Patterson, University of Michigan, and there is several edi-- there's two editions of the art songs written by black composers. These are not spirituals. These are the...

Patterson:

But it says the...

White:

These are poems of black composers that are written in the classical style and classical form.

Patterson:

What kinds of lyrical material is it? What words?

White:

Oh, words from...

Patterson:

Are they religious, mostly?

White:

No, well, they can be anything, everything.

Crew:

(inaudible)

White:

Oh, I don't know. This book, it was arranged by Hall Johnson. It's "At the Feet of Jesus." "At the feet of Jesus, sorrow in my soul, gather up the heartbreak, Lord, and make me whole at the feet of Jesus. Trouble I see, Lord let your mercy come, drifting down on me."

Patterson:

How would they be compared to, say, gospel songs?

White:

Well, gospel songs, as I said, are product of 1940's or so, so gospel songs are composed compositions.

Patterson:

And aren't these composed, from all the new negro spirituals?

White:

No. Well, yes, I guess they are. Or these were the negro spirituals, yeah. They are more contemporary arrangements or so.

Patterson:

I see, I see. Uh-huh. More like art, music, that you said. What else do you have up there?

White:

Well, then I had also (inaudible) collection of other persons (inaudible). Collection of Yerolga Nicks who is a woman composer of contemporary gospel music. She writes very well.

Patterson:

Is she in L.A.?

White:

No, no. She's from New Jersey, someplace, where is -- it's Philadelphia. I know a lot of the people so they send me their writings and, you probably know of Glenn Burleigh who is a contemporary gospel writer, but he's a very fine composer, a concert pianist, has played with many of the leading orchestras and concertos and so he writes a lot of gospel music. His most famous piece is the "Order of My Steps" (inaudible). And then I put together -- I want to get pieces. These are the compositions of Michael McKay, who's out of Houston, Texas, so I try to put all his stuff together so I can find it when necessary. And a fellow who lives here, does a lot of writing, Glenn Jones.

Patterson:

Glenn Jones.

White:

Reverend Glenn Jones. He has moved to Arkansas. He is heading a music department at an Arkansas Baptist seminary, I guess.

Patterson:

He grew up here in Los Angeles?

White:

Yeah, in Los Angeles.

Patterson:

And what denomination is he?

White:

Baptist.

Patterson:

He's Baptist.

White:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, and these are his songs. (inaudible) So I just -- that he's published. And...

Patterson:

And some of your compositions, (inaudible) huh?

White:

And these -- some of my compositions that I -- this is the organ composition that I'd written. I tried to write an organ prelude for the worship service on familiar tunes that a black congregation would know. People (inaudible) -- I remember playing a recital at one time and a man came up to me and he said, "I enjoyed your recital," Mr. White, but I didn't know anything you played. And I said -- well, we get stuck with only listening to certain songs, a certain hymn, and we don't learn the others, so I say, well, let me write some preludes or organ solos on familiar songs that the congregation would kind of hear, a tune that they like. That's all.

Patterson:

So you wrote a prelude to...

White:

Several. (inaudible)

Patterson:

Several.

White:

All of this book are different compositions.

Patterson:

And did you write -- did you write some -- what are the -- how would you describe some of the other compositions that you write, if you had to put them in a genre or in a...

White:

Well, they're organ solos. They're solos.

Patterson:

They're organ solos.

White:

Solos, yeah.

Patterson:

What about choral works?

White:

Like anybody else would write. Well, I have some choral works, but these are the organ works. And these -- this is the choral composition. I've written on the commandments. I did a choral composition on each commandment, and then one for each of the Beatitudes.

Patterson:

Are there titles there? Did you title them based on the commandment that (inaudible).

White:

Yeah, like this one is -- well, I -- this song is commandment number four, whatever commandment four is, I don't remember.

Crew:

Have we talked about the (inaudible)?

Patterson:

And then open that up?

Crew:

There, and now you can...

White:

Commandment four. This is "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."  
That's the fourth commandment.

Patterson:

I want to hear it!

White:

No. You have to have a choir! (laughter)

Patterson:

I want to hear it!

Crew:

(inaudible)(laughter) Are you going to perform any of these?

White:

These are -- this was written many times. I mean, they've been performed...

Crew:

No, I mean, like, any of these times, like in the next couple of...

White:

No, no. That's one thing I don't -- I don't force my compositions on my choir to perform.

Crew:

You can force them on us!

White:

No, no, no.

Patterson:

Would you have to force them, when they...

White:

Well, that isn't always the -- (inaudible) on the Beatitudes, this is "Blessed Are They Who Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness," is...

Patterson:

And would you open that one up?

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

OK, whenever you're ready. And this is choral?

White:

Yeah.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Gosh, I wish we could hear that. Are any of them recorded?

White:

No.

Patterson:

Really, Don?

White:

I doubt it.

Patterson:



Oh! So these were -- what inspired these compositions?

White:

Well, as a composer, you're inspired by just sound. If you put the words...

Patterson:

Was anything going on in your life at the time? What made you say, well, I really want to write...

White:

No, no, no. Some composers write (inaudible) to form, a lot of them. They don't write because you're inspired by something, or you...

Crew:

Can we see more?

White:

Oh, (inaudible) enough.

Crew:

They look beautiful.

White:

This is...

Patterson:

Organ Compositions of Don Lee White. Oh, there are several then in that. Is that like a booklet of compositions, then?

White:

Well, yeah, this one has, what, the "Crusader's Hymn," the "Waters of Babylon," is down there, "Joy to the World," and "Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross," you know.

Patterson:

These are your compositions, though.

White:

Yeah, well, my arrangements, organ arrangements.

Patterson:

Organ arrangements of existing songs?

White:

Mm-hmm.

Crew:

Hold up...

White:

(inaudible)

Crew:

Might be something hand-written back there.

White:

Well, this was the organ compositions that I wrote.

Patterson:

Are they...

Crew:

(inaudible) that top page, right there.

Patterson:

By the waters of...

White:

"By the Waters of Babylon."

Patterson:

So this is a song that you wrote?

White:

Organ composition.

Patterson:

OK. Did you ever write it for any soloists, any...

White:

Not particularly. I have a couple of solos.

Patterson:

Compositions?

White:

But I'm not -- mine's mostly for organ and piano. That's all.

Crew:

Well, there's more back there.

White:

No, that's all the same thing and so forth. These are -- this is a Thanksgiving hymn and so forth.

Patterson:

A Thanksgiving hymn for organ. Did you perform it, that one?

White:

Well, I don't write for me to perform, I write for other persons, you know.

Patterson:

Maybe I should ask, was it performed?

White:

Oh, they were performed, yeah.

Patterson:

But being an organist, wouldn't you...

White:

I don't perform my own works. They're too difficult!

Patterson:

Why? Oh! (laughter) They're too difficult? So you write more difficult than...

White:

I don't -- I just write. You know, I don't write for me. I write for the -- for the works to be performed, or to express whatever the title of the composition is. And some of them are very, very difficult and some of them are very easy and some people commission me to write a prelude or something.

Patterson:

Do you have a favorite organist that you like to play your compositions, that you would seek to have play?

White:

Like any composers, as long as somebody will play 'em, I'm very happy.

Patterson:

Is there anyone in L.A. that you can mention that has played your compositions?

White:

No.

Patterson:

Any organist?

White:

No. Mostly concert organists that are back east, so...

Patterson:

Have these...

White:

Well, yeah, one person. A John West has played a couple of my compositions. You know John West? John West is a black fellow who is a concern organist. He's recognized throughout the United States as an extremely fine player.

Patterson:

And he played here in the (inaudible) Hall?

White:

Well, he's in Los Angeles.

Patterson:

And so he played in a Los Angeles church? Or a concert hall? Or...

White:

Well, yeah. He plays church -- he has recordings and all, and he was organist at the very swank Brentwood Presbyterian church for several years.

Patterson:

What organ did he play, say the Thanksgiving -- did he play that Thanksgiving piece?

White:

Oh, I don't know which one -- no, he didn't play that one.

Patterson:

He didn't play that one. Which one did he play? Do you remember?

White:

No.

Patterson:

OK. OK, so what are -- what's over there on that side?

White:

Oh, these are oratorios or cantatas and so forth. Something that -- I put them up here close to me because maybe there's something that's current that I might be working on or at the time and so I bring them out and put them here for a sound or a reference. These are cantatas.

Patterson:

Anything you're working on now?

White:

No. There's all (inaudible). These are all choral compositions for the church that I've taught, anthems, gospel, whatever it is that -- music of the black church.

Patterson:

So those are the -- that's the sheet music that you would hand out to the choir?

White:

Yeah, well, I always keep a copy for me, my copies with my notes and everything, or something probably on there.

Patterson:

So you conduct from these copies.

White:

Uh-huh.

Patterson:

OK, anything else down there that you could tell us about? That's about it?

White:

No. That's it. Well, as an organist, these are my organ -- not my compositions, but these are organ compositions. These are concert literature. These are just the organ, that every organist plays. And that's all.

Patterson:

Do you have a particular favorite composition on the organ, that you could say is your all time favorite to play?

White:

No. Depends on the time what you're doing, if you have the technique to play it. (laughter) No.

Patterson:

OK.

Crew:

And we are out of tape.

Patterson:

OK. Yeah, I'm going to let Don go. I don't want him to be mad at us. (laughter)  
Thank you, that was wonderful today, Don.

Crew:

Yes, it was really beautiful.

Patterson:

Really, really great.

White:

That's a lot of talking.

Patterson:

Don't you let me forget when we come back to do those awards that are on top of the bookcase. (inaudible) You're going to give me a workout! Is there any way that (inaudible)?

Crew:

Yeah, I could (inaudible). I'm going to borrow one (inaudible) It's a tripod.

Patterson:

We could put it on your shoulder or something?

Crew:

(inaudible) for the next session. (inaudible)

Patterson:

That was great, though, Don, thank you so much.

## **1.6. Session 5 (March 5, 2007)**

Patterson:

The, uh...

White:

Ericson, I don't know the name.

Patterson:

Now, you wouldn't have known (inaudible) as Ericson, but she lived on 36th Street. And at one point she owned property on 36th Street. And...

White:

Because I lived on 33rd.

Patterson:

Did you?

White:

Well, I was 12, 14. I would've been going to junior high school, but I went to John Adams, you know. And all of us walked, just the whole neighborhood. We'd go to school, looking out there and come home together. It was interesting.

Patterson:

Yeah. My grandmother belonged to Sojourner Truth organization for a long time. She was active in that. Are we ready to slate?

Crew:

Almost.

Patterson:

Almost? (inaudible) I always liked singing in the choir. I always sang in the choir in high school and junior high school and...

White:

Now, which high school did you go to?

Patterson:

L.A. High.



