

A TEI Project

Interview of Brenda Marsh-Mitchell

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1A October 31, 2006

STEVENSON

Hey, good morning. I'm interviewing Brenda Marsh-Mitchell on Tuesday, October 31st. Brenda, I'd first like to ask you when and where you were born, and something about your parents and grandparents.

MARSH-MITCHELL

I was born in Los Angeles, California in -- on April 13th, 1947. I actually walk the hospital I was born in every day. I was born in -- at that time it was called General [Hospital]. It's USC [University of Southern California] now. And my mother was originally from Arkansas and her family lived from Arkansas to Connecticut, even some in Oakland, California. My father's family was from Alabama to San Fernando Valley.

STEVENSON

And your grandparents?

MARSH-MITCHELL

My grandparents -- I didn't know my grandparents. My grandparents died. My parents were very [inaudible].

STEVENSON

And brother...

MARSH-MITCHELL

Actually, my grandmother died giving birth to my mother.

STEVENSON

I see, I see. Brothers and sisters?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I have two sisters and two -- I had two brothers. I have one cousin left. They're younger than me, so I really like don't have none. I was grown and -
- grown and gone when they were born.

STEVENSON

I see. If you could tell me something about your parents' education and occupations?

MARSH-MITCHELL

My mother, when she retired, she worked at a senior citizen retirement home. But my mother had her children and she went on to go to college. She went to trade tech [Los Angeles Trade Technical College], and she did get her [inaudible] degree. My father, I didn't know him well. [inaudible] he was a preacher, well-known preacher [inaudible]. And my mother, she did several things. She raised us. She raised five kids without being on welfare, and to go to school. [inaudible] I never seen her curse. I never heard her talk loud. I never seen her do a lot of things that I do.

STEVENSON

I see. Could you tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood, particular neighborhood in Los Angeles that you grew up in?

MARSH-MITCHELL

One that really -- we lived in several, but we lived... My mother used to wouldn't let us cross Main Street, but while we lived around 24th [street] and 25th [street] and Magnolia [Avenue], and that's near the Ward A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal Church] but at the time belonged to West Angeles Church of God in Christ [C.O.G.I.C.] and it was a very small storefront church in Los Angeles, and then they moved on Adams [Boulevard]. It used to be on Vermont [Avenue]. I remember going to Vermont Avenue Elementary School and then I thought we had really -- I grew up [inaudible] Mexican.

STEVENSON

What years would that have been, approximately?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was around fifty-four, and I ended up going to [James A.] Foshay [Junior High School], and they went to Berendo [Junior High School]. My mother taught them how to make cornbread. Their parents taught me how to make tortillas. And my sisters and them still talk to them. I don't, because it's been -- they have contact [inaudible]. And I just, like, we just parted our ways. My family still talks to them.

STEVENSON

So it sounds like the neighborhood in the mid-50's was very mixed.

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was mixed, and it was a good neighborhood, because no matter whose child you were, somebody was always there to look out after you. I don't have no horror stories of when they beat you, but I do have stories where they'd make sure you were in the house, or if you needed something, yeah, or if you guys didn't come outside all day or something. Somebody's going to knock on your door and see if everything was OK.

STEVENSON

Right, OK. Well, earlier you alluded to some of the values that your mother had, because you talked more about that and also you just talked about the values of people and families in the fifties as opposed to today.

MARSH-MITCHELL

That's been a life lesson for me. My mother taught us that no matter who you are, or whose you are, you can always be the best you can be, whatever your situation. Like I said, she had five kids, and she raised us all without being on welfare and she never complained. It was her cross to bear. She bore her cross.

STEVENSON

Could you tell me a little bit about what role religion played in your family?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Oh, it was always the same [inaudible] because my mother had been Church of God and Christ. We went to church almost six days a week and did our homework in church. We went to Bible study. We went to choir practice. We went to BYYP [phonetic]. I can't even say it now. We were there -- we went to church, so that was a part -- it was a way of life. It was a way of life, and [inaudible] and we had to pray before waking up in the morning. We went to bed at night, and we had to pray. We had to pray every time we drank some water or something. So it was -- (phone ring) Oh, I'm sorry.

STEVENSON

That's OK.

1.2. Session 1B

October 31, 2006

STEVENSON

OK, you were talking about the role of religion in your house.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Religion was part of your study. You learned to read in my house by reading the Bible. And we learned history lessons in the Bible, so religion was always a big part of my life, and I said when I grow up, my kids won't have to do this. They won't have to be like this. But I had to get back to the basics with them, and so I [inaudible] children for that, to take them back to the [inaudible]. And my mother believed that the Bible was -- it was home school for us. They say home school now. [inaudible] home school, because

she could take us to everything that we did today in the Bible. That was her Bible, and I thank her for it

STEVENSON

OK, what particular role does she play in the church that...

MARSH-MITCHELL

She was in the choir. She was a missionary. She was a trustee. She was a steward in every auxiliary. She was on the praise team. She was there. And not only did she do that, she used to -- we'd say, well, we don't have money today. [inaudible] and when they moved on Adams and [inaudible] that was a long walk from Adams [Street]. You might as well say Adams to Hoover, to Adams and 6th Avenue. That's a long walk there. They never complained. We walked, because when we got there she paid her tithes. In some kind of way, we always made it. She always paid her...

STEVENSON

Could you talk about your experiences in your elementary school that you went to, and maybe talk about some of notable teachers, what was the racial composition of the school, relationships between the races in the school, that sort of thing?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, since elementary school, I don't remember [inaudible]. Every [inaudible] school I can remember, I can remember it was kind of mixed. There was a lot of Hispanics and black kids. In that 24th Street [Elementary] school, it was mostly black kids, and I don't remember any teacher being real special to me at that time. It's in middle school that I did, and a teacher shook me one day and said, "You don't listen. You've got to get [inaudible] out of my class." And I was like [inaudible], leave me alone. And she was saying, "No, you're going to get something out of my class. You're going to be somebody one day." So that's when I noticed that there are people that care, and there are people that know the difference. I just happen to -- when I also got in middle school, I got a little fast, quite fast, and I really didn't do nothing. I really didn't, but it looked like I did. I was with these girls and they was drinking and stuff, and the teacher says something to them, and I took the bottle like I was drinking. I don't drink now, and I didn't drink then, and so I wouldn't tell on anybody, so then they sent me to an all-girls' school called Betsy Ross School, and I really was the youngest one in the school, and I just thought this was really [inaudible] thing. We had to catch the bus, the regular bus, and go downtown to Sunset [Boulevard], and I thought this was just -- everybody else in the school had boyfriends and there was the Coasters. It was the Coasters and another group that was singing then, and they used to come by the school and pick up the girls and stuff. That was really, really something, but later, about two and a half years, the counselor called me and said "You don't belong here. You're going to school. You're going to regular school," and I was really, really upset because I was comfortable going to class for two hours, and the

teachers were more afraid of you than you were of them. And they'd had a riot at the school. They [inaudible] a teacher's hair. She was wearing a [inaudible]. Kids, playing in home economics class and heat up a [inaudible] my hair, and I just thought that was funny. I was not -- they told me to get out of there. But I just thought it was funny, and I was just a follower at that time, because I guess I did it for attention. While I was at home, I was always expected to [inaudible] and watch out for my sisters and brothers, and do something, and it was like, I was free. I could do whatever I wanted to do in school. But then, I calmed down, and then I started to go to LACC [Los Angeles City College]. I'd been to LACC for over a [inaudible]. I never finished, but I started on the road. And then I had a lot of different jobs, because I was always [inaudible], so I started working at Thrifty's [Drug Store] as a waitress, the coffee shop. I loved that, because that was my stage. I could act however I wanted to and make the customers laugh, and whatever, and I really did like that. Then I had to move on because I needed more money. So I went to EDD [Employment Development Department] and they had a job, so I took the job, took [inaudible] and I worked there for a while, and then I went to the City of Hope and the City of Hope was like no, didn't care what I did. I made so many typos. They didn't care. They just needed a black face anyway. I actually had left [inaudible] and we still had, and I'd go tell those people, I'm ready to work. But they needed a black face so bad, that that's what they would do. And so finally, they realized I really wasn't coming back, and I started working at the [inaudible].

STEVENSON

OK. Let me --

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible]

STEVENSON

Yeah, no, let me -- I want to get a couple of details. One, what middle school did you go to?

MARSH-MITCHELL

John Adams [Middle School].

STEVENSON

John Adams.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Foshay. Foshay is where I went to school.

STEVENSON

And then high school?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I went to Centennial [High School].

STEVENSON

Centennial

MARSH-MITCHELL

Then I went to -- I went to Ventura School for Girls.

STEVENSON

What was this?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Ventura.

STEVENSON

Ventura School for Girls.

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible]

STEVENSON

OK, and let me ask you maybe a question or two about your high school years and the same questions I asked you about middle school maybe, if there were any teachers that were notable and again about what the composition of the school was.

MARSH-MITCHELL

I think school was mostly black. [inaudible] the time, there was still some. I mean, they stayed on their side, we stayed on our side, but there were -- there was a teacher, the teacher I said that told me I could do better.

STEVENSON

Do you remember her name.

MARSH-MITCHELL

I think it was Miss Brown. She taught -- I seen her since I've been [inaudible], since I worked at [inaudible]. She told me, "I told you you could do better." She told me I could do better if I would stop trying to please everybody and just do what I knew was right, but being locked to a bedroom all the time and just going to church and sometimes going across the street to my friend's house or something, I just took that freedom and went crazy. But it's a part in there -- when I was 21, I had some kids and they [inaudible] but I was always bashful, except when I was a clown. So I was always kind of bashful, but when I started Headstart -- I say I'm a product of Headstart, because I took my kids to Head Start every day.

STEVENSON

What year was that?

MARSH-MITCHELL

They were born in '68, so it had to be like '70. '71, '72. I took them to Headstart and I just started. I would go every day and I would sit up in there. I would go to work afterwards, but I would sit up in there with them. I grew up in Headstart. I started making comments at the parents' thing. I wound up being president of Headstart. They said they couldn't do something, and I said, oh, heck no. We don't do that.

STEVENSON

Remember what it was?

MARSH-MITCHELL

They said that they couldn't -- when they graduated, they wouldn't be able to get robes and stuff, because they didn't have the money to get the robes.

And we wanted a real nice way for them to graduate, and I didn't know how we was going to do it, but I knew we were going to do it, but I knew we were going to do it. And we were going to Sacramento. We looked for different places to argue about different things and, say, [Frederick Douglass] Headstart, because you know, every year they had this thing at Headstart where the employees would get paid. And it was [inaudible]. So, I don't know how I met Jim Brown. I met Jim Brown and he let us have the graduation at his house, and also we raised money at his house for robes. And that was real interesting for me. That kicked the door open for me, to let me know that I could do anything. Working at EDD, I decided one day, I seen this thing on the board and I said -- it was the Neighborhood Association for Greater [inaudible] at the Brotherhood Crusade. And I just took that paper off the board and put it in my purse, and I looked at it for a couple of days and I said I'm going to try out for it, because I learned at EDD that I couldn't really help nobody. I tried. They came up with this bill called the Talmadge bill. The Talmadge bill meant that if your kid got five, you had to go look for a job, and I would always want to help the sisters in line get their unemployment. It's sad sometimes that you can't help everybody. And I told them, look, we don't have no way to check if you looked for a job, but you've got to give us six jobs that you went to. We can't call them, because they don't remember. Then they come back the next week. Where are your six jobs? And they go off. Bitch! I didn't have time today! You don't be telling me to look in no phone book! [inaudible] I didn't have time to do that! And I said, you know -- they want to kill you and all that, and I said I gotta get out of here. So, I saw this job and it was a training job -- in fact, it [inaudible], every two weeks. And my husband said "You're crazy. I've got to subsidize your check to pay the babysitter." But I could see something. I could feel something. And I said I'm going to do this job, and sure enough, it was three of us there, and in fact, Miss [inaudible] used to have staff meetings with me and he would tell me how if we could get ten cents from every black person working in the city of Los Angeles, that we could take care of hundreds of black problems, day care centers, senior citizen centers, cultural centers. We could have tutoring for the kids, whatever. And I'm like, ten cents? How are you going to do that? But it worked, and then he taught me there's nothing you can't do. Nothing. Case in point, one day he said the banks used to close at three o'clock and it's like five-thirty one day and he said call the bank to see if I can go pay my bill. And we all said the bank is closed. The bank's closed. He said call them and see. And I was like really mad. Just [inaudible]. I called that bank and I told him I need to come pay a bill for him, and they said the side door will be open. And when that happened, I realized ain't nothing you can't do. So you've just got to work at it sometimes a little harder, but you can do it, and that's been my motto ever since.

STEVENSON

OK, I have a couple follow-up questions. One, if you could tell me a little bit about your time at LACC, first of all.

MARSH-MITCHELL

At LACC I was lost in a new world. You had to really pay attention, really really pay attention, and it was like too much. It's funny you said that, because this morning I was riding down the street. I come by USC and I see a kid walking down the street studying, and I said to myself, that's what I should've been. I was just excited to be there, and not necessarily in my studies where I should have been, because I go to work, I've got kids, and I didn't bog down like I should, but it was a good experience.

STEVENSON

OK, and then I was intrigued when you said you were president of Headstart and that you did make trips to Sacramento now. Were those trips for the purpose of seeing lawmakers? Can you tell me...

MARSH-MITCHELL

And asking for -- that you as a person could make a difference. You could go voice your opinion. You could go knock on somebody's door and they work for you, and you were able [inaudible] a person that just didn't finish college, that had twins, could go knock on somebody's door and say "I'm here representing the parents of this Headstart program." And they would listen, and we'd just erupt -- we'd disrupt the meeting system and that's not going to happen and that's -- and it was exciting, too. I mean, I would get rushes about that, and just everywhere. You've got to go through this, go to this meeting, and you're involved, people want to hear from you, whatever. And it really got me excited.

STEVENSON

Was there -- could you cite maybe a particular instance with particular lawmaker that you can remember that was memorable when you were making those trips to Sacramento?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I can't -- can't remember any names, but I can remember -- I can remember the parents coming from other places, and I remember the hurdle we got over, the one hurdle we got over, it was a commissioner, Warren Howard, that said these parents have a right to have this graduation, and they have a right to have robes for the kids. Here's my first contribution and here's some phone numbers. You could call and get started. And we actually had that graduation. We actually did -- we fixed that hurdle. We actually lobbied and stuff to get in Sacramento, what we were lobbying for the people's checks, the teachers [inaudible] and I met Maxine Waters not long after that, too long after that, just before -- by that time, I had started working at the Brotherhood and Ned Hershey [phonetic] worked for a day [inaudible]. She was just chief of staff [inaudible] and Mr. [inaudible] sent me over to -- there was a guy there in Washington. I'm being old, I can't remember. He ran for a [inaudible] and I worked in that campaign and that's

where it all started. Just from then on, we worked in every campaign, Bradley campaign, Dave [David] Cunningham. Maxine worked for Dave, and Rod Wright, and we worked at Maxine's campaign. I mean, we just found out that your little help can make a difference.

STEVENSON

So you would say that was maybe the beginning of your what some people would call political consciousness?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

STEVENSON

And so this would've been maybe the early Seventies?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yes, oh yeah. It was like a drug, and I'm just getting unaddicted to it. I'm doing it another way now, and I only go help when I'm really needed now. But I used to live, drink that. No matter, I work all day long. I go stay in the campaign all night long, whatever. You know, because it was just -- it was the excitement of that you could get people to do this, so now I do it another way, but it's a lot of things that we had to make change, and I always credit that to Mr. [inaudible] because he just said go out and do it. There's no book. Like, when it was burning up over there off of 55th, looking for Patty [Patricia] Hearst. My first job when I came to the Brotherhood was take this check over to the Black Panthers, for their Breakfast Program. And I'm like, Black Panthers? Oh my god. They're heathens. I'm scared.

STEVENSON

And where was that?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was on Central [Avenue]. And I was like, oh my god. Then I got over there and I see these wonderful people that we never heard about them providing breakfast for young kids every morning, and it was just a wonderful thing. Kennys sitting over there and I went over there, they was burning up the street looking for Patty Hearst. And I never forget, I've never did no [inaudible], we didn't work on no newspaper. We worked at the Brotherhood Crusade and Community, and all this is coming back now. "I want to know how they got across the police line." I told them I was from the Brotherhood Crusade, I needed to see what's going on over here. I didn't have nothing to report. I just came back and told them it was burned up. They let me over like they let someone from Channel 2 over, or whatever, and I was like wow, this is real power. (laughter) And then we started working on -- after that we just started doing all kinds of things and the most memorable moment of my life is when we first started working on the Apartheid, and just to be involved with students and leaders from South Africa. I mean, actually, Oliver [Reginald] Tambo came to our office. I mean, really. Fundraiser for Oliver Tambo, and just to sit there and listen to him talk about how they promised they would never -- him and Nelson Mandela

would never -- what was that guy's name? Oh, god. Not [The Most Reverend Desmond Mpilo] Tutu, it was the other one. He was the [inaudible]. Oh, god, I've got to think of his name. But he was like against the ANC [African National Congress]. He didn't like the ANC. They all grew up together, and this year I happened to go on the street where they grew up. But they all grew up together. I remember having, we had this thing at the [The] Wilshire Ebell [Theater] where all these students were going back to South Africa and I think Harry Belafonte was there. There was a whole bunch of people there, and I'm sitting in the midst of it and I'm thinking, wow, this is going to go down one day. And the students, I mean, I felt like [inaudible], to be treated like a [inaudible] here, and they were saying no, I have to go back. It's my duty to go back, and to sacrifice the way they did, knowing that they're going back, we treated [inaudible]. But they went back, and this summer I way why they went back, and going to -- that's a funny thing, sounds, going to the -- a few times we went to the [South African] consulate and stuff [inaudible], and this one time we go in and my friend, she worked at Channel 2, and Danny told me to go downstairs for something. [inaudible] They was all up there, him, Maxine. So when I opened an elevator, the police say if you get off the elevator you can't get back on. But I seen my friend from Channel 2 at the cameras. I started screaming, "They're holding us hostage!" And it broke out. I mean, she got on the phone and started -- everybody started, and they start flashing it on TV, and the next thing I know, this is no story. People brought us blankets. They bought us so much food, we had to take the stuff on Skid Row the next morning. But people cared, you know, people outside were waiting. Hostage, the police was trying to be our friends, but they said if you get off this elevator you can't get back on. You can't go back up there. So they winded up being nice too. They wouldn't take us to jail or nothing. We spent the night, broke in that place. Actually, Danny and Maxine had to go to New York to get arrested, because the Beverly Hills Police wouldn't go and do that.

STEVENSON

And so that place was at the consulate? That was the consulate?

MARSH-MITCHELL

South African consulate. And then I can't, I don't know how to, nobody, we take, I don't know -- I always tell my boss, we take things for granted, and then Oliver Tambo, like I said, came to our office, and then when they freed Nelson Mandela we were on the team of [inaudible] to Los Angeles so I [inaudible] on the team preparing for going to the airport every day, practicing how they come in, and the day they came in I had read his book, and I had read Winnie's [Madikizela-Mandela] book, and she had talked about how she really didn't know Nelson Mandela, but you know, she loved him and she never really knew him. He used to sneak in town and they had a baby and he was [inaudible], and he always talked kindly about [inaudible]. He was never mad. I mean, I'm mad. I'm mad. He's never been

mad at the people that imprisoned him. He's never mad at the people that imprisoned his wife. She was like locked up in her house but she was doing her work still, no matter how it was. She was doing her work. This was the most, to me, that was our Romeo and Juliet story. But we have to remember, they didn't know each other, and just didn't know that at that time, at that place, she was a nurse and he was a lawyer. I mean, that was really something, and through the odds, because it was bad odds at that time, and then I guess -- I don't know what was wrong, and I had got a team together of lawyers and accountants on my team. Our duty was supposed to welcome them off the plane and help them to the hotel or whatever, but as it happened we was cleared so we had to do their luggage because that was -- they needed somebody honest and somebody [inaudible] and it didn't even bother us. So when the plane came in, we were at the airport. It wasn't the regular part of the airport and you had to have a secret service clearance to be over there, and the first plane came over there. They do like the president. They fly a plane before the first one, and everybody's looking at me and I didn't know what's wrong. I was just crying. I couldn't stop crying. The congresswoman said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "I don't know!" I tell you, I cried for about an hour, and I couldn't even do what I was supposed to do until they cleared the runway. You know, I'm supposed to go over and relay their protocol. I couldn't. I was just overwhelmed with tears. It's just so thick, just thick that it was -- they had [inaudible]. We wasn't supposed to do this. We got there all right, but we wound up doing this job and it was really good that everybody -- you know people used to act [inaudible]. These lawyers and accountants, they just picked up the bags, and I don't know it happened. I have each one on assignment to get a certain person's bags. We didn't lose a bag. We got on there, to the hotel, and the next day I was walking around the corner of the hotel and Nelson Mandela trod right in front of me and then I started crying again. So we got him out of here. There was this great big banquet that they did at the Armory, and then they did this thing at the Consulate. Well, I'm so overwhelmed, I was supposed to go do something at the Consulate. All I could do is go home, because I was so full of [inaudible] and I went home and just cried against, because I [inaudible] dang, we're a part of this. And then we got them out of here but it was really a good feeling, and then again, like I said, this year to both sit in his [inaudible].

STEVENSON

A couple of questions, I'm sort of backtracking a little bit. You said that you were raised to not see race. If you...

MARSH-MITCHELL

My mother said Martin Luther King was messing up for us.

STEVENSON

Really? Explain that a little bit more.

MARSH-MITCHELL

By challenging and speaking out and picketing and lunch counters, transportation and stuff, she would say, "Oh, he's going to mess up for us." And I was like, "No, he don't. No he don't, and I'm going down there," really really wanted to go march and stuff when my mother used to say that, but I found out later that sometimes people have their right to their opinion, and they have a right to how they feel and I have a right to how I feel. But it's not -- I shouldn't argue with them about their feelings, and she did [inaudible].

STEVENSON

Do you know why? Is there anything in her life that might have caused her to have that opinion?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, I think coming out the cotton field, and never having a lot, that she appreciated what she had and she didn't want nobody to mess it up, and I was saying that if he's fighting you could get more rights. Just leave it alone.

STEVENSON

OK, and the other thing I wanted to ask you about, maybe starting in your teen years, what were some of the social activities that you participated in? Dances? Concerts?

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible] I could dance twenty-four hours.

STEVENSON

Where did you go to dance?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Anywhere. I used to sneak in clubs and there was a club called the 54 Ballroom [54th and Broadway] and I used to put on my wigs and go in and dance. There was a place called Marty's on the Hill [La Brea Avenue], and there was a place called Dupree's [Dupree's Paradise on Avalon Boulevard]. Actually, the Veteran's Club [Broadway and 59th Street] where the Brotherhood Crusade was was an after-hour place and we used to go there.