White:

Oh.

Patterson:

I made my living as a singer for...

White:

Was David Sears...

Patterson:

Yes!

White:

You know David?

Patterson:

Yes, I do!

White:

Oh, yeah, he was a student of mine.

Patterson:

Was he?

White:

He had a Cal State...

Patterson:

Trombone.

White:

Yeah. Uh-huh, at Cal State L.A.

Patterson:

I know David. We performed together.

White:

And his father had a shoe store, or...

Patterson:

I didn't know his family, but David and I worked jobs together.

White:

Oh, yeah. He does the Emmy Awards today, something. He always does things (inaudible).

Patterson:

David, I know David.

White:

Yeah, and then he taught at L.A., didn't he? He was the band director over there.

Patterson:

He may have, because I hadn't -- I've only seen him once in recent years. We went to Lisa Robert's funeral. Did you know Evelyn Roberts?

White:

Oh, yeah.

Patterson:

I knew them for many, many years, Evelyn Roberts.

White:

Her organization gave me an award or something.

Patterson:

The Accents, yeah.

White:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

I worked with them.

White:

Evelyn and Tommy and (inaudible).

Patterson:

Oh, yeah, Tommy. Oh, yeah, Tommy. Who could forget Tommy? (laughter)

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

OK.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Today is -- what is the date? It's the 7th, isn't it?

Crew:

Yes.

Patterson:

It's the 7th. OK, it's March 7th, 2007, and we're back with Don Lee White, going through his archival collections, all the things that he's collected over the years, and here we are at a collection of materials that are associated with an organization you belong to, right?

White:

Yes, these are the files I guess you might say that I've collected from the National Association of Negro Musicians, and we have four or five local branches of the organizations. I belong to the GLB, the Georgia Lassiter Branch, and that's just one. It's the oldest branch on the West Coast, and that was the one they attributed to being founded by Albert McNeil.

Patterson:

Oh, what are some of the activities that they do? What are their functions?

White:

Oh, well, our main function is to grant scholarships to deserving students and to -- we do high school scholarships and we do a local scholarship, and then a national search for a person to perform at the scholarship contest at the national convention each year, and each year is in a different category. And so this year it is strings, and so we're trying to find -- well, we're already, I guess, found a person to participate.

Patterson:

Do you feel like you've ever found someone that hadn't been otherwise given an opportunity and ended up being special, or went on to do great things?

White:

Oh, yeah, many, many, many.

Patterson:

Any you remember? Anybody that stands out in your mind?

White:

Oh, several, I guess. The one person now who was a violinist, Ron Clark.

Crew:

I'm sorry. Battery died on me. I'm sorry.

White:

You hurry up, because my mind is working now! I'm going to forget it!  
(laughter)

Patterson:

It's -- you tell her now, now, you know! You know, you won't forget it. It'll come out.

White:

Oh, no, it doesn't come back. I don't remember.

Patterson:

It'll come back!

White:

Ron Clarke is a violinist. He's a studio musician who plays for all the Academy Awards and all that sort of stuff. He's played...

Patterson:

Well, I'm going to get that on tape.

White:

Los Angeles Philharmonic, you know. As a young feller, he was our competition, won the National Award.

Patterson:

Are you back on?

Crew:

Yes.

Patterson:

OK, so Ron Clarke was a violinist.

White:

Violinist and who competed locally and then won the region, and then went on to participate nationally and won the national competition. And there's also a young fellow, another fellow named Donald Horne, who is in New York as a performing musician with all of the -- most of the local orchestras. He hasn't made it to, what is it, New York Philharmonic or something. But he is world-recognized and well-known.

Patterson:

And this organization really discovered him.

White:

Well, we didn't, I'd say, discover. We just sponsored them. They have to compete against other persons, you know.

Patterson:

So you were a factor, the organization was a factor in that, in their development.

White:

His development, yeah, but his mother was also a singer and a local person around, Mildred Horne. I don't know if you know the name. They -- when we talk about families, they came out of Vermont Square United Methodist Church on Vermont and Budlong. He grew up out there, and then there's what's his name, Mise, Mise, I can't think of the first name, who competed in piano, national piano competition. She won and she went on to get her Bachelor, Masters, and a Doctorate in piano, and is now a head of the piano department, I guess, at Prairie View A and M college, and she's been teaching there for I guess almost ten years.

Patterson:

She's a native of Los Angeles as well?

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Great. Well, that's good works, certainly. And you say Albert McNeil was instrumental in...

White:

Well, he's credited with reorganizing the group in Los Angeles. There was a group, I guess, back in the early Thirties, the National Association of Negro Musicians and even as early as that time, they presented many concerts in the Los Angeles area and George Robert Garner, the name that stands out, was the director of music at First AME, when it was on Eighth and Towne. You know, he was a very famous tenor, singer, and his wife was a concern pianist, and there was a -- I guess they presented a concert at the Hollywood Bowl, which his wife played concerto with the symphony orchestra. But Albert reorg-- somehow or another, I guess the organization...

Patterson:

Disbanded?

White:

Well, they didn't really disband, I guess, but Albert brought them all back together and...

Patterson:

Reinspired their mission?

White:

Yeah, in the Sixties or so, I guess, a little before, and it's been going kind of regularly since about '60. I think -- OK. This was my first convention. Was this - - no, no, this is '69. This wasn't the first convention. I had it all in order, but I guess I pull things out of order.

Patterson:

Those are all covers of...

White:

I guess maybe then '68 was my first convention.

Patterson:

That you attended?

White:

That I attended.

Patterson:

Mm-hmm. What was your first impression of the organization?

White:

Oh, it was magnificent, because of all of the famous people I'd read about, you know, and to see it all in one room.

Patterson:

For a working purpose.

White:

Mm-hmm. I can't -- the cover page is gone, but I can't -- but this was '68.

Patterson:

That was the year that you joined.

White:

No, yeah.

Patterson:

Or did you just attend that year?

White:

Oh, I was a member. I was a member locally, and that was the first national convention that I went to.

Patterson:

Oh, when did you join?

White:

Oh, as a kid.

Patterson:

As a kid, really?

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Like, what would you say, in the Fifties?

White:

Oh, no. (laughter)

Patterson:

No, you don't have to remember exactly.

White:



I don't keep dates and things in my mind.

Patterson:

You don't have to remember exactly.

White:

So I don't remember...

Patterson:

You can give me approximate! (laughter)

White:

It's hard to say, because I've been playing around for a hundred years.

Patterson:

No! (laughter)

White:

But I mean, I just kept all the programs, and of course, they're just historic.

Patterson:

Who are some of the people you met?

Crew:

Let's see some covers.

Patterson:

Yeah, let's see some covers.

Crew:

If you could just hold them. The covers actually would be...

White:

OK, this was 1994.

Crew:

And if you could tilt it forward, please. That's kind of a reflective, kind of a -- ooh, you have your signature on it, that's great.

White:

This was in Dallas, Texas. This was...

Patterson:

1919, the organization started.

White:

Yeah, it was started, it was founded.

Patterson:

Wow. That's great.

White:

Yeah, and...

Patterson:

Did you get that?

Crew:

Yeah, I got that.

Patterson:

I mean, where did you get it?

Crew:

Right on top of...

Patterson:

OK, right there.

White:

Do you know the name Mrs. Benjamin, Evelyn, Mrs. Fannie Benjamin, who was very popular in the organist is Los Angeles, and she was a member, and she was president of the local branch. Don't take all that junk. No, no.

Patterson:

No, no, that's your signature.

White:

No, no. This was Mrs. Benjamin.

Patterson:

Oh, there she is! She was one of your teachers!

White:

Well, she was my first organ teacher, first organ teacher.

Patterson:

There she is!

White:

At fourteen or so.

Patterson:

Oh, god, you have I'm glad you have a photograph of her, wow. That's great.

White:

And she was president of a local branch for many years.

Patterson:

Really. Oh, OK.

White:

And she kept it going. And I have a picture of her, around 1910.

Patterson:

Oh, my gosh, that's beautiful.

White:

One research leads to another research, so since I liked her so very much I just tried to do a...

Patterson:

And so you kept some of the major events in her life? Did you...

White:

Oh, well, what I remember.

Patterson:

Did you put these together yourself?

White:

Yeah, I guess so.

Patterson:

Sort of a...

White:

Yeah, from writings and places that I've seen things.

Patterson:

Yes, biographical information.

White:

And then...

Patterson:

That's great.

White:

Here she is as a...

Patterson:

Oh, my gosh, look at that photograph.

White:

Teenager, I guess. (inaudible) It's not dated or anything else.

Patterson:

When would you suspect this was? In what decade?

White:

Hmm?

Patterson:

What decade would you suspect this is, this photograph?

White:

Well, I think that's just... That looks like she was, what, 14?

Patterson:

And then if she was born in...

White:

Born in about the turn of the century.

Patterson:

1900's, so this is before 1920.

White:

Yeah, had to be, and I found this picture...

Patterson:

What a beautiful photograph. It's 100 years old, this photograph.

White:

And this man, I don't know, was never labeled and everything else, but I said it possibly is her father. I found several pictures in her memorabilia.

Patterson:

Oh, Don, gosh, you have collected this stuff.

White:

At the organ at People's Independent Church.

Patterson:

Wow.

White:

So she must have been in her 20's or so.

Patterson:

That's great.

White:

And as I just said, just some of her history.

Patterson:

Some memorabilia, mm-hmm.

White:

And this was a very popular woman in Los Angeles, who was a jazz violinist.

Patterson:

Emma Smock.

White:

Yeah. The called her Ginger Smock.

Patterson:

I think... yeah.

White:

She played at Vina's -- what was, Vina's restaurant on Western. She used to play there and all, and she played it...

Patterson:

Did she play Central Avenue?

White:

Oh, yes, she played all over, jazz violin.

Patterson:

I think Betty showed us a picture of her.

White:

And she played event-- well, she played every Sunday at People's Independent Church along with the choir, and she finally got a good job in Vegas and that's where she remained for most of her life.

Patterson:

And she wrote this to you personally and signed it.

White:

She did? I didn't even see it all that time.

Patterson:

Yeah, there's a personal...

White:

(inaudible) I don't even know.

Patterson:

It's a personal signature there.

White:

No, that's to Fanny.

Patterson:

Oh, she wrote it to Fanny.

White:

Fanny, that's what it says, but you can't get it -- I didn't even see it.

Patterson:

So Fanny shared these really personal photographs with you.

White:

No, no, no. She passed, and to preserve things I always run and grab it out of the house, because people take all the pictures and old things, and just throw them away. She didn't have a family, and so to preserve...

Patterson:

I'm so glad you did.

White:

Yeah, some of this stuff. And this was a picture of the Independent choir. There's Albert McNeil.

Patterson:

Oh! (laughter)

White:

And Fannie, and there that's Ginger Smock.

Patterson:

Yes.

White:

The choir.

Patterson:

1940, about 1940.

White:

About 1940.

Patterson:

Wonderful.

White:

I find that many people with pictures and all never date them, and never even list who's on the pictures, so you don't know. You have to really find somebody who was around at the time that can give you...

Patterson:



To even give approximate is...

Crew:

Hold on for a second longer.

White:

Well, you take too long.

Patterson:

Just to get an approximate date is great.

Crew:

One more. It's just a really nice picture. Could you just hold it for a second?

Patterson:

I'll hold it.

White:

And Mrs. Benjamin, her husband, had a cleaning establishment on, what, about 41st or 42nd and Central, right on the corner. And he also had a band.

Patterson:

Oh, really? He was a musician?

White:

And they were called Benjamin Serenaders. They played at a lot of activities. These were some of the soloists of the church, and in the city. This was Jerry Garrett, which is a bass. This was one of the early gospel singers in Los Angeles. This is Marguerite Chapman.

Patterson:

Oh, wasn't this the woman that...

White:

But this isn't the woman that sang in the Porgy and Bess. No, this was a gospel singer, Marguerite Chapman. She sang for many years for Angelus funeral

home, was a soloist there. Was a baritone, Jay Laughlyn who was from -- came out of New York.

Patterson:

Pretty people.

White:

And I can't remember. Did I get -- oh, Eleanor Miller. Eleanor, very fine soprano. I don't know where she was from. And Helen Stewart. And this is Ruth Rochelle, eventually married Jerry Garrett.

Patterson:

And so these soloed in various...

White:

Productions of performances that Albert presented at Independent.

Patterson:

I see. You have some great photos there. Don, you have a wealth of stuff. We were about to pass this closet up! (laughter) That's amazing.

White:

And the rest is just minutes of the branch, minutes of the national and regional meetings and so forth, constitutions, how they've changed over the years, you know, they (inaudible).

Patterson:

So really, this is a history of the organization in here, in this closet.

White:

Yeah. So when I find anything, from even like last night we had a board meeting, so I take the minutes and financial reports and throw them all in there, try and -- look in the closet (laughter). OK.

Patterson:

It's your closet!

White:

My closet. I'm through with the closet! (laughter)

Patterson:

Gosh, it's great that this history is somewhere, collected.

White:

Well, I'm still trying to put it together. Oh, here, this is another interesting project that I am doing. It's an ongoing thing.

Crew:

If you could tilt it forward.

Patterson:

Los Angeles and musicians history and practice. So what does this contain?

White:

Funeral programs of musicians.

Patterson:

Wow, OK. And that's a performance venue that's -- a performance...

White:

Well, there are so many musicians in cities who contribute so much to the life of music, who are not nationally or internationally known. And we forget about them. We'll say, like, your grandmother, persons who play. They might have played for church or taught school, the music teachers would teach school. They're degreed and well-trained, but when they die nobody remembers them. And so I just kind of put it -- started collecting and there was a little thing thing in (inaudible), I guess it was, or some paper, that said "Lest We Forget," which -- remembering people and names, so I just said, that inspired me to keep the works of...

Crew:

Tilt it forward.

White:

It's heavy, and all. I don't want them all to fall out.

Patterson:

I'll help hold.

Crew:

Or we could set it down on something.

White:

Yes, uh-huh.

Patterson:

Oh, these are clippings from 1946.

White:

Clippings about people.

Patterson:

McNeil choir.

White:

Well, they're just dates from anywhere. It depends. Here, like this is Albert's first choir or so grouped together.

Patterson:

Yeah, let's see.

White:

I don't -- I hadn't even shown this to Albert. I don't know if...

Patterson:

I'm sure he'd love to see it. Does he keep things like you do?

White:

I don't know. (laughter)

Crew:

Is he in there or not?

White:

Yeah, there's Albert.

Patterson:

Yeah, he's on the far right. So this is his first choir.

White:

Well, I...

Patterson:

First jubilee choir.

White:

I don't know whether it's the first one of them, or any one.

Patterson:

(inaudible)

White:

The information might be on the back. I'd probably say -- I usually try to put the information about the something, the picture or something on the back. But I have it alphabetized, like Gilbert Allen, Gilbert Allen was the early musician, one of the first early directors at First AME, and he left here. He went to teach at Wiley and I guess that's where he passed, and then I don't have the dates there for him. But it was in the Thirties or Forties, I guess, when he was directing, so these are just people who have passed and have...

Patterson:

Francis Alexander.

White:

Very fine pianist. Taught...

Patterson:

What did she play?

White:

She taught school and she has her private studio. She lived mostly out in Watts on 108th or something. She had her studio there. I think she played at St. John's United Methodist Church on Anzac or something. Remember that street, way out there? Very popular singer.

Patterson:

Iris Tenara Ambrose. So these people are people that are now deceased.

White:

Yes, all of these are deceased.

Patterson:

And these are their funeral programs.

White:

Uh-huh. A picture, at least, and then...

Patterson:

And biographical information.

White:

And biographical information, or what is inside here. Her bio is. And not just Los Angeles. Most...

Patterson:

Calvary Baptist.

White:

Mostly Los Angeles.

Patterson:

Calvary Baptist in Santa Monica.

White:

Santa Monica.

Patterson:

People's Independent as well, huh? She was a secretary during the pastorship of Reverend Clayton Russell.

White:

I just have a lot of people.

Patterson:

Wow, yeah, OK.

White:

Well, there's a very interesting fellow, UCLA graduate, a Ph.D., William Granville Carter, who was head of the music department at Cal Poly Pomona for many years. He died very young, but he was a marvelous historian. Died in, what, '93?

Patterson:

Was a piano player?

White:

Oh, yeah, organ, piano. And his wife Henrietta Carter teaches at -- I can't remember the name of the college she's...

Patterson:

Uh-huh, an educator as well.

White:

But a very marvelous person.

Patterson:

So this is (inaudible).

White:

Well-known in UCLA. And you asked, I guess J.J. should remember him or know about him.

Patterson:

He has some bio information there.

White:

Yeah. It's just that that meant...

Patterson:

James Cleveland.

White:

Mm-hmm.

Patterson:

Jonathan (inaudible).

White:

Well, these are people, a lot of them I knew personally, you know, before they were famous, like Cleveland. We all kind of ran around together.

Patterson:

(inaudible), oh yeah, we saw this (inaudible).

White:

That's in her book?

Patterson:

Yeah, she kept a clipping.

White:

Oh, clipping like mine.

Crew:

Could you tilt it forward a little bit?

White:

Well, you know, you just research it, you just run through all the old newspapers. That's what I love doing.

Patterson:



Yeah, to compile this is just so important.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Gwendolyn Gorden.

White:

She's in San Diego. Was a good friend, composer, marvelous pianist.

Patterson:

Henry Lee -- Henry L. Grant.

White:

Yeah, he was one of the first presidents of the National Association of Negro Musicians in 19-- and this was...

Patterson:

1911.

White:

11, is a... I think -- I don't remember his bio.

Patterson:

Was he from Los Angeles?

White:

No, no.

Patterson:

Oh, OK.

White:

Think it was Chicago. I don't know who Thomas Hall is.

Patterson:

Lewis?

White:

Oh, oh, in Galveston, Texas. She was the sister of a good -- my good buddy in Dallas, so she was the organist at the Avenue L Baptist Church in Galveston, for about 40 or 50 years, so she's... Oh, there it is. She was a good musician.

Patterson:

Did she ever play in Los Angeles?

White:

No, I doubt she even traveled. Well, I just saw a picture...

Patterson:

No Los Angeles stuff, (inaudible).

White:

There is one person, I just saw his...

Patterson:

John Handy.

White:

Well, this guy, jazz pianist, Hampton Hawes, whose father was the minister at Westminster Presbyterian Church, and...

Patterson:

Los Angeles, (inaudible).

White:

Have you heard of Hampton, Hampton Hawes. Marvelous jazz player, and played many times, of course at his father's church. And he had a sister who played. I can't think, remember her name. And there was somebody else here. Yeah.

Patterson:

Dr. William H. Henderson.

White:

Whose father was the Reverend Henderson for the Second Baptist Church, who -- he was a violinist, had a doctorate in music. I think it's UCLA, too. I'm not sure.

Patterson:

William Preston Hayes Henderson.

White:

Good friend.

Patterson:

Violinist.

White:

(inaudible), I just... And as I said, just many people who are keeping all...

Patterson:

This is a great collection.

White:

It's in two volumes, so...

Patterson:

Two volumes!

White:

This is just one.

Patterson:

Wow.

White:

This is -- can't remember. K, just goes as far as K. (laughter) And then this is L to Z. And then the other volume right here.

Patterson:

Oh, wow. Gosh, that's a whole -- wow. Gosh, that's a whole project right there, just going through those two. Whoa. It's mind-boggling.

White:

You know, you clip 'em and then all of a sudden, you have to try to put it together and always file it because I have a whole list, stack of stuff that I haven't filed yet, and...

Patterson:

Yeah, that's -- OK, well, I wish we could take more time on that, that second volume. If anything stands out...

White:

This is the close of this, the end. I said I have a bigger thing on the door saying, "The End."

Patterson:

Very important door, should say "treasure chest."

White:

Where do you want to go now?

Patterson:

Well, we can go to your office.

White:

Oh, well, let me close this. You say my office. This is the dining room. (laughter) It's just...

Patterson:

Well, it doubles as your office?

White:

The office, OK.

Patterson:

OK, I got it. OK. And you've got two cabinets full of...

White:

Three.

Patterson:

Three cabinets, yes.

Crew:

Before we get started (inaudible).

Patterson:

OK, yeah.

Crew:

I want to check the levels. (inaudible)

Patterson:

OK. So you want us to continue, talk just so you can hear the levels? Say something, Don, so she can get the level.

White:

All right. This is the room. This is the room. This is the room. (laughter) I pulled this out. Pulled this out purposely for you.

Patterson:

Oh, great goodies.

White:

Yeah, these are all the -- it's people you can write, you can put down on your resume and all, all the awards, but here they are. Some of them.

Patterson:

Oh, my gosh. OK. We've got to have a place to lay them and shoot them.

Crew:

OK, might not be the best room for it.

Patterson:

OK, maybe we can put them on the piano or something?

White:

Well, you can (inaudible) which ones you want, you know.

Crew:

Can we put them on the piano? That would actually be a really pretty...

White:

Yeah, well, I mean, you can select. You don't have to do all of them. But you know, you can...

Patterson:

Ooh, look how pretty that is! Oh, my gosh.

White:

Not all of them! (laughter) You'd have to come back!