STEVENSON

And where were most of these clubs located?

MARSH-MITCHELL

In South Central. They were all in South Central. The 54 was off 54th and Broadway. The Veteran Club is off Broadway and 59th. Which other clubs did...

STEVENSON

Dupree's.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Dupree's was on 40-something and Avalon.

STEVENSON

And Marty's on the Hill?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Marty's on the Hill was on La Brea.

STEVENSON

So when -- so that would've been what, then, the late Fifties, early Sixties?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Early Sixties.

STEVENSON

Early Sixties, so by that time Central Avenue had died out.

MARSH-MITCHELL

I couldn't go over there.

STEVENSON

Oh, really?

MARSH-MITCHELL

My mother wouldn't allow us to go.

STEVENSON

For what reason?

MARSH-MITCHELL

She always told us don't go across the [inaudible] when I was growing up. The colored folks that live across Main was low-class. You stayed on this side. My husband lived on Central, and over that way. He used to gamble on Central Avenue. He used to tell me stories about that. Well, my mother was like, you can't go over there!

STEVENSON

So it was a class thing.

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was a class thing! And I was going over Avalon and Broadway. It was a rebellion thing. I had to go see what it was like over there. I was having fun over there, right.

STEVENSON

So, did you go to any -- when the local musical groups or when...

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, they used to come to, like, the Temptations, a whole bunch of them. James Brown, they used to go. We used to go to theater on Washington [Boulevard] and Vermont [Avenue], Boulevard Theater, and they used to come in...

STEVENSON

And what was that called again?

MARSH-MITCHELL

The Boulevard Theater.

STEVENSON

Boulevard Theater. OK. All right.

MARSH-MITCHELL

And they used to come there [inaudible].

STEVENSON

OK. All right. Yeah, go ahead.

MARSH-MITCHELL

But I was younger then. When I got a little older, sixteen, seventeen, [inaudible] I knew I always -- I knew my mother would come.

STEVENSON

She would come looking for you.

MARSH-MITCHELL

She would come get me at the Boulevard. But she wouldn't come across Main. You just didn't do that. And it's funny, because [inaudible] actually she died. She lived right off of Central, Second Baptist [Church] had built these senior apartments and she lived there right before her death.

STEVENSON

OK. You said that your political consciousness started an you became socially aware, started participating in demonstrations, things like this?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Demonstrations, and started working on the campaigns. Just [inaudible]. His name was Washington. He was on this college board. He ran for college board. He lost the first time he ran, and then after that he became -- we would do Gil [Gilbert W.] Lindsay, [inaudible], because he'd never really wanted to wake up the voters. He just -- you voted, if you did, you didn't. He didn't wake you knocking on doors. We would do it, but he didn't want you doing that. So like I said, one time he was in trouble, so we'd do Tom Bradley. No matter what Tom Bradley ran for, we did -- Warren [inaudible] ran for a couple of things. We would do Dave Cunningham, and we'd do [Robert] Bob Farrell. We would do a lot of them, but that first one and the first conscious one I got was Washington, and the first one that I really believed in, black people really started coming, and Maxine had a way of making every just work and want to be there.

STEVENSON

So had you already started working for the Brotherhood Crusade when you were involved?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, I did that.

STEVENSON

OK, well, maybe you can tell me something about when you started working for the Brotherhood Crusade and when you first met Mr. Bakewell and what your impressions were?

MARSH-MITCHELL

From day one, I had to go for an interview about four or five times. I had to -- I worked with the State of California. I had -- these girls kept asking me to come in three or four times, and suddenly I just told them, look. I want this job. I'd be the best one for it. [inaudible] but I could see it was working around black folks, and I said, I used to party in this building. My husband used to lose money and win money in this building. I want the job. I don't think you can hire anybody who wants the job more than I do. And that was from going to coaching school.

STEVENSON

Coaching school?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Coaching school, and I went to this program called the WIN Program.

STEVENSON

WIN Program?

MARSH-MITCHELL

WIN, uh-huh.

STEVENSON

WIN Program.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Uh-huh, and it helped further -- give you a career.

STEVENSON

Career development.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, uh-huh, and they always said you got to be -- if you're not confident in yourself, then why would you expect anybody else to be?

STEVENSON

Interesting. Who ran the program, the WIN program?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Accounting. And they always [inaudible] and they taught me that you could do anything you wanted to, but you've got to believe that you could go it, so when I went for the job, I was like [inaudible] three jobs, I want this job. And all these people, they were really, I mean, I was sitting at the lobby a couple of times. I seen a fight in the lobby. I seen Mr. [inaudible] go by. He was real tall and light, and everybody [inaudible] said I always had this problem because when I was in school and I didn't tell you this. In middle school, I did run into racism. I ran into discrimination and that's what kind of turned me the other way. I wanted to be a Centennette and at Centennial, and at that time we had to be real light and have long hair. I didn't understand this. I just knew I wanted to be a Centennette, and they told me I was too dark. I was too big. And they were like, really -- I told the mayor, Omar Bradley, after and he wanted to give me some feathers, some Centennette feathers. He apologized for that, but that kind of messed me up a lot. It really did, because I really thought that I should have been a Centennette, so I did. But anyway, so when I got in that office, for an interview one day, I said, oh, man, this is just like Centennial. So I had to go on there and fight.

STEVENSON

You went in with a certain attitude.

MARSH-MITCHELL

I went with an attitude. I was like, [inaudible] and I had to take off from my job to come here, and I want this job. You couldn't have nobody that wanted the job more than I did. And so I don't know what happened. The girl said

they went and talked to Mr. [Danny J.] Bakewell [Sr.] and he said "Hire her," and I didn't realize the job didn't pay nobody. But, did. It did. It paid a lot, because work, just working for black people, I always had this thing that you can't do nothing, you know, whatever, and just watching him and him saying, "Look, this is going to be a nice way. We're going to have it, and you've got to have [inaudible] for anything and everything." We have to do [inaudible], and just following his lead. I mean, it's been thirty-some years.

STEVENSON

What were your impressions of him?

MARSH-MITCHELL

My impression of him was that he was crazy. He was crazy. He let black people use him all the time, because he would hire people and then you had to get somebody else. But he taught me a life lesson, that if we don't keep doing it, how do we expect anybody else to do it? And that one of the lessons that I learned, this is a [inaudible]. There was a homeless man. We was [inaudible] when we saw him running down the street, and he ran and got in the trash, and he was taking stuff and throwing it on the ground. So one of the guys we worked with told him to get out that trash, so he cussed us out and came back a couple times to the front door. He saw Mr. Bakewell. Mr. Bakewell brought him in the office one day. He called me, he said, "It's almost a holiday. Did anybody see -- " I can't remember the guy's name. "Did anybody see if he ate? Do y'all know where he stayed? Do you think he had anything for Christmas? Did you [inaudible]? What do you think we're supposed to do?" While Mr. Bakewell's talking to me [inaudible] to us, so everybody go get the man something, clothes, something. Which we should be doing, and he always preached to us that we were just a paycheck away from being where this man is. So he did, and he had a couple of jobs, and the man didn't do whatever. And he did them, and some he didn't do. His name was Louis, that's what it was. So about five years later, Mr. Bakewell was bringing in Berry Gordy to the office. He remembered Lewis said all he wanted to work for Motown, he wanted to sing and dance for Motown [Records]. Mr. Bakewell had us like investigative reporters go and find Louis. We found Louis. Louis got his life dream. He got to dance. We dressed him up. He got to dance and perform in front of Mr. Gordy. But that was his life dream, and Mr. Bakewell just said, "Just see, you have to keep working with black folk," and every black person has their niche. You've just got to find their niche for them. And then it works. It works, and no matter where we go, we left the Brotherhood one time, and we went to investment banking on the 48th floor downtown. Had all these white stockbrokers, young boys. Stockbrokers, investment bankers. We were the only black thing in the office. Danny was the president and I was the -- and he had a secretary. I got to tell these white people what to do, and the white people would sometimes, we'd call them and say [inaudible]. So I would tell them his secretary might call and tell you [inaudible] and they would give her a little

[inaudible]. The president [inaudible] in the morning. "Well, I have to have notice." I said, this is the president, so whatever notice you need, take this as your notice. And it would be funny to them, but they would do it. They didn't want [inaudible] and then I got to Mr. Bakewell. I said -- because at first I didn't want to go, because I figured what do I do up there? He told me one day at the [inaudible] group and we're going investment banking downtown. I said, "[inaudible]," and my thing was I was secure at the brotherhood. These black folks -- I had got good at what I do, and I know being there I wouldn't be fired. I said [inaudible]. I mean, when I got there he was -- well he kept calling me every day. Come down here, right now. So one day he says "I want you to go to the Mikasa House. Go somewhere and get us some fine China." Girl, I thought I was a Lexus. I thought I was a Lexus, on Dynasty or in the ballet, people following me with all my bags and stuff. He gave me a Mercedes the company rented, and a Rolls-Royce to drive, and gave me a condo to watch out for people used to go from the White House in Beverly Hills. And we'd have parties all over the country, and I'd set up parties for the bankers because, you know, when they make a deal, no big deal. I mean, but never did he lose his ground. He always, he -- we were on every one of these [inaudible] the black people. We wanted to take one for the holidays. But we took more black folk up there. He said we're going to have parties [inaudible] and invite all our folk, and our folk was proud of us, right! Oh, you guys [inaudible] leave our community, and he -- I noticed him going to meetings. Well, we at the Brotherhood, certain people didn't want to meet with him, right, and even some of the politicians at that time. When it was investment banking, everybody wanted to meet with, and he told me we're going to start up [inaudible] whatever. I wanted to talk about my charity. They wanted to talk about investment banking. He wanted to talk about Brotherhood, and he never, ever lost the course, and doors just started opening wider and wider, and people respect that. They respect that you do stand up for something and you never left that, and now we have to open our doors for you and we have to listen to you, and we have to write you a check now, because you've got a product that we want. And he took it with him, and I was just amazed, and it really felt good. It felt good that we could go get Miss [Lillian] Mobley and Miss [Mary] Henry, mothers of the community. We could put them in limousines and have the drivers take them out to lunch every year, and some of these ladies probably never been there. We could have them bring them up to the office on the 48th floor and have tea with them, and he shared that with them. He shared every point of his life, he shared it with them and that's what [inaudible]. And every day I come to work, I got so excited because he's unpredictable.

STEVENSON

OK, when you started working for the Brotherhood Crusade, what year was it and at that time how long had it been in operation?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It started in '68, I believe, and I think I got there in '71, and he was in horrible moods. They had -- Mr. Bakewell was not the president. He was there just to ask her to be an acting executive director and there was papers all over the place and there was the empty office. It was two other ladies there and one gentleman and this director, and they hired two of us to be career trainees and Mr. Bakewell had all these big dreams and we had a radiothon. I remember I got excited [inaudible] because I [inaudible] what a radiothon was. They came in there with a microphone to raise some money, and then we did a concert and a tribute to -- I think the first one was a tribute to Quincy Jones and the [inaudible].

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STEVENSON

OK, you were talking about the concert and also radiothon. What station was the radiothon on?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Probably KDAY -- I think it might have KDAY, or KGFJ.

STEVENSON

OK, and there were tribute concerts, so there was one for --

MARSH-MITCHELL

The first one was a Tribute to Quincy Jones. He had just had an aneurysm. He was married to Betsy Black, and we did it at the shrine and there was everybody there. There was Aretha Franklin, and Barry White, Smokey Robinson. There was everybody there, Stevie Wonder. It was just -- but it was -- and Marvin Gaye, and Marvin Gaye was singing and they made his [inaudible] and I was like walking around there like in the office. High-five Danny [inaudible], whatever, you know, and it was just really great and it felt like I belonged.