Patterson:

He's got so many awards, that we can't get 'em all.

White:

What is that, came out of what? What was that in?

Patterson:

Oh, they're beautiful, too, just beautiful to look at.

White:

I don't know, that's just -- I don't even know what they are, half of them.

Patterson:

Citizenship and activities enhancing community betterment. Presented by Mark Ridley Thomas, councilman of district, 2001. So you direct...

Crew:

(inaudible)

White:

Well, you don't have to do that now.

Patterson:

Do you mind doing it at the end?

White:

At the end, yeah.

Patterson:

Shoot all it, and then we'll do this and then come back to his awards. OK, so this cabinet holds what more treasures, could you possibly have?

White:

Oh, this -- I try to -- can you come out? I don't want you to get your stroller caught. I always bump into that because it's the plexiglass. I try to put most of my stuff in categories, so I can find them, and these are writing on African-American music or history, somehow or another, and this is Dr. Caldwell's book on Afro-American music.

Patterson:

Yeah, I have that one.

White:

And this is a nice, definitive book on the history of the Negro spiritual, written by a French priest, Bruno Cheneu. It's very interesting. It's a good book. I guess they might be using it, I think this edition was just a couple of years ago. This is, what, 2000 so it's still kind of a new book. It's very, very good. I have a friend who used to be a librarian at Southern University who does research, and we used to compare notes on our research. He has published more than I -- he publishes his research and I just pile it up, but this is -- what is that, facts and material on black musicians based on original source, and these are old concert programs, I guess. His work is mostly out in Detroit and back East.

Patterson:

So you have a copy of...

White:

Yeah, we share things. I share what I research with him, and he gives me copies of his research, you know. This is autographed.

Patterson:

And he wrote that to you, mm-hmm, great. Arthur...

White:

Labrew.

Patterson:

R. Labrew.

White:

Published in 1996.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

So he's doing in his neck of the woods sort of what you do in yours, right?

White:

Oh, he's just doing really extensive research in history of black music, because there's one book which is -- I can't find it now -- which he did on -- I don't know where it is. It's in here someplace. Or it might be up there.

Patterson:

Of all these histories, which one really resonated? Did anything stand out that resonated for you as far as, you know, influencing you?

White:

No, I use all of them. It depends on what I'm working on at the time. If it's church music, or if it's church history or if it's just general slave music or slave performances and looking for names of the slave performers or people before 1865, I'm looking for something after 1865, or you know, it's just -- depends on what you're looking at, and I just collect books. This is one thing I found in an old book shop.



Patterson:

Interesting cover. The cover is great. Do you mind, may I?

White:

Just the etching of -- not just musicians, it's just history.

Patterson:

I just wanted to see what that cover art was.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Ethnic groups and language families. It's interesting that they did this. Out of the mists of time. OK, who -- Russell Adams, illustrations by Eugene Winslow, but I don't think this is the same illustrator on the cover. I was interested in the art, yeah. Because it's the...

White:

I had that a long time. I don't know, when was this?

Patterson:

'63, '64. Wonder who did the cover painting. I won't be able to... OK, all right.

White:

Yeah, and -- OK, there's so many things. Here's an interesting book. This is a history of Negro Baptists, 1750 up to 1930 and when I want to do research, I say, what music was sung in 1800 or something, and some of it's listed here. You have to go through several books to find what they sang, and at least this indicates the title of the composition, but it say out of the Baptist hymnal and I don't know -- it doesn't say which edition or which hymnal, because we didn't have any African-American hymnals at that time. The first American -- I mean the African-American hymnal was 1801, and this was back in...

Patterson:

So they were referring to the general...

White:

I don't know. I haven't found out what they were referring to with here, but it gives a history of the proceedings.

Patterson:

When was that book written?

White:

Just a few...

Patterson:

Louis Jordan...

White:

1995. (inaudible)

Patterson:

Nashville, Tennessee.

White:

I guess, yeah, that was printed in 1995, and they say it was a reprint.

Patterson:

So that's been useful in (inaudible) book.

White:

And here's a history of National Association of Negro Musicians, which was published by the National.

Patterson:

OK, so somebody did do a history of the organization.

White:

Yeah, Doris McGinty. Do you know that name, Doris? It was a historian. They hired Doris to put the material together in one collection.

Patterson:

When did she do that?

White:

Oh, it was just about three years ago.

Patterson:

How would you say what she collected compares with the materials you've collected?

White:

Well, everybody in the association is sharing our material with her. We sent material to her, and she -- this was in 1904.

Patterson:

2004.

White:

2004, yeah. And so I...

Patterson:

So some of your materials went to her to compile this.

White:

Yeah, to help compile the history.

Patterson:

OK, so a history has been done.

White:

And several people have done histories. It depends on how they slant the history, and I have an interesting old book of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Patterson:

Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal history. That's interesting, they call it scraps of history.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

James A...

White:

Handy.

Patterson:

Handy. I think I saw his name in your book, a photograph of him in one of those. No?

White:

No, I don't think so.

Patterson:

Maybe it was another Handy.

White:

Yeah, another one. He was bishop of -- one of the bishops of the African Methodist...

Patterson:

And when was this -- this may have been...

White:

This might be one of those that doesn't have a publication dated anywhere. No, it doesn't. Or either I lost the page.

Patterson:

I wonder when this was...

White:

No publication date.

Patterson:

Any idea, like generally? What is that signature page in there?

White:

That's Handy.

Patterson:

Right there.

White:

Oh, I don't know. It's probably the person who might have owned the book.

Patterson:

Uh-huh, J.C.

White:

Looks like a Coleman.

Patterson:

J. Coleman.

White:

I don't know.

Patterson:

Wow, it'd be great to know when it was written.

White:

See, they don't give any dates in all of them. No.

Patterson:

(inaudible) biographical sketch of the author, (inaudible) a biographical sketch of the author.

White:

No, but they don't give the date of this publication anywhere. But it...

Patterson:

What are his dates, let's see. He was...

White:

Bishop Handy? Who?

Patterson:

Born in 1826. Now, wait a minute now. If he was born in 1826, then this is definitely a 19th-century piece, if he wrote it and he was born...

White:

Yeah, in the late, in the middle (inaudible).

Patterson:

So this book is over 100 years old.

White:

Yeah. So as I said...

Patterson:

Wow, that's pretty precious.

White:

(inaudible) things (inaudible). Well, let's see. These are the journals published by Michael -- what's Michael's last name. Where is it? Who was at Yale and so forth, various...

Patterson:

The Journal of Black Sacred Music.

Crew:

If you could hold one up?

White:

I'm trying to find his name, you know. Michael Spencer.

Patterson:

Oh, yeah, Jan Michael Spencer.

Crew:

The cover would be great, and hold it up even more vertical.

White:

And we know each other, we're friends, and so...

Patterson:

Yeah, I use his work.

White:

A lot of writings. Writes very astutely. And AME.

Patterson:

Yeah, he has an interesting slant on things. I like the way he thinks.

White:

But has done a lot of research on the music of the church. OK, and the second shelf, here are piano compositions by African-American composers. This is a book that was published by Samuel Coleridge Taylor. His arrangement -- yeah, arrangements, I guess, of piano, concert piano arrangements of African-American spirituals.

Patterson:

Wow.

White:

And over here, which is the organ music by African-American composers. This is Ralph Simpson, who was head of the music department at Tennessee State. He has a lot of things he was -- he is an organist. He's still living. This is David Hurd, who was a concert organist. He's just about in his late 40's or 50's, a marvelous performer. Noel del'Osta, who's out of Detroit, a composer.

Patterson:

So these are national -- composers from all over the nation.

White:

Oh, yeah.

Patterson:

That compose organ music. Any Los Angeles people in there?

White:

Only one and as I said, might not have put him here. Only one. No. Oh, yeah, here he is.

Patterson:

Calvin Taylor.

White:

Calvin Taylor, who's a Seventh-Day Adventist who grew up in -- at -- do you know the Wadsworth Seven-Day Adventist Church that turned, changed its name to the University Seven-Day Adventist Church.

Patterson:

Where is it located?

White:

On Budlong and, well, used to be Santa Barbara, you know. King Boulevard. Yeah, he grew up in that church. He's a concert organist, plays, family still a member of the church.

Patterson:

Where is he now?

White:

He's at the University of Kentucky, I think.

Patterson:

Oh, he left.

White:

He's a professor of music there.

Patterson:

I see. OK.



White:

He has a doctorate from University of Michigan in organ.

Patterson:

And he grew up in L.A.?

White:

Yeah. And then this is just junk.

Patterson:

Oh, yeah, right. I'm sure there's stuff in there. (laughter) OK. I see there's something down here, living musicians, L.A. area and more? So you have more L.A. history here.

White:

Yeah, these are living. The book in the -- that have passed on.

Patterson:

Those were people that had passed on.

White:

These are persons -- this was part of the lecture I did at Holman, this...

Patterson:

Oh, OK.

Crew:

The chair in (inaudible) maybe sit (inaudible). You could sit here and we need to get the light in the right way.

White:

You want me to sit there? OK. Well, then I can't see what I'm doing. (laughter)  
All right. See, I just (inaudible) don't want to...

Patterson:

I got it. What is this?

White:

This is Olivia Shepard, who was the organist at the Old Saint Paul Baptist Church on 21st and Naomi. This was probably a picture in the early 20's or 1919, or 1910 or something.

Patterson:

Really.

White:

You know, Saint Paul was the church that started the gospel music rage in Los Angeles, you know, they had the broadcasts in the Forties. What was the name, Reverend Brannon in Saint Paul Baptist, voices of -- I forgot what they called it. But she was -- this -- I was showing probably -- well, this is Olivia then, but most churches in Los Angeles had pipe organs and I was just interested in the pipe organ that they had in the church at the time.

Patterson:

Who took this photograph?

White:

I don't know. I got this from her.

Patterson:

Great photograph.

White:

I'd talk to people. I've known her most of my life. You know, here's a picture I like to show people. (laughter) Can you see that? I guess (inaudible).

Patterson:

It's a little dark.

White:

Dark, yeah.

Crew:

If we put it maybe against a piece of paper, and then...

White:

Well, this doesn't have to, I just like that.

Patterson:

That's because you're in it! (laughter)

White:

Yeah, because I'm in it! (laughter) And you don't recognize the other person?

Patterson:

No, who is it?

White:

Jesse Norman.

Patterson:

Oh, so this is Don Lee White and Jesse Norman. You guys were having a good time! Where was this taken?

White:

I can't say. Someplace we were drinking. (laughter) It was after a concert, I think.

Patterson:

Was it here in L.A.?

White:

Yes, mm-hmm. Yeah, it was -- probably here in L.A., because I followed her around quite a bit. Oh, that was what I did at home. But these are the living musicians. They're all alphabetized. I put them in there.

Patterson:

Wow, great.

White:

Now, what would you like to see about...

Patterson:

Just pull out things that you find important to you.

White:

Well, this is not important, I just -- I think it's important to know that these people have contributed musically to society.

Patterson:

It's all important, equ-- right. I was just...

White:

And I just don't want all the names to just be lost, you know. And these are just...

Patterson:

Anything stand out that you'd like to show us? Here's some -- the bigger pictures where we can see for Adrianna's camera.

White:

Well, I did -- I made everything in, what do you call them, transparencies. So when I lecture I could show it on a screen, and that's why, I guess -- or I'd just put it in there so it's good.

Patterson:

I understand.

White:

Now, this is a very famous woman, A.C. Harris Bilbrew.

Patterson:

She's from Los Angeles?

White:

Not really, but she came in, what 1910 or something.

Patterson:

And her career was here.

White:

Here, yes. Her father was one of the founders of Philips Temple CME Church. He was one of the first ministers and she was an elocutionist and choir director and most people knew A.C. Bilbrew. One of the actresses in the old films, Tarzan films and the old plantation films that they used to do about the Negroes.

Patterson:

She played in those?

White:

She played in those, yes.

Patterson:

Oh, really?

White:

Uh-huh.

Patterson:

And she passed in 1974?

White:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Patterson:

Did you know her personally?

White:

Personally, yes.

Patterson:

She was your friend?

White:

Her daughter was Robert V. (inaudible) Remember we saw that name before, and you said unusual name? The only name I knew was Robert. Her name was Robert V., Robert V. Edwards who was organist at First AME.

Patterson:

And they were friends?

White:

Uh-huh. Well, that was their daughter, Robert V., and then she had...

Patterson:

Oh, it was her daughter.

White:

And she had twin daughters, Maudie and Kitty Bilbrew, who were jazz pianists and singers, in the early 30's and 40's in Los Angeles.

Patterson:

Here in L.A.

White:

Yeah. Mm-hmm, yeah. So that's a popular woman. And this was -- well, this was the president of our National Association of Negro Musicians now. And that's Roland Carter, Dr. Roland Carter, who's professor of music at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. And this is his bio, (inaudible). Somebody did that with (inaudible) really comprehensive. So I couldn't abstract anything, so I just put the whole book in there. And anything I find about a person, I just stick it in.

Patterson:

Oh, who's that?

White:

You don't know who this is?

Patterson:

No.

White:

That's Margaret Deaureaux.

Patterson:

Look at that picture of her! I didn't recognize her!

White:

Did you recognize her?

Crew:

Yeah.

White:

Uh-huh.

Patterson:

You did?

Crew:

I did.

White:

(laughter)

Patterson:

Oh my god. I didn't recognize her. That's a pretty picture. When did you -- when was that taken?

White:

Oh, I don't know. Like I said, I just collect things and put them, keep them together, and know that she's a good musician. She's well-trained. She's a graduate of Southern University. I guess she gave you all that information. I can probably get more from you. But I just -- I used to play for her father, (inaudible) before he was a minister. But I guess he was a minister before -- I guess he pastored, or maybe he was pastor. I can't even remember. Can you see that?

Patterson:

That one's going to be tough.

White:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Who is that?

White:

Thurston Frasier.

Patterson:

There he is. Wow.

White:

People me-- mention all these gospel persons, but they don't know what they look like.

Patterson:

Yeah, sometimes you see them, pictures at different points in their life, and they look different.

White:

Yeah, I know. We were friends, and I used to play for him and sing, well-trained singer, not just gospel music but he sang the literature. So you have the name of somebody you want to know? I see if I have them in the collection. Young fellow who's conducting in Los Angeles, a singer and -- I don't know if he plays or not, but he directs choirs.

Patterson:

Robert L. Jones.

White:

Don't have much about him. I don't know. (inaudible) And this is -- well, that's not a good picture. I have another one of him someplace, Anthony Kendrick



who is organist at Westminster Presbyterian Church, and now he's a young fellow. He's in his late forties, schoolteacher. But these are people who have contributed and are teaching and are into the music program that we need to remember -- that's a better, I guess, little better picture of him. That's his bio. He's from Indiana.

Patterson:

But he grew up here.

White:

Well, not really. But he's...

Patterson:

He's made his home here.

White:

Yeah, made his home here. He's been here I guess since he was 23 or 24. And there's (inaudible). Here's a fellow that I guess people don't know, but that is a concert pianist and has been here for many years. I don't know when he came. What's his name? His last name is Lydell, Lydell, like (inaudible), concert pianist who's head of the piano department at San Diego State. So, and his sister Gwen Lydell is an operatic soprano who lives in the Riverside area, so -- who sings, is in opera in L.A. and all-around marvelous, both of them marvelous performers.

Patterson:

Musical family.

White:

Yeah. But as I said, we lose these people that don't know anything about them unless somebody mentioned them to...

Patterson:

Jennifer Lindsey.

White:

Yeah, or was that... Where is she? Jennifer is a phenomenal violinist.

Patterson:

It's hard to -- maybe we can sit something behind this.

White:

Oh, that's Jennifer. Oh, that's not a good picture, I think.

Patterson:

You can't see her very well.

White:

That's not a good picture, but Jennifer is a phenomenal violinist. She won our national competition about two, three years ago, four years ago, because -- and she played the Tchaikovsky violin concerto, which is extremely difficult, and...

Patterson:

She lives here in L.A.?

White:

Yes. Well, in Orange County.

Patterson:

In Orange County.

White:

Yeah, and believe it or not, she's working on her doctorate in mathematics.

Patterson:

There you go again, math and music.

White:

Yeah, and then here...

Patterson:

Oh, there he is. Albert McNeil. There he is.

White:

When he had black hair.

Patterson:

A great shirt. (laughter)

White:

As I said, Albert was kind of -- he mentored me and I -- he was resp...

Crew:

(inaudible) on those two pictures.

White:

He was responsible for, I guess, my involvement.

Patterson:

Are you OK? Your arm, huh?

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Uh-huh, Don's looking at his watch, Adrianna, better hurry up.

White:

Yeah, I was (inaudible) how longer -- these battery are going out faster than the... (laughter)

Crew:

It's annoying. They're (inaudible) charging them and they didn't.

Patterson:

They didn't charge them? We won't keep you long, Don, today.

White:

(inaudible) I just don't know (inaudible).

Patterson:

We won't keep you long.

White:

You have these young kids that are coming who are phenomenal. (inaudible) this young boy, here. He's only about 18 or 19.

Patterson:

Oh, wait, let's get him.

White:

But I mean, this is not a good picture. I can find another...

Patterson:

We'll just have you talk about him.

White:

Well, I don't know much about him. I know he's one of our contestants and we've given him a scholarship, and he plays extremely well, the cello, and I just would not like to see the fate of these younger kids as it's happened to, say, like the Marylou Williams and the other persons, though I -- there's nothing wrong with jazz, but they have to resort to playing in nightclubs or something else to make a living, you know, because there is no outlet for them in the concert field.

Patterson:

So his name is Drake Price.

White:

Drake Price.

Patterson:

So Drake Price, and how old would you say?

Crew:

(inaudible) get Albert's two pictures?

Patterson:

OK.

White:

I don't know. I'd say, he's just I guess...

Patterson:

Just late teens, early twenties.

White:

18 or 19. I don't think he's graduated from high school, so he would be even younger. I think he goes to Hamilton, is that, Hamilton High School in the Arts.

Patterson:

Drake Price. OK, let's see Drake again. Here he is. It's hard to get a clear picture of him, but you can get a little bit. So, the Negro -- that National Association of Negro Musicians sponsored...

White:

We've been him a scholarship and he's won the scholarship, a high school competition, and he's played several times for the organization.

Patterson:

Yeah, that's great.

White:

And I just can't -- I don't have any blank pages to put this fellow on.

Patterson:

Maybe we could borrow one.

Crew:

Here, there's one right here.

Patterson:

OK.

White:

This is a brilliant young fellow. Can you -- is it clear enough?

Patterson:

Fernando Pullum.

White:

Yeah, who was the instrumental teacher at Washington High School, Washington Preparatory High School.

Crew:

If you could just lay it flat, because...

White:

He didn't grow up in Los Angeles, but I don't remember where he's from. I think he's from -- graduate of the University of Michigan.

Patterson:

And he moved out here.

White:

Moved out here.

Patterson:

And made his home in L.A.

White:

Mm-hmm. But he's developed so many young teenagers, musically.

Patterson:

Fernando Pullum, winner, National Music Teacher's Award. Wow, that's great. Is he still teaching at Washington?

White:

No. And that's another thing that happens, the fate of our teachers and so when you become very good and you seem to be working so hard in the school system, they move you up to administration or you at least, to make

some money, to exist you move from the classroom into administration or regional something, you know, and so you lose that contact with the kids.

Patterson:

Yes. So that's what happened to him?

White:

Yeah, that's what he's doing now, I think. He's still in this USD school system. Yeah. OK. This is not -- this is not a local person, but an Ajawan Pratt who is a concert pianist out of Chicago. So he's traveled all over the world, and...

Patterson:

Has he performed here?

White:

Yes, he's performed here. But I'm afraid that people didn't know the name, and so they didn't... Well, the black community at least didn't attend the performances. We had them, what, three years ago, perform for the National Convention of our Negro Musicians Association, and the boy is phenomenal, phenomenal. You're talking about making the keyboard sing. He does. So another girl, woman (inaudible), you probably know Althea Waites? Do you know that name?

Patterson:

Sounds familiar.

White:

She's teaching at Long Beach State, piano at Long Beach State. Girl is phenomenal.

Patterson:

Althea Waites.

White:

But you can't really get a career, you know. Can't get a career started and that financial backing that you need doesn't really come, so you end up teaching, I guess, not really. But I guess she enjoys teaching but is a concert pianist and

has specialized with piano compositions of African-American women composers, and she does recitals. I guess...

Patterson:

Do you have a picture of her?

White:

No. I don't think so.

Patterson:

And she's in Long Beach here.

White:

Yeah. Althea Waits. W, I don't have a picture. Some people, you know so well, you don't (laughter) -- you forget to get their picture. You talk to them all the time.

Patterson:

Well, your collection would be...

White:

No, I don't have her.

Patterson:

Is waiting for her, huh?

White:

But I'll get her.

Patterson:

(laughter) OK. Wow, that's great.

White:

Is that enough of this one?

Patterson:

OK. Well, you've got two more cabinets here.



White:

These loose leaf folders, though, are lifesavers, though. They don't usually -- they tear, and the holes you, know.

Patterson:

I know, I struggle with mine, too. I got those little reinforcements, but then you've got to sit and do that. OK, I'm going to put it back where you found it.