STEVENSON

And where -- when you started with the Brotherhood Crusade, where was it located?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was at the Veteran's Club on 51st and [inaudible]. Not 51st. It was Slauson and 58. About 59th and Broadway, and then we moved. Oh, we got hifalutin. We moved -- there was this rumor control [inaudible]. Our first building we bought, it was on Central and 70-somethingth. It was right across the street from [inaudible]. It was on Central Avenue, and they made a little cubicle for me and I was so proud of it. Stayed there for a few years and then he told us to find a place. This is mighty funny, because this is vice-versa from what I was taught. This is vice-versa from what I was taught about don't cross the Main. He didn't want to bring the Brotherhood

across the Main. So he told us to look for a building, but don't go across Main, so it was kind of vice-versa, so we found this building on Slauson [Avenue] and they had all these nice umbrella-ed chairs and stuff, and it used to be U.S. Motors, and we said this is a big building, beautiful. We never knew that you couldn't -- it wasn't occupable on the top floors. What made us notice it was the nice picnic tables outside. So when he was out of town, when he came back, we told him [inaudible], and the first thing he did was take the picnic tables that were outside, and you could see us [inaudible] all day having a barbecue, and it was still like three of us, maybe four. [inaudible]. We thought it was [inaudible] and we got a lot of space. It was horrible, moving in. We could only stay on the first -- he fixed the first floor up. One side of the first floor. And then -- the community loved it. The community -- we'd open the doors. They would come in in droves. They'd [inaudible] the front yard. The community grew up with us. You know, every step he made, the community felt like they was a part of it, and they was so proud. We was hifalutin. We moved into that building and it was lost and then they fixed the second floor and we moved up on the second floor. And that's where it is right now. We even got new clothes to wear to that office. We had a new attitude.

STEVENSON

So when you started with the Brotherhood Crusade, you were a career trainee. What were some of the tasks, or what was --

MARSH-MITCHELL

That was no career trainee. That was just the name of this job. Career task was, first of all there was no books for what we did, so all I know is Mr. Bakewell started talking. If we have to do what United Way doesn't do for our -- and he starts showing us how Mexicans give to Mexicans, white people take care of white people, Indians take care of Indians, Jews take care of Jews, black folk take care of Jews, Indians, Mexicans, and everybody. Black folk, they give more than anybody. They give free, but they give to everybody but themselves, and so I thought wow, we are charitable. So then we cleaned up the office. We did different things, different tasks. I was the clerk, and we started getting payroll deductions and Mr. Bakewell used to go out and do payroll reduction presentations early in the [inaudible], and as time changed he needed help. So I started, and I was just excited -- I have a young lady who works for me and she goes out, like today we went to the senior citizens, and she's early in the morning [inaudible], but it made me feel like all this -- this is what I can do. I can tell our story, the Brotherhood's story, and I used to drive around every day and just tell my story [inaudible] presentations to city employees. I loved the trash [inaudible] because I took those [inaudible], and then I got the hospitals and oh, did we have fun at the hospitals. I was able to go to [inaudible] where I was born. All those employees, I'd go three, four times a day. They were good. They loved to give. They just wanted somebody to

give them some attention. We'd have dances, bake sales. And today, today, i see some of those people. They're retired. They still work for them. I always worked, so I used to be over there, like, during the Christmas holidays they come. You know, when you get your bonuses and stuff, they come bringing their bonus, and they talk about "remember those good times we used to have," and I had all the hospitals. I had the general, so at eight o'clock or six o'clock in the morning, I could be at Big General [Hospital] and I had to go to Pomona to the other hospital and then go to Harbor General [UCLA Medical Center], then go to Martin Luther King [Hospital], and then go to Rancho [Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center]. My day was full, but it was exciting because remember, I told you I was an actress, something like that, so that was my stage too. Just get me an audience and let me talk to them about the Brotherhood, about how we need to take care of our own, whatever, and then we would show them that -- we were able to show people, we were saying like, I gave more money to the [American] Heart Association, but your parents didn't get heart disease from it. They got heart disease because they had high blood pressure, and they didn't take care of themselves, so you need to give your money to the High Blood Pressure Foundation, or somebody in your community. And it was a good, clean, and it was fun and people could see that I believe in and [inaudible], and it was just a good time. And then my heart was crushed when they made me come in and not do it no more and start doing other things.

STEVENSON

Right, so you enjoyed the direct appeal in going out and what -- did you find that the reception you got from African-Americans being asked to give to themselves, I mean, what was that like?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Oh, I was a showoff. I like to come back and flop my cards and show 'em. They would sign up. I could get you to sign up. I liked that. And then, you know, they felt good about themselves, but then it came time -- they said, no, you can do other things, so then I started coming up with programs like we feed the homeless in Florida. I just realized that all people can help. We feed the -- I have families that have pictures of stuff, being downtown on Skid Row, like [inaudible] one year just usually it rained early in the morning. We'd get down there about five, by five-thirty. It stopped raining. I said Lord, just watch the streets for us. But the year before last, it rained and Danny called and said, "You need to call it off," and I said I can't. He said, "Why? It's storming down there." I said, "Because I have two big buses, and when I got here, all the [inaudible] are standing out there with their umbrellas. Now tell me that we can't." We pitched the tents. We [inaudible] ten people [inaudible], and they started heating up the food and stuff, and we had stages, and we did programs. We even take our kids. We make our kids Mothers in Action, and so we'd take our kids down there for career day to show them, have doctors, nurses, whoever they want to come

talk to them and then take them on a train ride around Skid Row, the little [inaudible] you people sleeping in cardboard, and then they have to come back and they can ride the rides and then they help serve the homeless. So they know in life they have choices. You can either stay in school, or you can be down here with the poor. So we just continued doing that. We just kept doing it even in the rain, and nobody got sick. People -- I had more volunteers that year. This year, it started raining but it stopped. But people were ready to just -- Wal-Mart came out and set up a whole store. But we've been doing that for about seventeen years.

STEVENSON

It sounds like you, the Brotherhood Crusade's outready to the homeless predates a lot of the efforts now, like the Fred Jordan [Mission] and the...

MARSH-MITCHELL

We moved on. Well, we always did -- Mr. Bakewell said we want to pick a day that's special to us. We don't want to pick a day -- everybody goes down there on Christmas. Everybody goes down there on Easter. Everybody goes down there on Thanksgiving. We got in February, Valentine's, this Saturday after Valentine. So we did Valentine's. We used to go twice a year, but we'd go once a year because the second time of the year we were going and we decided not to do that. We decided to start something else. We start things, and then people pick it up and then go ahead. We started to feed [inaudible] just people on the park, on the streets, on Thanksgiving Day. Some people don't have nothing to eat, and everybody was concentrating on Skid Row. So then we start off on a little place on Vermont, and we feed seniors and then we said they kept it up, when the program started. So we said [inaudible] we had to move on. We started on 53rd and Vermont and we did good the first year. Second year, we noticed we were delivering meals around the community and we seen these churches deliver meals, so that's good. Everybody -- we'll just move on, so we picked something that nobody's caught yet, so when they do we'll move on. For the last eleven years, we've been feeding senior citizens that get Meals on Wheels. We go to the senior place -- I'm going to go in a few minutes -- that we feed, we start off feeding 200 senior citizens and let them bring a guest at Ward Villa. So now, we decided there's some people that said, a couple of them kept saying, "I'm sick and I can't come out of my apartment, can you bring it to me?" So we said yes, so we started delivery. We deliver seven, eight hundred meals on wheels to people, and now people come -- it's a learning lesson for our community. People come with their whole families, their kids, and they take five or ten meals and deliver it, and they found out -- they thought at first, someone thought at first, they could do it real quick. But you [inaudible] they don't have nothing, and they don't have nobody to talk to, so a lot of them sit there and warm it up for them and talk to them while they eat it, and a couple of times, by the time the last people take the stuff, we do four more dining rooms. They take the centerpieces which our kids

make, because they have to learn to give back. We give them a [inaudible]. They're making stuff right now for centerpieces, so now their centerpiece is a gift that everybody could take, so a couple tables they didn't take their stuff, so we let people take it and borrow the tablecloth and stuff, and people really -- they really enjoyed that, and it's really good. I never put a thing in the paper no more for people to come help. They just come. I had a man call me and said, "I called you five times, I want to help." But people want to do this. They want their kids to learn how to share. They cut off their whole food and everybody got to wait.

STEVENSON

I know that when you started work for the Brotherhood Crusade, you were already politically active and involved in demonstrations and other campaigns, and one of the hallmarks of Mr. Bakewell and the Brotherhood Crusade is being politically active.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, he taught me all that.

STEVENSON

So, when you started working for the Brotherhood Crusade, were -- Mr. Bakewell and the staff were also involved in political campaigns?

MARSH-MITCHELL

No, we all kind of started together because he was there but he was like on the board, and he had -- they asked him to come to be the executive director, and I don't know if he worked on campaigns but he started sending me out to work on them, and I said -- in fact, the longest campaign I worked on was [Reverend] Jesse Jackson, in [inaudible] when he first ran for president.

STEVENSON

That was the Rainbow Coalition?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yes. And I worked harder than Reverend Jackson.

STEVENSON

So it became part of what the Brotherhood Crusade did.

MARSH-MITCHELL

We did, we did it and it helped, because it brought hope to our community. We have to be a part of the process, and we have to not only work to get the voters out, it's voter education we did. That what we did. We did voter education, to explain to people why to vote, how to vote, and kind of who you should vote for, just somebody that's going to take care of you, but it was voter education that we did. And then we realized you just can't do voter education. You've got to give money. It costs money to run for office. You've got to raise money for that, so we had to put another had on, time off. We're not working for the Brotherhood right now. It's evening time, you've done your eight hours, and now we've got to work on fundraising, because we have to do that, and then we did. And we still do. I mean, we

did everybody. We've done vice-president. We've did {Albert Arnold} Al Gore [Jr.]. We did great. I mean, we worked on the presidential election, two of them. Actually, more than that. We worked in [William Jefferson] Clinton's election. We hooked up preachers and all over the country for Clinton. They still think he was talking to them, but they was in their pulpits saying, "I just talked to Clinton!" But it was a good campaign, and we did Clinton, Hillary, Reverend Jackson. I mean, at one time I think it was '89, it was the first one or the second one, he was like three hours late. And all these people sat down [inaudible], the bishop got up and said, "I don't know. I know you're not complaining. I've been here and never been invited to no presidential campaign party in your life, so what is three hours to wait?" And it was, it didn't mean nothing. And I think I was in the first election. I gave all of me, and to say I gave all of me at the end, I really thought Jesse Jackson was going to win. I really did. My kids had turned 18. My family before that day, before I went to work, we went to the polls. We was uppity. We really just [inaudible] and I felt so proud and I went to the polls with my daughters for their first time. My husband, because he usually goes and votes somewhere else, and but before we went, before that, we went to the -- I went to the convention and I just -- I was mad. Coretta Scott [King] was [inaudible]. Nobody was mad but me. I was mad with her, I was mad with Andy [Andrew] Young, and I never even told nobody this, because I thought they should give him the first round, and I was really like, really hurt and then it was me and Dr. [Reverend Thomas] Kilgore still in the empty convention hall. Dr. Kilgore couldn't [inaudible] for it. He couldn't get out of his chair, because he knew it too. He knew. He thought Jesse should have won. I really think that took a part of him. He thought he should've got that nomination, and I did too, and I kind of walked, started walking, because people were laughing, "did you really think he was going to win." And I was, yes, I did!

STEVENSON

So you're angry at Coretta and Andrew Young because they had not supported...

MARSH-MITCHELL

They had. I thought they should have. And now I really think, you know people really don't understand Reverend. There's so many people that have gone on that have been so successful because of Reverend, and right now, I just told him a month ago, I'm tired. He needs to start telling his story, because there are a lot of people there. My friend, one of my best friends, used to be his secretary, Minyon Moore, and I did not meet Minyon for years, but I used to talk to her over the phone, because him and Danny would have a conversation and we would know, and we had to follow that lead and she would be in Chicago in the middle of the night, on the phone, talking to me, and we'd talk for years. Well, she wound up being Clinton's political advisor. She worked in the White House. She -- everything of color

you've seen him do, anybody other than white people, she was in. Every morning, she was in briefing in, with him. We were proud. Right now he still calls her. She went to South Africa with him not too long ago, when we went. But I'm saying she would've never had that position, or Donna Brazile. Donna Brazile was the first African-American woman to -- she came out of the Rainbow Coalition. What's the guy's name that died -- Ron Brown?

STEVENSON

Ron Brown.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Ron Brown got his job because -- and they killed him because he was smart. He got his job because Jesse Jackson, instead of getting a presidential nomination, he negotiated for him to get that job, you hear me? And just two months ago, we went to the [Congressional] Black Caucus [CBC]. They got a whole -- I'm not going no more. They got a whole lot of new folk there. These are young, young politicians that I say know how to set the VCR. They know how to do the computer, because you go to most people's house my age, you go in there and the VCR is blinking, because we don't know how to set it. But these are technology buffs, young, forty years old, thirty-five. They're Speakers of the House and they're assembly people. They're council people. You know what I'm saying? They are now running things, but guess what most of the denominator was? They got their organizational skills from the Rainbow Coalition. And as I go around the country, people that are doing things somehow came in touch with the Reverend, and people don't talk about it. And it just -- Mr. Bakewell's made it possible and I know all these people. We take it -- and everybody says when the Reverend sees you, he just lights up. Wherever I am across the country -- he really light up because I lost weight, but... I like being in the background and I like organizing things, and I -- Mr. Bakewell just taught me to go do it, and I could do it because he taught me there's no way you can't. There's nothing you can't. He just had a thing [inaudible] with 35,000 people right out of here in front of our building. No problems. We worked with the police, the fire department. No problems at all.

STEVENSON

And that was A Taste of Soul, right?

MARSH-MITCHELL

But there's nothing, and I told my boss, he set the tone. I said we'll [inaudible] if he could. He did. [inaudible]. But he's a great teacher.

STEVENSON

Okay, you want to wind up for just...

1.4. Session 2

December 12, 2006

STEVENSON

Good morning. I'm continuing an interview with Brenda Marsh-Mitchell on Tuesday, December 12th. Brenda, first I have a few follow-up question from our first session. One, you talked about wanting to be selected a Centennette at Centennial High School, and the role that skin color played. Could you elaborate on that some more and maybe cite some more examples that you personally had with what I call Colorism, but other people call it being colorstruck or whatever.

MARSH-MITCHELL

We talked about going to school and how they wouldn't let you be a Centennette, you couldn't be a Centennette because of their color. And that was just a lot of things that you couldn't be in, in school. I mean, I can remember the teacher telling us that -- well, I can remember a teacher telling us, teaching us about slavery and the Civil War, and it almost made you feel like you were a bad person, because the master was good and the master brought you clothes and fed you and stuff, and you were unappreciated because you ran away and you used to steal from them and stuff. I mean, I was feeling really bad. I didn't know that we were being slaves without wanting to be slaves. They never told us that. We didn't have a wage that we worked for, but we were the bad, the villains.

STEVENSON

Oh, that's interesting that that was actually taught.

MARSH-MITCHELL

That was taught. It was part of the curriculum.

STEVENSON

See, I was going to ask you. Was that actually in the books and in the curriculum?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was in the books, about the slaves running away, and stuff, and the teacher would add that stuff to it.

STEVENSON

And so these were white teachers, I assume, teaching this.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yes, and you know that the lighter slaves was in the big house and the darker slaves were in the fields because they was the ones that couldn't be trusted.

STEVENSON

I see. So there were a lot of things you couldn't do if you were dark-skinned but it was unspoken, certainly.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Sure, it was unspoken and it was just a lot of racism between the African-American people, and as I grew up, you know, I've grew up feeling like -- until James Brown made me feel proud. I mean, I'd always walk with my head down and stuff, and then when I started working at the Brotherhood [Crusade], people started saying "Black is beautiful," you know, and I

started holding my head up, you know, accepting who I am for who I am and not being afraid, and I used to be afraid of black [inaudible] because as growing up first we had white [inaudible] and then they threw this black down on you and everybody always said black was ugly, so scared of white. And I vowed my children would never have a white [inaudible] and they didn't.

STEVENSON

So do you think today that there's much less of this Colorism?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It's less -- you know, it's funny, because sometimes I tell my story across the -- oh, they accept me now. They've got a Classism, and it's just as bad. I mean, I know when I first started the [Los Angeles] Links, [inaudible]. Nowadays everybody [inaudible] and some people in the community, I won't mention no names, but now they want to talk to you, you know, invite you at the table and come to their events and stuff. It's accepted.

STEVENSON

And that's the Links social group that you're talking about.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Links social groups and some of the other groups, uh-huh. You know, I'm just amazed how they've turned around.

STEVENSON

Yeah, because there used to be a time where you would even look in the Sentinel and look at the Cotillion and it was all light, right, for many years.

MARSH-MITCHELL

And they've changed and you've got Wilfandel [Club], you've got all these other people who have changed. I mean, I'm really -- it's like I guess somewhere down the years they've learned that we're all the same. I mean, some have it and some haven't, because it's like people get embarrassed about -- they use, what do they call it right now? Ebonics. And that's the way of racism too, I think, because some people have gone to college and their parents still speak Ebonics. The [inaudible] on the east side of town, they wouldn't be caught dead over there. It's [inaudible] their parents are nothing, you know. The same people, they own their houses probably longer than people in the [inaudible]. They're the parents. They're the relatives. But they wouldn't be caught over there, and their parents still talk Ebonics so they're embarrassed by that, so to me that's another form of racism.

STEVENSON

OK, and you also talked about working on various political campaigns over the years. Could you tell me about one campaign you worked on that was personally significant or stood out for you over the years?

MARSH-MITCHELL

When I worked on -- Mr. [Danny] Bakewell sent me to work on all of them, but doing the first one in 1984, I believe when Reverend Jesse Jackson first ran for President. I worked them both, but the first one I worked day-to-

day, I really thought Reverend Jesse Jackson was going to be the next President of the United States. I probably thought that more than he did. I did, I worked day and night. My children were sixteen, or so, or seventeen. I think he was sixteen when he first started, and they used to cry for their mother. We started two years out, because when the actual election came, they were old enough to vote, so we started two years out. I worked daily and my children was crying in their sleep because they couldn't see me. They'd have to come to the office. [inaudible] ready to come to the office to me, because I literally worked twenty-four hours and I quit home in the middle of the night and get up early and leave before they caught up, and they was having nightmares about Sammy, so I said best way to see him would be to come help me. And I really thought I was hurting. When Coretta Scott King and Coretta King and Andy [Andrew] Young and Hosea William and them, they didn't give him the first round, I was hurting. I was hurt. I never forget -- I thought he was going to win. I did, I thought he would win the black vote. I was surprised when the Secret Service said he had got so many death threats that if somebody was to kill him it'd be a black man, and then at the Democratic [National] Convention, I'll never forget, in San Francisco there was two people -- we was laughing. Dr. Thomas Kilgore, he was left in the Democrat hall, still sitting in his chair, and I was at the back of the hall and I, like, these ladies, Miss Henry said, "Did you all really think he was going to win?" And I said yes. I thought at least he'd win the Democratic Convention, Democratic thing, or he would get the first round and they'd negotiate him out of there, but that didn't happen. But he negotiated for other people. That's what people failed to remember. He negotiated for Ron Brown. He negotiated for a lot of people to get jobs, and he really did. So it wasn't a loss. We all had -- we never had a presidential candidate in our area, let alone to be part of inside of the campaign, so to me that was really significant.

STEVENSON

OK, could you tell me about the first time you met Reverend Jackson and elaborate a little bit more about what is so important, what was so important about him as a black man running for President?

MARSH-MITCHELL

He gave hope. Well, the first I met him was -- that wasn't the first time I met him. First time I met him was a Brotherhood dinner or something, and he came -- he was the keynote speaker, so. We used to take it for granted, because we'd see Jesse all the time, and yet he was speaker long long time. I laugh about that now, and I used to kind of run out the room. We'd go to go to my room and go to sleep or something, 'cause he'd be talking all the time. But I realized in my later years that we take things for granted, because we know him, we walked and we worked with him, but he's serious, and like I've had meetings with him, three or four o'clock in the morning, and he's constantly on our agenda to make life better for somebody. I don't

know that he knows, but to me he's like a driven person. I've never been in a -- he's like a driven person, like he's always thinking about how he can make the quality of life better for us, no matter what, and I just -- a lot of people don't know. They think that that's not what he does, but that's what he does all the time, 24-seven, no matter what. He puts himself on that front line for us, and he's constantly doing that. The other day he was there. He said, "I'm 71 years old, but not slowing down." But I say that to say he hasn't slowed down. In fact, when he was here, he was talking to somebody overseas, something happening somewhere, so he was on the case there and he has never, ever really let us down. Like, when he'd go after somebody like an award or something, he goes back with his people. Yeah, he's able to do that, and that's because no matter what, people really don't have a problem with us. It's the people here that do, and they respect our plight because they're going through a similar thing.

STEVENSON

That's people overseas, yes.

MARSH-MITCHELL

And most people overseas are, whether you want to -- they're people of color. So they can identify and they can sit down and talk to Reverend Jackson and understand his fight or whatever, and he's never lost one. So, we have to think about that, and he's always right on target, and doesn't have a lot of time to spend on stuff, but he's right on target. He gives us our talent and he's gone and it's up to us to pick it up and keep on going. But he puts it out there in front of us.

STEVENSON

OK, you talked about how your role at the Brotherhood Crusade has changed over the years, and one of the most enjoyable roles you had was as a fundraiser, a pledge-taker in the field, something you really enjoyed. Could you talk about some of the other positions or roles you've had in the crusade over the years?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Made a film. We created a film. [inaudible]

STEVENSON

Could you tell me more about that?

MARSH-MITCHELL

We didn't have a lot of money, so we made film for it, you know. We took -- made a storyboard. I mean, there was no book for how to do this. We didn't go to school for film making, but you do what you have to do, and you do it, and honest and earnest. I'm saying that because we made a film, but we made it up of what kind of agencies we assist. We assist domestic violence programs. We're beating on the pot, the sound thing. And you know how [inaudible] talk, get a testimony from someone or whatever, and we had -- the Brotherhood started out of the Watts riots so we had a siren coming and everything. We just made up a film, like a ten-minute film that we had to sit

up and edit it and get the sound and everything. And it set an interesting road because it's no telling from one day to another what you might be doing. One day we were making a film, one day we broke into the South African Consulate. Another day we closed the police department down. I mean, it's been surprising. We go to the gas company, where they have a private meeting or whatever. Said what you guys doing here? We're stockholders. We have a right to be here. Same thing with the phone company. They want to shut you out, but they couldn't shut us out because Mr. Bakewell had the foresight to buy stock. We thought he was crazy to buy stock, but he did, so we had a voice. It's just been a whole -- I can't even remember all the things.