White:

Just one other thing I think, that I like, is of interest, that I am doing now, this is a current project. I haven't put a title, really with it.

Patterson:

Historical African-American churches of Los Angeles California, 1850 to 1950. OK, so you've indexed, you've started...

White:

I'm trying to do the index, you know, putting it together, content or something.

Patterson:

Great.

White:

And there's -- I think for me it's very interesting, the oldest black church in California is in Sacramento, and it's not Los Angeles. (laughter) When people say First AME, the oldest black church, that's the oldest black church in Los Angeles, because we have an older church in San Bernadino or Bakersfield, that are older than First AME, because with the slaves when they came out across the plains and so, they settled in Bakersfield and San Bernadino and Fresno and so forth because that was cotton country.

Patterson:

I see. Los Angeles became a city of the United States in 1850. So that's right from the beginning.

White:

Of course, Los Angeles, the First AME. I think -- these are just categorized by chronologically.

Patterson:

Is that the way you did the whole...

White:

Well, that's just (inaudible) I'm starting it now. I'm going to have to do it alphabetically so I can find -- these are just 18-- what is it, 1872 was first AME. And it's just the history we're looking at. This is the old Eighth and Towne. It was build on a cathedral in England, the old church, and there's Biddy Mason.

Patterson:

Yes, I've seen that photograph. Organizer. (inaudible) First AME Church.

White:

Searching through something, and this is horrible you can't find it, but I was searching for something and this was -- don't take this, because you can't see it. I couldn't get it nowhere (inaudible).

Patterson:

What is it?

White:

This is a picture of the first-- see (inaudible) came off and I couldn't lighten it up -- of the First Church of -- building that First AME occupied, and it was upstairs. Have you heard of Azusa Street? It was upstairs and when they vacated the building, Azusa Street or the Azusa Revival movement took over that building that they were in, the very first building that first AME was in, and this was a picture of the congregation on the stairs over a -- what do you call them, some kind of stable or something or other.

Patterson:

Wow, 1903. Where did you get the original photograph?

White:

Oh, no, don't look at me! I got them searching around and it was in something.

Patterson:

If you could find the original and it was in something, maybe it can be touched and fixed a little bit.

White:

Yeah, no, and the history. This is another old church in Los Angeles, that was the old building, the building was located on 12th and Hemlock and I guess that one of the reasons I have a difficulty with people requesting renaming streets. You rename the street and people forget where the street was.

Patterson:

Yeah, it breaks the history, doesn't it.

White:

Yeah. And I went looking for Hemlock and I don't think I found it, but I knew about where it was, 12th Street, east of Central, was Hemlock, and that was the old church and the new church now is on McKinley, the new building.

Patterson:

Tabernacle.

White:

It was like Angelus funeral home. It used to be at Jefferson and where -- there's a point that Jefferson and 30-something Street, but that street where it came to a point used to be called Austin, and they've changed the name and so people forget about the history that happened there at Austin, because when I was a little kid, my first -- well, my dance teacher, I studied dancing, tap dancing, was on Austin, and that's why I used to walk by Angelus funeral home to get to my dancing lessons.

Patterson:

Yes.

Crew:

We're out of tape, so...

Patterson:

OK.

Crew:

If it's not one thing, it's another.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

OK, and I've got to go blow my nose.

White:

OK. Well, I don't have to see any more of that, but...

Crew:

(inaudible) check level.

Patterson:

Level, level, level.

White:

All right, we're talking.

Patterson:

We're talking. Back in effect. (inaudible) So this section here is, what?

White:

Well, as I said, one research leads to the other, another research, and ideas pop into my head. And so do you know about the lectionary for the church? Well, the lectionary is the Scripture readings that are done by most churches throughout the year, and the common lectionary is where all the churches are studying the same Scriptures throughout the year, and the sermons are built on the Bible readings that no matter which church you go to, the church is following the common lectionary, you are hearing the exposition or expository presentation of the Scripture, and it's the same Scripture.

Patterson:

For AME.

White:

No, for the whole -- any church. Any denomination.

Patterson:

I see.

White:

So I got the idea that with that, I would do a -- kind of like a lectionary of music for the African and American churches. And so I took all the bulletins. I've visited many churches and bulletins that I would find in African-American churches, and if they listed the music and Scriptures that they sang that day, then I would put it in a compilation and maybe one day publish a musical lectionary of compositions, or songs that are familiar to the African-American church. You know, for music that would go along with the Scriptures.

Patterson:

Yes, great, OK.

White:

And then, well, anything, any little writings that I find on gospel music, I put into a folder. These are little clippings, and J.J.'s little publication and everything is all in here about gospel music, and things about spirituals are put, clipped and put in here, copy and put it in the folder, anything about the history or why, you know, spirituals are written or how they were written or slave music.

Patterson:

Can we see maybe something out of that?

White:

Let's see. Like, this was on -- this was in the program written by Albert McNeil, just the other day. So it was a new approach, different writing, so I put it in here. So if I do a lecture or something about spirituals, I can refer to all of this. I don't -- this is from the encyclopedia. (inaudible) Usually I date it on the back

someplace. I didn't date this one, from which publication. What is this, this is about the spiritual.

Patterson:

Spiritos, es is spirimo. I can't...

White:

Oh, spiritual.

Patterson:

Spiridio.

White:

Oh, (inaudible).

Patterson:

OK, there you go.

White:

It was the page, yeah. So, it's all history that you need when you're lecturing.

Patterson:

The Africans, OK. So you're connecting African heritage and its connection to the spiritual evolution.

White:

Well, I just collected, all sorts of (inaudible).

Patterson:

I see.

White:

Anything I find I just put it there.

Patterson:

Johnny (inaudible) music syllabus. OK. OK, great.

White:

So like I said, just every -- and I guess from here on, these are -- I did a presentation on hymn writers of African-American descent, and so these are about -- this is about Wendell Whalun, who was head of the music department and was an authority on the spiritual and Afro-American hymns, head of the music department at Morehouse. And this is Charles Price Jones, who was founder of the Church of Christ Holiness, and he wrote a lot of hymns, even has a hymnal, complete hymnal. We did the hymnals. That was "In His Fullness," his hymnal. And the -- I'm sorry, as I said, I do everything on transparency so you can't see anything here.

Patterson:

Well, we'll put a paper behind it.

White:

Well, this part of the hymnal...

Patterson:

We saw that, yeah.

White:

Yeah, the African -- of the AM-- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Patterson:

We got that the other day.

White:

And I did a -- what do you call it, a publication or writing or something in a book about black hymnals, so this is just part of the history of the different hymnals that were published by black denominations or African-American denominations, historically, what they contain. And this is -- this is -- well, all of this is part of the lecture, I guess, so you have to know. That's an AME Zion still. That's a Baptist (inaudible). This is -- those are everything from collection from the hymnal catalog, or hymnal.

Patterson:

So some of the music itself.

White:

And some of the music is written by African-American composers. You put that back there. This was a very famous person, J.G. Layton, who was responsible for the -- going to look all -- the literature of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He composed many hymns to be used in the -- can't think of the word. In services, in the liturgical services, so we don't think of the African-American church and black church as having a liturgical connection, but it is because as long as you do something the same time each Sunday at the same place, the service becomes a liturgy, part of a liturgy. So these are just people, and this is the man who's responsible for the African-Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Patterson:

(inaudible)

White:

Varik, who was the founder of that church.

Patterson:

Who was this?

White:

Who was that? I don't remember who that is. I'd have to look at my other notes. He was part of the AME Zion Church as well. One of the bishops. I can't keep all this stuff in my mind. I'll have to refer to notes.

Patterson:

(inaudible) so much.

White:

And these are just hymns, but you probably will not find in the hymn books anymore. They're old hymns. When their hymn isn't sung very regularly, then they drop it in subsequent editions of the hymnal. These are just founders of different black African-American denominations. That's part of the lecture, you do that first, and then you look at the hymns.

Patterson:



Where did you hear these lectures?

White:

Oh, anywhere. You know, (inaudible) asked me. All over.

Patterson:

Like, at Cal State LA, or...

White:

Oh, no. Los Angeles is not really a historical air. People around here I don't think are that much interesting in history, as you'd find in the South and back East, where they really thrive on preserving the history. Los Angeles, you can tell by the buildings. We tear down the old and put up new, so all the old structures are lost, gone. We don't preserve them. Gone again.

Patterson:

But that's really -- we need to change that, here. Because we can still have the new. It's OK. But we don't have to get rid of the old. And I know land is an issue, and we don't want to get rid of the sky by building up. That's what they do in New York, and -- but we have to find a way to preserve our history. I think that the -- like, the California African-American Museum maybe can expand in some ways where we can find archives

White:

Well, they've done it. But they've collected a lot of pictures and all, the history, but you can't find those buildings or the places and all that they talk about.

Patterson:

But even to have some archival references to them that are open to the public and accessible...

White:

Yeah, so whereas it's my...

Patterson:

That are open to the public and accessible to the public.

White:

I put it so I can see things, and now I can't find it. It was supposed to be here. Supposed to be here. Hang on, no, that's Hampton. Oh, here, I put it over here. You've heard of Azusa, no? Azusa Street Revival. Well, here, I have all the material. Every time I see anything written about Azusa, and I put it in a little folder and even though the Azusa church is all those old places up there on Temple and Bonniebrae and so forth, they're gone, so we don't know exactly what they look like, but this is just a history, might go around and find books of Azusa, about Azusa Street and all, just collect it and put it there, so if I -- oh, yeah, they did do a -- they just celebrated their revival. Was it the centennial of Azusa Street? And they found a...

Patterson:

The William Seymour story. And who was that?

White:

He was the founder of the Azusa revival. See, all these places are gone. So as I said, I just collect them until somebody wants the information about the place, and so -- and I found this, don't ask me where. It was the Reverend Seymour, but somebody I got -- whatever did, they wrote all this stuff around it, which is kind of like a history, the pictures you have. I don't know when or the date of it or anything, but I think it's...

Patterson:

1983? September 4, 1983, from Lula Belle. Lula Belle.

White:

Lula Belle, I guess.

Patterson:

(inaudible), maybe?

White:

I don't know.

Patterson:

September 4th, 19-- this is one of the original pictures of the Elder William Seymour, the 1906 revival and the downtown...

White:

Civic center.

Patterson:

Civic center, where the Holy Spirit fell.

White:

That's the history of that Azusa Revival and, you know.

Patterson:

There is no church now. Wow.

White:

It was -- I just collected it because J.J.'s signature's on it.

Patterson:

Yeah, she's famous too, that's right. (laughter) That's right.

White:

OK, where did I get this from? You see, that's why I don't...

Patterson:

You had put over there.

White:

Oh, I was over here. I put it back in another place and then I don't know what I've done, where it is, and it just takes me -- in here are just pictures and things to be catalogued.

Patterson:

Oh, yeah, for filing?

White:

I've got to find out where to put them and all.

Patterson:

What is that other folder next to the Azusa? Yeah, on this side?

White:

This here? I guess "to be filed." Those are pictures of, I don't know, to be filed, or I don't know whether those are organs or what. Pictures, just pictures I have.

Patterson:

Various pictures you have to put in their place. Uh-huh.

White:

Just have to find where I'm going to put them, uh-huh.

Patterson:

And what are -- what's the rest of this, the People's Independent -- so that's a...

White:

Yeah, this is a history of People's Independent Church, history of Second Baptist Church, and pictures. These are the, what do you call them, anniversary booklets I've asked for from different places and people have sent me from all over the United States. This is Sharon Baptist Church, Baltimore, Maryland, from which I abstract pictures and history and put into (inaudible) research. What is this? I don't know. These are things that need to be catalogued too. Or this is what -- oh, this was St. Paul Baptist Church. This is in -- the present minister.

Patterson:

Joes Anthony Ward, 2004. Mm-hmm.

White:

Yeah, as I said, here's another thing. As I said, I buy -- this is the history of the Mormon Church, which you can't really find anymore.

Patterson:

Oh, let's not forget to put this back in the Azusa folder, Don. Yeah.

White:

Oh, these (inaudible). I pulled that out before. No, this is Shiloh Baptist in Washington, D.C., their history.

Patterson:

So you have history from various...

White:

Various churches throughout the United States.

Patterson:

Churches throughout the nation, mm-hmm. This is a 16th edition, brief history of the growth and doctrines of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, 1974.

White:

You know, the Mormon Church has been very secretive in its history. You can't find it, but I found this book in an old bookstore so I just grabbed it up. This is the Church of Christ Holiness, 1864.

Patterson:

You have photographs in there too, huh.

White:

Yeah, I don't know what those are. But that -- these are not the pictures of this building, I don't think. I don't know why I put it there, but I have to put it back so I remember when I look at it. This is the history of the church. And pastors. I guess this is one of the original. You know, this is the theme song of the Church of Christ Holiness. This was written by Charles Price Jones. So all the churches, his churches of this denomination, they sang this all over the United States. I was doing a presentation one on hymnity at Hampton, and I had the people who came to the workshop and sang this song, and we were singing it, and they got into it, and we were singing it and they got into it. We're singing it very lustily, and people next door who were, I think, were next to the kitchen or something, and they heard the song and they rushed in and they said, "That's our church, you know, that's our hymn!" (laughter) And I said, oh

-- so it was interesting, you know. And that's what I guess I'm interested in, is that we don't lose the hymnity of the church written by our African-American composers. We could become so contemporary, and everything is clap clap jump jump jump hands up, and two liners, and our young people don't know hymns at all, and so we've...

Patterson:

But the young musicians that you have worked with, I mean, there's still passion here. It's just expressed in a maybe more measured way when performing the hymns in a traditional type expression.

White:

Well, you can perform the hymns in any way you want to. That's what I was telling them last couple of weeks at home. And you can do whatever you want to with them. It's your interpretation. But don't lose the text and the tune. You can change it, make it in a contemporary style or whatever you want to. But the texts were the best literature you could put together, and it isn't just Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, you know, and you get caught up in rhythm, and not making sense. Sidetracking, when I was growing up, and most people were growing up, ministers recited poetry a lot. And you heard poetry, but you don't hear it now. You might hear them recite a hymn, the same old hymns, you know, over and over and over again. But young people don't hear poetry, so they're not involved with hearing the best poetry. Rap is all right, but they can improve it if they would, say, express it by maybe finding another word for what they're trying to describe, and making the context flow with greater -- what do I want to say -- greater flow of a better language.

Patterson:

So then, one of the things that you feel has been missing is a more, a deeper exploration of the language of the music.

White:

Yeah, the language that you have to use and you have to communicate with. Today's communicative thing is going backwards.

Patterson:

Well, rap is interesting, because rap is bringing back language. Yes, it's just a repetitive accompaniment sometimes, but the language is -- but you feel like it can be applied more to a broader...

White:

Broader perspective of language.

Patterson:

I see. But you don't feel like it's -- you have no objection to rearranging the original material.

White:

Oh, hymns or hymn tunes are -- no, I don't have any objection to it, no.

Patterson:

So we're losing the content and the linguistic expression.

White:

Yeah, the hymnology of the different denominations. The people who took the time to write the hymns, they wrote the hymns because of the theology of that denomination, and that is being lost. We don't know -- I don't say we don't know it. Many people don't know why they are Methodists, why am I a Baptist, or why am I an AME Zion, or why am I Church of God in Christ. They just feel that because I got to the church that's it, and they don't know the tenets or the -- what do you call it -- the discipline that's written for that denomination.

Patterson:

And the hymns that are chosen represent that philosophy

White:

That denomin-- for their philosophy and what they believe.

Patterson:

So these differences are subtle, but carried by the songs.

White:

Mm-hmm.

Patterson:

Some of those songs are shared between denominations.

White:

Some are. It's never been agreed upon by the ecumenical council of churches, and they have a whole list of about 500 songs, 500 hymns at least, that can be shared, or you will find them in all the hymnals, you know, because they don't offend any of the disciplines of the other denominations so when congregations meet together you should do the research to find out these -- which songs can be sung.

Patterson:

So, can you think of any hymns that are particularly representative of one denomination or another, and why?

White:

No, no. I could. I'd have to do some research, and no, it doesn't come to mind right now.

Patterson:

OK, but that is what some of the differences are, is based in the content of the hymn.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Wow, OK.

White:

Well, just generally, you wouldn't take a song that talks about -- like in baptism, I go down in the water and I'm covered up with the water, something in baptism, when you go to a church that believes in sprinkling. That's the discipline of that particular church.



Patterson:

And there are songs that talk about the sprinkling and songs that talk about going down to the water.

White:

And the Catholic Church is all over that, "Asperges Me." Asperges means sprinkling me. You sprinkle me.

Patterson:

I see, so it would be inappropriate to use the hymn talking about going...

White:

Yeah, that talks about taking me down in the water.

Patterson:

Yes, is that more of a Baptist...

White:

Yeah, it's more of a Baptist thing, because Baptists believe you have to go down into the water and come up, as I say, a new creature, a new individual. The water is the cleaning and the changing of the person's life.

Patterson:

And which does the AME...

White:

Sprinkling.

Patterson:

The sprinkling, I see. And the Methodists?

White:

A sprinkling, but AME, you can opt to be baptized in the pool or in the water or sprinkled, but most of it is being sprinkled. But the philosophy or the discipline indicates why you -- why the Methodists are more sprinkle-oriented, and I can't go into all that, that's a theological thing which I don't really know.

Patterson:

But the hymns that are used reflect that theology.

White:

Yes.

Patterson:

I see, mm-hmm. So, getting back to some of the collections you have here, did we go down to this level?

White:

Well, these are still churches of the 19th and 20th century.

Patterson:

19th and 20th century.

White:

Churches book one and two.

Patterson:

17th and 18th century.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Wow, so that's -- so you have photographs in there of some of the old...

White:

Well, yeah.

Patterson:

OK, just pull out the 17th and 18th century ones?

White:

Ohh.

Patterson:

I know, just one more big book, Don. Just one more.

White:

See, these are clippings that I had clipped and have to file and put someplace.  
What's this, is it the 17th?

Patterson:

What is it? Sit yours...

White:

Sit yourself down.

Patterson:

Sit yourself down and be comfortable. OK.

White:

See, I (inaudible).

Patterson:

No, don't worry, I got it.

White:

I leave -- I don't know what I've done with things. Well, just clippings that I find. This was a news article, the history events and I have to read it again, I don't remember, but it dated 1764 or something. I don't know what it is. I found it interesting for the research.

Patterson:

Do you have where you got those clippings? Do you usually...

White:

Oh, it's on there someplace, on the back or something.

Patterson:

It is on there? OK.

White:

Usually I put it on the back.

Patterson:

History of the footwash?

White:

Yeah, I found...

Patterson:

That's -- wow.

White:

This friend -- it was a woman I know, goes every year, and she was born wherever this takes place, in Alabama. The foot wash, something, and what do you think of?

Patterson:

Washing the feet as a -- like you were just talking about, ritual that happens in water.

White:

Ritual, ritual that happens in the -- one of the denominations and so forth.

Patterson:

Yeah, just what we were talking about.

White:

But this has nothing to do with washing of the feet. It's just -- I don't know how the term, it was applied, but they don't wash the feet at this particular festival, which has been going on for 118 years.

Patterson:

Wow, what do they do?

White:

Well, I -- it's just a meeting of the townspeople, more so than churches. So it's historically...

Patterson:

I wonder if originally it had something to do with the ritual...

White:

Well, they didn't say so in this writing. So I just put it there.

Patterson:

Historic black churches founded during the 18th and 19th century.

White:

And, let's see, where is the First Church (inaudible)? Talk about the meeting houses. It's interesting that there were meeting houses before there were churches, the meeting houses when they were I guess freed from the masters' overseeing of -- slaves could not just gather, so when they gathered there was also the master was present to see what they were doing and why they were doing whatever it was. But then after they became a little freer, then the meeting houses joined different denominations. That's why we have, like, the Congregation Baptists and the CMEs, AMEs and so forth. They joined those conferences. And some of these I found on the Internet.

Patterson:

Charleston, South Carolina. So this is a collection that spans the nation, these churches.

White:

Yes. And then this is a history. Where was I, where was this -- I don't remember where. I was in Virginia, some little town in Virginia, and I always run to libraries so I went to the library and here they had this recorded history of all the Baptist churches in this Virginia city when they were founded and everything, so went and duplicated it and put it in my research. This is actually -- what was that. Well...

Patterson:

Inventory of the church archives of Virginia, historical survey.

White:

And interesting here, this starts 1821, these churches. They list the names of the churches, these are the black churches.

Patterson:

So you're doing something similar for Los Angeles.

White:

No, this is all in the collection.

Patterson:

No, I'm saying for Los Angeles, something similar to what they did and you're doing that for Los Angeles

White:

Yeah, but I don't have the pictures of these churches and so forth. But this is a general, all over the United States.

Patterson:

No, I know, but I'm just saying that -- right.

White:

And so that one is just for Los Angeles, California at least.

Patterson:

But a similar kind of...

White:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Patterson:

Kind of work, process, methodology.

White:

The churches by states, (inaudible), and I can't get enough. Let's see, this is 1806, found the church, and these are big churches, if you can see the pictures of them. Arizona, there's California. Sts. Andrews, 1850. Sacramento.