STEVENSON

Well, could you tell me about shutting down the police station, and what...

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was -- I forget the little girl's name. They killed this little girl on 92nd [Street] and Figueroa [Street] over some milk in the store. I can't remember her name. And they killed her and they let the lady out on bail. And she was going to court every day, and black people are just -- they believe in if you do something you go to punishment. You get punished for it. A lot of black people felt like this girl had no business stealing the milk.

STEVENSON

That wasn't Latasha -- Latasha Harlins.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, Latasha Harlins. That's who it was. And you know, Mr. Bakewell, he helped pay to bury her and stuff, and so anyway, we were protesting the lady in court, and you had to go to court every day. You had to call her up early, because if you didn't, you wouldn't get a seat. You wouldn't get anything, because the Asian people brought busloads of people every day, so we were a little slow. So one day, we're out in Compton and I think it went to court or something. Anyway, we was going in the courtroom or something, and one guy had something and they arrested him. I can't remember. He was shouting or something. They arrested him and so we all went to the police station and [inaudible], oh, we got on our knees. It's a picture. I've got to find that picture. I think it might still be -- we all got on our knees in front of the police station, [inaudible] the police station. They couldn't go in or go out.

STEVENSON

Which division was it?

MARSH-MITCHELL

It was the Compton Police Department, because they was in Compton Superior Court. And it was funny, because we never did that before. Another time, we stopped a train, a big old train. We could've got ran over, but it was important. The tracks had hypodermic needles and trash and glass and no safety belts for the kids, and you had to -- you would call the train

[inaudible] first of all they said it belong to this person. Finally, we found out it belonged to MTA [Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority] and one of the Southern Pacific [Railroad] trains or something. We found out it belonged to them. After we stopped the train, everybody wanted to talk. Can we talk about it? Well, we've been calling people, whatever, whatever. So we take a hundred people and stop the train. They start right on these tracks. We was blessed that it did stop, but it made a difference. They put some things up there. It's somebody's job now to clean those tracks once or twice a month. They had dead animals, everything over there, so working with Mr. Bakewell was really -- we've been able to make a difference.

STEVENSON

So it seems like direct action and mobilizing people seem to be the best way to deal with the number of issues over the years.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Young folks today, they say, "Y'all still marching up and down the street?" But marching up and down the street works. Two years, two or three years go, they had this picture called [The Secret Diary of] Desmond Pifer, did I tell you about that?

STEVENSON

Yes, yeah.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, we marched up and down the street. People say you can march up and down the street all you want. That's got nothing to do with the picture. We'd go, so we did. We marched up and down the street, and while we was marching up and down the street, Danny called M&Ms and called AT&T [Corporation]. They cut their money and we went off the air. But it's strength in numbers, and when you show them you're just not going away. Like we closed that store down.

STEVENSON

Which store was that?

MARSH-MITCHELL

That store on Western and 70-something, right across the street from Bethel A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church. They killed a man over there in the store. The man was 50-some years old, never been arrested in his life. They say he robbed the store. He was a fighter, a boxer. And the story just didn't jive with us, and then when we really looked, they told you one story and the police -- they had the police come in and tell us a story. But if you go in the store, you could see blood rolling down walls, like they [inaudible] him down, so the next best thing was to say, no, we can't in the first place. The store was right across the street in the church, which was the school. That shouldn't have been. So we policed it ourselves. We stayed out there for a hundred-some days, through the rains and they had a heart attack but we sat out there and picketed that store until they closed. It was making a

thousand-some dollars, maybe more than that, a day. They were down to nothing. They had to close up. You had -- if we don't do it, we can't expect nobody else to do it. If we don't do it, we can't expect nobody else to come in our community and take care of our store, if we don't do it. And I'm the first one to say that we have to do some hard work in our community, like getting the railroads clean. We've got to teach people don't throw your trash out there.

STEVENSON

So part of it is instilling personal responsibility.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Sure, sure. I asked this young man to come, just paint my house. I was really happy that he painted my house and the fence to match. But two hours later, this boy came and put a mural on my walls, some graffiti stuff, so we painted it all. The next day his mother knocking on my door and said, "I'm very upset with you." I said, "Well, you don't even know me." She said, "You painted my son's art off your wall." That's my wall! I mean, does she hear what she's saying? Somewhere, we don't get it, and all I could tell the lady to get off my porch. So the parents don't teach them, so we all have to be part of that village to teach them and their parents.

STEVENSON

OK. I want to go back a little bit historically to ask you about the Watts rebellion of '65 and from your perspective what were the contributing factors to that, and maybe you could tell me a little bit about where you were during the Watts rebellion and then something about the aftermath.

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible]. Actually, we was hanging out that night on Broadway, and I really didn't realize that it had happened until I seen all these police and stuff coming by, and we got to be friends with the National Guard, started hanging out with them. But I think it came out of a need -- again, I really -- personally, it was the story to me of a store I had seen when I was a kid, and I'd seen a young man get shot on Broadway in a car. He didn't have a gun. I'd seen the police put a gun on him after they shot him, and so it was kind of like -- and this is what happened. To me it's the same thing as Rodney King. Man, they've seen this. The police, they're messing with us. They're beating us. These people, somebody's going to see what was happening, and all we've seen was people start looting and stuff, and you really saw black people looting. That's what they showed you. But it wasn't just black people looting. Even in '92, my friend Carmen, he was in Beverly Hills. He said, "Brenda, it's ridiculous." He said you see white people going in these stores. Something of Hollywood. What is it? They sell the underwear.

STEVENSON

A Victoria's Secret?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Something of Hollywood. I can't remember.

STEVENSON

Frederick's?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Frederick's of Hollywood, and all down Hollywood Boulevard. He was rolling. He said, "Brenda, ain't no black people up here." [inaudible] is white people and it's black people running in and out of here. [inaudible], they wasn't black, but they just showed us. But we thought the places [inaudible] was hoping they would go, and I shouldn't be like that, but I was hoping they'd go where they sell drug para...

STEVENSON

Paraphenalia?

MARSH-MITCHELL

On Slauson and Vermont [Avenue], there's a swap meeting. I thought they'd go in there. They didn't go in there. They just thought they were guns [phonetic], they didn't allow them in there. I thought if they went anywhere, they should go in -- and I don't like them destroying their community, because some of them live and witness that. They destroyed Compton Boulevard, end of '65, and until Mr. Bakewell came and redid it, it was still like that in the 70's. He did [inaudible] from '65. And they gave him holy hell to get the property to do it, but he made it look like Lakewood anywhere else where they have shopping centers down there. So I really, really was afraid in '92 when I saw it. I said, oh Lord, they're not going to rebuild right now, you know. But then with the rebuild L.A. efforts they did. So I lumped the two together, '65 and the '92. And they both was about police abuse. They both were, and people still didn't believe us. They still don't. I just knew that [inaudible] police abuse and then need, a need of something, and something came out of the '65 riot. I think that might have lasted a little more, a little longer. A lot of programs came out of '65. They had the NAPP [Neighborhood Adult Participation Project], they had a youth program, and I forget. CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act]? They had a lot, and people were [inaudible] to school, and this is what some people get on my nerves, because it was because the people in the Watts riot and they went -- I think they went to Chicago or Detroit, and they went to Florida. They made it possible for -- everybody couldn't go. But they opened up the USCs [University of Southern California] and they opened up the UCLAs [University of California, Los Angeles], and they'd allowed some of us to go. And they came in with Affirmative Action, and some of us -- I mean, we [inaudible] on that, but some of us got ours and said forget the rest. And I really always loved the ladies that lived in Watts, because it's on their backs that a lot of people were able to come out of there, and were able to buy homes, to start working. They got skills for their kids, and for themselves out of the Watts riots. The '92 riots, I didn't feel like I come out of there. I feel that was more for the corporations and stuff. They rebuilt some stuff. To me, it gave you hope out of the '65 riot, gave you hope. It gave you

something to look forward to rather than when I grow up I'm going to get a project and I'm going to do like my mama did and whatever. When I graduated from school, I got a chance to go to school, to college now. I'm going to go -- you know, I can go into a training program. I can go into NAPP and go into a training program. So you had hope.

STEVENSON

OK, I'm looking at the '92 rebellion and I see that you've connected the '65 and the '92. What would you say were the causes of the '92? How much...

MARSH-MITCHELL

'92, they asked for it. I mean, I don't think that that was all black people. I think people was looking for an excuse to do some stuff, because again, I think most people -- we didn't care nothing about O.J. [Orenthal James Simpson]. It had nothing to do with O.J. It had to do with we know that Emmett Till was lied on. If you look at that woman, you know Emmett Till was lying on it. You know that -- everybody know a brother that got beat down by the police. One time, I talked to this man, I said, you know, you keep messing with me. [inaudible] do anything. He said, oh no, they won't, and I flagged the police down. They was ready to beat him down. I say, "He socked me." They was ready to beat him down. [inaudible] no he didn't. I told you, brother, they would do that to you. I was surprised they didn't take me to jail for that, but they was ready to beat him down. And when I said -- we all know that they did that. You all know somebody. You might not knew them personally, but you've seen them beat them down. I believe, and this might sound far-fetched to you if you don't know, but I believe in Los Angeles the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department] started the Crips and the Bloods. They started picking up boys on one side of the street and taking them down the street, telling them they did this and they did that. It got good to them, because then they started getting overtime and stuff. Always believed that. I believe that somebody brought drugs into community. These boys ain't never been to Colombia. They've never been to Mexico to get drugs. Somebody they came here [inaudible] was bringing drugs in here. We had all these huge drive-bys and stuff. It's strange. Let me tell you, I used to go to work and come home late, and I would see people, white people driving down the street on Manchester [Avenue] and Vermont and Imperial [highway], and they're always bothering me because I don't want to drive down there in the middle of the night. What are they doing down there? So I've always had a little skepticism about that, so I'm saying the '92 riots had a lot to do with frustration. It had a lot to do with -- finally they seen, and then they found these guys not guilty. They kept telling you on TV, you didn't see what you seen. How you [inaudible] if you're a little kid just watching TV. They're not doing that. They told us we didn't see what we -- and [inaudible], we got letters every day. I didn't keep none of those letters. They would send the letters out. White people take care of white people. They would send those letters out. Them guys went to jail, they rich. They

was raising money. Every white person was sitting [inaudible]. Poor Sergeant So-and-So was in jail, his kids. They had an all-out campaign to support these guys, and I just think that the '92 riots was, like, that was just it for some people. You know, they just blew it, and they didn't blow it in the stores. Other people blew it in the stores. They blew it in the streets, just mad, and other people took advantage of that. They had nothing to do with it. We got all kinds of people. They didn't really look at that and they got -- and I don't know what the Reginald Denneys and stuff -- Reginald Denny had to be a fool to just get up there and get beat like that in a big truck, so he had to ask for some of that too. But some people did go crazy. You keep pushing a man, you keep pushing him, telling you don't see what you see. So, I'm not saying it's right, but it was something to say to that, and then when they finally -- I know they -- some of the TV stations that are in our conference room, when they went back to court and they found him not guilty, OJ, hell, we was like, whew, good. It wouldn't have had nothing to do with OJ. It had nothing -- in fact, do you know that they were talking about us in the [Mark] Fuhrman tapes? That building on Slauson, talking about us. That's the day I found out I was a diabetic, but they were talking about us, them baboons, and they wanted to blow -- on the police tapes, they wanted to blow up that building on Slauson. But that's because we're always speaking up. Mr. [inaudible] said he takes it serious what you do, an attack on black folks. So you've got to speak up. Don't matter what, you've got to speak up.

STEVENSON

Let me ask you this...

MARSH-MITCHELL

And let me tell you one more exciting thing. I think I told you this. I'm just repeating myself. I went to jail with Martin Luther King [III]. I have people laughing -- in 2000, I think, we went to Riverside and we went to jail with Martin Luther King, Dick Gregory, Kim Fields. It's funny because when I tell people we went to jail with Martin Luther King, it was Martin Luther King the Third, the son. And the reason that is, you know, she died, Tashia Miller. Was it Taisha Miller? Yeah, she died in recent days, like in the 2000 [inaudible]. You still have to do that. I mean, youngsters say, they say we're wrong for marching, but [inaudible] but you don't get attention until you do that.

STEVENSON

After the '65 rebellion, did -- what role did the Brotherhood Crusade have in trying to dialogue with the LAPD and trying to address some of the issues?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, actually, the Brotherhood started after that, so it was like '68, but we started -- in fact, that's where that stuff came from. Mr. Bakewell was on the police committee. He don't know I did that. I went to the meetings for him. He know I did that, but we used to ask the warden, I mean, you tell him

they was dealing drugs. And they was starting the gangs in our community, you know, and they didn't believe in rehabilitation, and now half of them have to go to some kind of rehabilitation program. They batter their wives. They drank alcohol. But they didn't believe in that, so it was a fight.

STEVENSON

Were there black police officers, and were there any blacks in the upper ranks of LAPD that you deal with during that time?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, Mr. Bakewell was good friends with Jesse Brewer. Jesse Brewer and there was a couple more, and I guess [Bernard] Parks was somewhere in there, but he wasn't -- I didn't like him.

STEVENSON

Why?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I didn't like him -- to tell you the truth, I didn't like him until after I -- I didn't until I started talking, because he was crazy too. He was LAPD, like when they killed that lady with the screwdriver [Margaret L. Mitchell]. He really believed that they was supposed to do that. They knew -- the people in the business surrounding the lady was [inaudible]. She never bothered nobody. And I just never understood why all the witness was off-duty police. They all hang out over there? But when he got mistreated by the mayor, then that was a different thing. But you know, because I thought that was wrong, what they did to that homeless lady. Can you close the door? We're in a meeting.

STEVENSON

What do you think the potential is for there being another rebellion?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I don't know, because I thought it might be another -- but there wasn't. I really thought that the Crips, the way [Stanley] "Tookie" [Williams] had like they was going to rebel over that. The media had it, not Tookie. I should have said the media did. Tookie never told them not to, but the media had it that day, and it was a big failure to the LAPD, because they was ready for it and I was so proud of them because they just didn't go there. And I can't think of another one. And then, like -- oh, I know. The Brotherhood led the fight at KJLH so it wouldn't be with the Devin Browns and what's his name, Oliver Beasley. Because we had a town hall meeting for the people to come speak out. Oliver Beasley, Devin Brown, and the Flash, what's his name, the one they just paid. [Stanley] Miller, the one they beat with the flashlight. You know it's against the law now. [inaudible] the judge and that's against the law [inaudible] for them to carry them flashlights. What's that guy's name, Miller. Miller, they just paid him off two weeks ago. They denied to fire him when they paid him. A flashlight. I thought that Devin Brown thing, I mean, that was so bad, and you know, if you really ever talked to Devin Brown and his family you knew he wasn't a gang member. You could tell. He

had none of the stuff, and for the father, just say I was sitting there and I thought my baby was dead. He had a gun to his head, he couldn't move. He said he seen his son just groping for breath, and then he didn't see him groping no more. He thought he was dead, and the boy -- the mama said the boy said, "Mama, I thought I'd never see you again." That could've been very explosive and I was proud of the Brothers. They got [inaudible] and they talked about it and they didn't [inaudible].

STEVENSON

Do you -- in the late 60's, I would say, maybe around '67, '68, do you ever remember attending any meetings of the Black Congress?

MARSH-MITCHELL

The Brotherhood came out to the Black Congress. I didn't, personally, but they did used to have those meetings.

STEVENSON

OK, now I want to move to talking about some of the other community organizations that you've been involved with. Mothers in Action? And maybe tell me about how did that organization get started, who started it, how did you become involved with it?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, we started -- Mr. Bakewell started just to take our community back and we was -- every day, we would -- we came out of Avalon Gardens project and this park called Green Meadows [Park] or something, and they was fighting in there and they wouldn't -- you know, they'd fight the people from the projects and such, so he decided that we would take our community back. They wouldn't deal drugs around it. So he got twelve organizations, [inaudible] groups, and they all took a day, whatever, and they'd march through. [inaudible] we'd be out there every day. We'd be out there with them, setting up for them to walk, giving them their flashlights or whatever they needed and their radios. And then we would -- they gave us a project, and we would run the project, do homework, and show the kids videos instead of -- there's no movie house. Everybody didn't have video machines, so we'd show a movie, give them popcorn and a treat after school. And so we started talking and Mr. Bakewell says, "Y'all are organized." He talked with me, so then in '92 when they had the rebellion, we opened up a place, Vermont [Avenue] and Manchester [Boulevard], where we housed people and fed them and clothed them and stuff, and we did let the gangbangers come in there and talk about the treaty and stuff. Police chasing [inaudible] how it started with some people that I caught up with them because I was a kid when I first started, and Miss [Lillian] Mobley, Enola Carter [Bunchy Carter's Mother], Mary Henry, and Johnny [Mae] Tilman, there was some warriors in our community. Johnny Tilman was over welfare rights. She's the baddest black woman I've ever seen in my life. She closed down a casino in Las Vegas because of welfare rights. Somebody had took it on themselves to say [inaudible] not getting no more welfare checks.

They closed down the casino and they said what do you all want. And they told them, people need to take checks. They got their checks in a day. So she's the baddest woman I know, and then Miss Henry who had worked with Avalon Carter, had to raise hell for all her life, about stuff in our community. She was part of it too, and Miss Mola Carter whose son was [Alprentice] Bunchy Carter, she was part of our group. She was the nice one, too, to everybody. You know, treated them like [inaudible] and stuff. Johnny Tilman, who had been [inaudible], she was still doing welfare rights, so we kept her working until the day she died. She's an [inaudible] but we had her call and people said they gave her hope too. We would still ask her to do stuff, so she would help people do -- you know, get their paperwork in order and stuff, get their checks and stuff. And there was a few more ladies, Gwen Green from the union, and there was a couple more people. Mr. Bakewell said yeah, Mothers in Action. That's how we started.

STEVENSON

So he named you.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Uh-huh, that's how we started, and after that we started doing different things, job training, just whatever it took to make -- to do it. And then we came up with the back to school thing, and I worked with Jenessee Center for Domestic Violence. In fact, he put an ad in the paper 'cause in South Central there was no place for a shelter for battered women. So he put an ad in the paper for somebody to start one, and two ladies came. One was the sheriff, and one -- she was a sheriff married to LAPD. She had been battered by him, and the other girl, Margaret, she's dead. She -- they started the Jenessee Center and it's still going. They actually started it in our conference room, and High Blood Pressure Foundation, all those people are dead except Joe Dyer and Dr. Mays. Sickle cells. We used to work closely with Challengers Boys and Girls Club. And Bridgeback Drug Prevention Program, which actually taught me a lot.

STEVENSON

Can you elaborate on that?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I used to -- couldn't talk. Wouldn't talk. I told you I was real bashful and stuff, and so working with that drug program, it was a halfway house and drug program. And I used to go over there a lot, and they used to say, "Sister, hold your head up! You might miss something. Hold your head up and talk." It's more better you talk, than hold it in. What'd they tell me that for? I can't shut up now. And then there was a program called Hillsman [Drug & Alcohol Center of Los Angeles, California]. I still work with them, Hillsman drug abuse center.

STEVENSON

And any other organizations, Minority AIDS Project?

MARSH-MITCHELL

We started -- in fact, he was here yesterday. Mr. Bakewell said they came to him and talked to him about AIDS and I was like, I don't want to. He said come here, Brenda, I want you to work with them. And I said, oh, shit, he's giving me AIDS. I thought I had AIDS. I didn't know, because I didn't want to work with those people because I thought -- I hadn't had no education on AIDS. I didn't know what the [inaudible]. I've been with AIDS people and I probably had AIDS, and he was mad. But it wasn't. I just didn't know. Minority AIDS, in fact, I still sit on their board.

STEVENSON

How did that project get started?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Bishop [Carl] Bean, they have a church called Unity Fellow [ship of Christ Church]. What is it, Unity Fellowship? And his church members was advocating AIDS. This is a gay church. And his church members was getting AIDS, so he said they had to do something, so they came and talked to Danny and Maxine Waters, and so Danny gave them the first money to start, to rent a place. I had to actually go with them to pay for their rent. And we did their first brochures and everything, and tried to -- we went around, we did the first seminar and we walked around to the different churches and they said they didn't want to talk about it. They said they didn't want to hear it. And so now they're doing this funny because just Friday we was laughing that all these big churches [inaudible] they're just [inaudible] on TV, did you see it? Where they talked about the preachers who wouldn't talk about AIDS? Or these, I do my work in Africa. Well, they were doing their work in Africa. They say, we don't know. And they have people dying here with AIDS. And we used to try to tell them, we're not asking you to promote it. We're not asking you to promote it. We're not asking you to say it's right. We're asking you to get the people ready for the rapture, because they're dying. Half of your musicians are dying from AIDS then, and they're [inaudible]. The only church that listened was First A.M.E [African Methodist Episcopal], was Chip Murray, and Reverend Frank Reed at Ward A.M.E. The rest of them didn't want to hear it. They didn't want to talk about it.

STEVENSON

What do you -- why do you think that is, that...?

MARSH-MITCHELL

That they talk about it now? They get money. Their faith-based initiative, and money. They didn't want to talk about it before. They was embarrassed about it and they didn't want to talk about it, and I believed that in some places, they let us down as a people because they heard it from the church. They would not be -- our AIDS numbers are just [inaudible].

STEVENSON

70 percent.

MARSH-MITCHELL

And you don't even hear. It started off in the white gay community. You don't even hear it no more, and that's because we always turn our back. That's not happening in our community. We're not paying no attention. We don't pay attention to who moves in our community. If you move in a white community, they'll come to your door and knock on your door and give you a welcome mat. We, somebody moves down the street, they say, "Oh, I seen somebody down the street, he look ugly." Something, but they're not going to knock on the door and see what he's doing. He could be out having sex with everybody on the block. So I think they failed us. We failed ourself because we're just in denial, but they failed us too, not passing information.

STEVENSON

So do you think the preacher's not addressing the issue of AIDS, how much of that had to do with the religious doctrine against homosexuality as an abomination?

MARSH-MITCHELL

If they'd listened to the story, wasn't all about homosexuality. But they're in denial and they're in denial for a lot of reasons. I'd rather not say, but a lot of reasons they're in denial. Number one, you think about it. You very seldom see a woman musician in any of our churches anymore. [inaudible] and I mean, [inaudible] each of these churches have an AIDS funeral once a month, but they say they died of cancer, they died of something else.

STEVENSON

And that would include the Reverend Cleveland, which it is alleged that he died from AIDS, I believe.