Patterson:

Sacramento, that's right. First AME, 1872, and Westminster Presbyterian in Los Angeles.

White:

Presbyterian is in 1904.

Patterson:

The first AME Pasadena, 1888, Mt. Zion Baptist, Los Angeles, 1892. St. Paul, 1907.

White:

Yeah, and just recently that church caught fire, two months ago.

Patterson:

Second AME. Yes, I saw that on the news.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

Did they find out how that happened?

White:

No, that as I know of. So I have -- was not every state, I don't have all the history. 1872.

Patterson:

Emmanuel AME Church, Portsmouth, Virginia, congregation established 1772, AME affiliation 1864.

White:

You know, I just saw in a magazine where you can apply for a travel grant for doing some kind of research on churches or something, so I need to apply for a grant. I want to at least take the pictures of some of these places, and go -- but they only given something like \$1,800.

Patterson:

That's not enough to go very far! Maybe you go to one general region and get a car and have to drive around. (laughter) First American Baptist -- First African Baptist.

White:

African Baptist.

Patterson:

Beginning of (inaudible), 1774.

White:

Yeah, that's...

Patterson:

George Lyle, a slave.

White:

Yes, that's the church attributed with being the first organized African-American church in the United States.

Patterson:

Let's see, where was that?

White:

And (inaudible) George Lyle, and there's (inaudible) and I forgot where it is. Here.

Patterson:

Byron Street.

White:

(inaudible), where is the city?

Patterson:

Savannah, Georgia, 1788.



White:

Oh, she's running out again? That means we're about through! (laughter)

Patterson:

Don's about to kick us out, we'd better hurry up and get this last bit.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

(laughter) Are we OK?

White:

But I find it so interesting, since I'm an organist, I look at these old old churches and here these churches have pipe organs in them, you know, which they haven't maintained. Some, a few of them, have.

Patterson:

There's a technique, I'm sure a very specific technique. You have to know the instrument well, I imagine. It's a complex instrument.

White:

Not really, just have to study.

Patterson:

You have to study! (laughter)

White:

As I said, you have to study, but I said (inaudible) in those early centuries, 1870, 18-0-something, and here you find a slave who could play it, and you look at that background of the slave, they have studied in Europe! Or studied in Jamaica or someplace, but they still have...

Patterson:

But do you find that a lot of the organs you've visited are poorly maintained?

White:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Somehow or another, we throw away -- as I said, throw away the old for the contemporary. The Hammond organ came in, and somebody invented a B3, so they had to be contemporary, so we buy the new thing.

Patterson:

You think it's because it's easier somehow?

White:

Yeah, it's easier to play. Sure, you don't have to have studied.

Patterson:

Less discipline required.

White:

And -- but if you play it well, you have to have really have studied it to give it some real in-depth practice time. This was -- I know this church, Mother Bethel, which is the oldest -- the African-Methodist Episcopal Church that was founded by Richard Allen in Philadelphia and this is the organ they put in recently at the church. And I'd take it at least -- the listing of the Sunday registration stops of the pipes for the organ. And this is the beautiful -- this is the Mother AME Zion church in New York City. If you ever go there, go see this building. And we talk about megachurches today. You look at Blake's Church and all, but just to think, if right out of slavery in, I don't know when this church was built, but in what was it, 18-- this is listed with the 18th century here, the church was built like that, that seats two thousand and three thousand seats, that phenomenal, to me, I think. And in 1800's, here.

Patterson:

The first Baptist church established 1800, Norfolk, Virginia.

White:

And I was just there, what, last year? Yeah, last year in Norfolk and saw some of these old churches, and how they have maintained them, you know.

Patterson:

Do they have an organ?

White:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Patterson:

Did you play it?

White:

No, no. And in 1810. St. Philips in New York is a marvelous, marvelous -- St. Philips, one of the oldest Episcopal churches for African-Americans in the United States. This is the old -- it's a marvelous building. Huge instrument. Luckily, a friend of mine was the organist and so he took -- this was about 20 years ago. He took pictures of the instrument for me and of the pipes.

Patterson:

Wow.

White:

(inaudible) passed on. 1915. Oh, this is interesting because in 1915 they have a huge church in Seattle, Washington, Baptist Church, very nice.

Patterson:

Have you been up there?

White:

Yes, oh, many times.

Patterson:

Photographs. Is this of the Seattle Convocation?

White:

Seattle, yeah, the congregation, the choir, the church, and the huge -- they have a huge pipe organ in that church. I don't have a picture of the organ, I guess.

Patterson:

OK, so it goes on through the years. We got some of the older stuff, great. And so you have that through the 19th century, and then you have -- oh, no, this is 17th and 18th century, and then through the 19th and 20th.

White:

18th and 19th. 17th and 18th. It can't be 17th. If it starts 17th, that would be 18th and 18th would be the 19th. So I guess after that...

Patterson:

18th and 19th.

White:

And then this is 19th and 20th.

Patterson:

So they all (inaudible) 19th century. OK, (inaudible). Don Lee White, Life and Experience. That's..

White:

Yeah, all the junk I put together trying to get all the invitations and pictures and things, so that somebody might do research on me one day.

Patterson:

What, like us? Hello, here we are! (laughter)

White:

(inaudible) doing the writing, yeah.

Patterson:

Here we are. (laughter)

White:

And they're just other publications, as I said.

Patterson:

Don, we don't have to pull that out today if you don't want to, but you know we're going to have to look at the Life and Experience one.

White:

Well, you know, I'm not interesting in it.

Patterson:

Really, you're not going to show it to us?

White:

No, this was my Master's thesis.

Patterson:

You studied the choral compositions of (inaudible).

Crew:

Could you put it more in the light (inaudible)?

Patterson:

1958 Masters thesis. Can you open it too when she's -- were you ready? OK, one second.

Crew:

Is there a (inaudible) and introduction page? (inaudible) Get the name and the title. Hold it up. (inaudible)

Patterson:

Would it -- when you think back on this experience, what do you remember?

White:

Nothing. (laughter) It just started me on the road to research.

Patterson:

Was it easy to go through and get the work done? Did you...

White:

No, it was very difficult. It was writing, not performing. I was more of a performer as a younger person, and so trying to write, it was difficult, and doing the research, and not having the funds to travel because Samuel Sebastian Wesley was the brother of the Wesley that founded the Methodist

Church, but he was Anglican and so most of the material about him was in England. And just reading didn't cover the depth I wanted to go, I guess. And that's just Jester Hairston's material. Some of this stuff I haven't look at in months or years, so I don't know what it -- these, information and material about AME musicians and throughout the United States and the writings for the AME church articles.

Patterson:

Great.

White:

These were...

Patterson:

Pipe organs in black churches.

White:

Yeah.

Patterson:

African-American black organists.

White:

Or concert organists.

Patterson:

OK, and we went through that. Can we stop just for a second? OK.

Crew:

(inaudible) Don, is there any reason why you won't share your life experiences with us?

White:

Because it isn't...

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

OK. This is a certificate of commendation, presented to Dr. Don Lee White by Mark Ridley Thomas, councilman, 8th district, 2001. Is this a good angle? Do you want me to hold it -- shall we do this?

Crew:

What may be better (inaudible). Yeah, maybe this will be better. Can we set him up here?

White:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

OK.

Crew:

Yeah, that'd be perfect. (inaudible) Wait, can we get...

White:

I thought you'd go in and select some, not just do all of them.

Patterson:

Well, I'm selecting (laughter). I'm selecting. Got that one? And this one is very beautiful, city of Los Angeles, state of California resolution, whereas Don Lee White is a minister of music at Grant African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles.

White:

Episcopal.

Patterson:

It says Episcopalian.

White:

That says Episcopalian? Because it's not an Episcopalian church.

Patterson:

It says Episcopalian. Really, hmm. Who will be honored for over ten years of outstanding service to the church and community on Sunday, October 22nd and it looks like this was in -- what year? 1967. OK. And let's see. There's a pretty one.

White:

If you're just taking pretty ones, (inaudible).

Patterson:

Well, you pick them.

White:

I don't know, no, no.

Patterson:

That would be better. Pick the ones you feel like I should...

White:

No, no, I don't think they're pretty.

Patterson:

Well, I've been looking at the art of it, too. I mean, these are -- they have artistic visual merit as well. They're all important. Leave it to me, I will do all of them. Would you let me.

Crew:

(inaudible)

Patterson:

Then great.

Crew:

Let's do it.

Patterson:

California state assembly certificate of recognition presented to Dr. Don Lee White, in honor of your many years of fervent and dedicated service as



director, teacher, and musician in the AME church and community, November 18, 2001. Will you let me know when you've got it? And this is County of Los Angeles commendation. Oops. In recognition of dedicated service. Oh, it says, "a musical legend," New Testament Church of Christ tribute. In recognition of dedicated service to the efforts of the community and for the civic pride demonstrated by numerous contributions for the benefit of all the citizens of Los Angeles county. Yvonne Graf-Mitburg signing, November 2001. Got it? And... those are big ones. County of Los Angeles National Association of Negro Musicians, presented in April 1989, celebrating its annual spring conference at the Georgia Laster Branch of Los Angeles (inaudible) as host. OK. And let's see. Let's put this back. A lot of work. Do you play? (inaudible) Oh, really? I know I've had the urge to hit the keys too.

Crew:

(inaudible) the side of it.

Patterson:

Yeah, being here makes me want to do something to it, play or sing or something. (inaudible) Ok, this is the certificate of appreciation of service for Western Region Workshop from Benjamin -- F. Benjamin Music Guild, National Association of Negro Musicians, in 1993. OK. And Governor Gray Davis conferred this commendation on Don Lee White in 2001. New Testament Church of Christ, outstanding contributions as a composer and as an African-American music historian. 23rd Annual Church Music Workshop of America 1999. Jimmy James (inaudible). OK, one second. What's this? What's this? Grant AME Church will observe Dr. Don Lee White Day, 1988, in appreciation of his 30 years of dedicated service as minister and director of music at the church. County of Los Angeles, Grant African Methodist Episcopal Choir, Don Lee White, director, choir, Grant African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles is nationally recognized for its versatility in music including opera, hymns, anthems, spirituals, and soul-stirring gospel. I think we got that, and that. And this is another from Grant regarding his work at Grant. Don Lee White has been the director of music and the organist at Grant AME Church for more than 22 years. Under his leadership the adult choir has recorded three albums which have been sold throughout the United States. Signed, Kenneth Hahn. OK. This is a tight fit.

Crew:

(inaudible) microphone. (inaudible) Can we turn it off?

Patterson:

All right. (inaudible) Let's get out of Don's hair for now.

White:

Oh, I heard the end.

Patterson:

I know you did. (laughter)

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