MARSH-MITCHELL

But I mean all of them, they don't want to talk about it. They just did not want to talk about it, and it's embarrassing. You see on national TV they talk about our black pastors. They go to Africa to talk about it, and their congregation is dying, and I know that some of those preachers teach about Adam and Steve, but it's not all about Adam and Steve. Right now, our numbers is women.

STEVENSON

70 percent.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Women. And then in our community, [inaudible] racism, you had sexism and you had classism. I had a teacher one time who said -- she, instead of teaching us, she was [inaudible]. She talked all the time about she tried to put us down, like I only had one man in my whole life. I only had one man in my whole life. A whole lot of women only had one man in their whole life. They got HIV or AIDS. That don't make it right. But you know, and the seniors have it. They've been married 30, 40 years. Senior citizens have AIDS. And this is just because we don't want to hear. We have gone to churches and all the women jump up. "I don't want to hear this! [inaudible] I'm not gay, I'm not messing around!" Well, your husband messes around

with whoever he messes around. You all know what, well, maybe he did it with somebody five years ago. But black people are hard to listen, because it's like *The Color Purple*. I mean, that was a lightning thing for me. I never crossed a picket line. I crossed a picket line to see that picture, and it could've been any race of people going in there. We were in denial, because we were always told that didn't happen. It happens in the black community. It happens more than -- I look at Bishop Bean, who started *Minority AIDS*, and he tells the story of how he was molested as a kid, because he had -- he played with the little girls in the neighborhood, and all their brothers and uncles and daddies and granddaddies would just pass him around. It happens in our community.

STEVENSON

But a taboo subject.

MARSH-MITCHELL

A taboo subject.

STEVENSON

Even more so than *AIDS*, you believe, as far as being...?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, because I tell you, working at the Brotherhood has opened my eyes to so many things. I used to have to go to the juvenile hall, McLaren Hall, to do presentations, and I never in my wildest dreams thought that I would see black girls in there that had babies by their brothers, their granddaddies and daddies. Blood, because we were always told that didn't happen in our families. It does happen. It really does and it's just sad that we don't want to talk about it. And so *The Color Purple* was almost hilarious, because it did have -- you're inside watching the movie, and all your friends, your male friends are outside picketing. And it could've been, we talk about it should've won awards, but we picket so bad people got confused. But it could've been any race of people going in there and doing the job to make the movie, first of all. But you're hiding something. And most of them out there heard different lines anyway, and that's how they got there. If you look at the Donnie McLurkins of the world, oh yeah, we are in denial. And I'm so glad -- I'll tell you, the Brotherhood has opened my eyes to so many things, just being able to -- because I swear, I thought I had *AIDS*. I had to take the people, find them a place, and then one of the guys had *AIDS*. He died about two days after that, and I just knew I was sick. I went home sick. I said I had *AIDS*, but I didn't. But I also learned that sitting in the same room with one of the doctors in this community, a well-known doctor, he never looked at the medical stuff for *AIDS*. He [inaudible] the next day I know, he was passing out stuff for his *AIDS* program. And he didn't get no medical terminology and stuff, he got it from people in our meeting, so we're our own worst enemies. We just...

STEVENSON

What do you think it will take to turn it around, the AIDS crisis? What do you think it will take to turn it around?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I think it's education and I think we're on a good road because right now we're getting ready, people are printing the truth, and I notice even my church, they asked me to help them. They're getting me to do an AIDS thing this weekend. I'm not helping them because I'm mad they're not telling the truth, and I told them about it. They've got some statistics about Africa, whatever. You've got to bring it home to people. You've got to tell people in Los Angeles -- in Los Angeles County, they've got 500 black women in [inaudible] that have AIDS. You've got to tell them that in Baldwin Hills they've got 1,200 babies. Africa is too far [inaudible] it don't pertain to them. But if you break it down, and you give them some statistics from '04, we've got statistics right now. I can get it for you right now. We can pull it up. But they don't do that. So we think they're faking it. Because you've got to give people what they need to hear. They need to hear something that's relevant, because we don't take it until it happens to us personally, so if my next-door neighbor got AIDS, or somebody on my block, then personally I know what's coming. I'll accept it, you know what I'm saying? If I get a woman that's -- we're trying to do now a series next year in the paper, Mr. Bakewell wants to do, of testimonies. You've got a woman that's 60, they got AIDS. She ain't had but one husband, but she's telling her story. You might not identify with her. You might identify with the lady that had to give blood infusion. They've still got dirty blood. They just [inaudible] Salvation Army, that's what [inaudible] dirty blood. But they've still got dirty blood, so you might have gotten yours from dirty blood. But you know, but you keep telling the story until you get to somebody's personal issue, right, and I think educational. You keep telling them the real numbers -- not African numbers, the real numbers here in LA County. That's -- you can touch and feel them, or whatever. I was looking at a statistic in Washington a couple of months ago. There was a police chief saying [inaudible] showing that. Atlanta was the rape capital of the United States. Atlanta is also an unkept San Francisco, kept quiet, of gay blacks. There are so many gay blacks in Atlanta, so you can imagine who's getting raped, if it's the rape capital. So that means their AIDS numbers got to be up. But you've got to break it down to people. You've got to use ebonics on us and break it down to people, and I think that a few more of these AIDS seminars in the community, whether they come or not, we did about two months ago, we did with Tom Joyner, did across the country, Take a Person to the Doctor Day. Doctor Day. So we did our part, talking about we, the [Los Angeles] Sentinel, the Brotherhood Crusade, Mothers in Action, and The Beat. We went to Compton and we had all kinds of doctors and stuff out there, but one of the interesting things I was looking was Minority AIDS and we had two AIDS, because one AIDS give you the test, the rapid test they give to

you right then, and then the other one give it to you in ten days, and they had another one, that bloodless test. They always full. Usually we do AIDS and people don't come to them. They was all full. I just happened to be looking at them, staring, and I was looking at the Minority AIDS truck and people were going in and out of there like traffic. And some people was coming out like "Yes!" and one boy fell on his knees and thanked the Lord. A couple people came out and walked all around. You know, you figure they was told. They were busy, they never got a break, the three of them. They never got a break. It was good. We did Taste of Soul out here. They was packed. They got more numbers there, so people are getting the contest. They are taking the test. And we just need to keep doing that. And they said last week Magic did it at the theater. They was packed over there. But you've got to keep doing it and making it available for them. I think that health fairs are more apt to help people than them going to the doctor. It's a lot of people, we've had people -- we did the same thing with diabetes. We've had people [inaudible] walking around and we had a health fair and found out they had diabetes real bad and needed to go to the hospital right now. I'm one of them, so I'm just saying that I think that we have to do a lot more education, a lot more testing for people to -- and once you test them, if they feel like they don't have it, they find out they don't have it, they have something to work towards. Not to ever do this that way again, so you're giving hope to the community. We've just got to keep on doing it. No matter who-all do it, we have to do what we have to do, and I think our community again has to be a village for health issues and to understand this, and this is another thing that the Brotherhood's working on now. Mr. Bakewell has us doing everything. [inaudible] hepatitis. [inaudible] hepatitis. Hepatitis is high among black people. Nobody talks about hepatitis. I think it's Hepatitis A or B, but it's high. So they're getting ready to roll out a thing about hepatitis, and see, you just keep on at it, and one thing Mr. Bakewell told us a long time ago, we could put it out there, start it, and move on. Go to the next thing. Let somebody else work that. Just get it out there, let people understand, let them take it and work with it. We've got to get it out there. Somebody gotta be the institution built and start it, because a lot of people don't want to get on the bandwagon at first. It's too new. People wanted to talk about AIDS. He thought we was absolutely crazy. He said you've got to tell everybody. We've got to tell everybody about this disease. But because they came out and said it's a white gay disease, black folks didn't want to hear. They didn't want to hear. We got more gay black people than ever. It's funny, it is funny that we sit around and don't believe it. I believe, I tell my daughters every day, I believe y'all might not never get married to an African-American man. Now, you might get married to a Jamaican, African, even they coming out. You used to never see that, but now you're seeing them come out gay. We have so many gay men, it is sick. They've been in the [inaudible] and they plan on [inaudible]. It's just

ridiculous, so you've just got to stay -- stop telling people it don't pertain to them. It do pertain to them. It do. I need to shut up, I'm sorry.

STEVENSON

No, that's what I want you to do. Couple more things, one, the demographics in the community that the Brotherhood Crusade serves and our community has changed in some areas to mostly Latino. Could you talk about some of the -- maybe the Latino initiatives, organizations that the Brotherhood Crusade has?

MARSH-MITCHELL

We do, but they don't do it back. They don't do it back, and personally, it makes me upset. Like for instance, Chicano Service Center. We give them money. Nobody else gave them money.

STEVENSON

Chicano Service Center?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, they do a whole lot of stuff. They do job training. We gave them money because they did job training and they had a shelter. And they did house some white people in their shelters. You know, there was another program, a Latino Walt [Bremond] helped start, like the Brotherhood Crusade. It's like -- it's a self-help program, for Latino programs, I can't remember the name of it. And he helped start that, but there's quite a few - - everywhere we go, I mean, it's like when we do back to school. Our lines are filled with Latinos. They have attitude with us, I mean, like you have to give it to them. They don't say thank you. I want it -- you just racist. It ain't racist. You gettin' it. You know, we don't know where they [inaudible]. I've never heard of a Latino [inaudible]. I know they have them. You never know. They'll stop and get in your line, they don't know what you're giving away. Y'all know what we're giving away. What are we giving away? I don't know! They're just right there. But I mean, they're in our community. We have to. I mean, I'm never going to turn nobody away. But our job is to speak for the African-American people, because ain't nobody going to speak for them, and we don't deny that, and if you get in the line you'll get served, but our outreach is to the African-American community. It's hard to do that. Right now it's hard, because I ask for it. I call Jeff, high school [inaudible]. We was doing a black family reunion for the band, and the man said I don't know if we [inaudible] to this band, this ain't no black band anymore.

STEVENSON

So when you say they don't reciprocate, the organizations, groups don't reciprocate, why do you think that is?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I don't know. I know one day, it was one of the grocery stores, it was giving away ice cream and they gave it to this group, and they caught us and said we're turning the truck around because they have all Hispanic people and we

want everybody to get some. [inaudible] to us, and of course, everybody got in our line.

STEVENSON

OK, are there any other organizations that you're involved with that you'd like to speak about that I haven't covered?

MARSH-MITCHELL

That's a lot of them. That's a lot of them. Black Women's forum.

STEVENSON

Well, maybe you could pick one that is maybe personally significant to you. I know you've been involved with --

MARSH-MITCHELL

Black women's form, they helped around me. I mean, just to be involved with all kinds of black women that are doing something to better our community. I mean, some people you never see every day. Some people are at the university level, some people are in the law level. I mean, just working with all -- doing that New Frontiers Democratic Club, that another exciting program. That's one of the oldest Democratic clubs in Los Angeles and the country.

STEVENSON

What year was that formed?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I don't know, but it was founded by Julian Dixon was one of the founders, I think, Gwen Greene and some people. And it was -- and it still is one of the most popular Democratic, because they understand. I mean, I think everybody should belong to them. They understand that you have to give these politicians money. You have to work with them to get them elected. You need to endorse them. You need to go sit down and lick stamps. Everybody can't -- you know, everybody can't be up there making speeches. You've got to lick stamps and make some phone calls. You've got to help the process and be a part of the process if you want to make a difference and I think that's a great club to teach you how to do that, not just social things. And there's programs like Miss Mobley and I have a health task force. They meet on every Monday, and I tip my hat to them. That's so boring to me, but they stay on top of the health issues for Los Angeles, for African-Americans whether it be a hospital, they've been raising hell about the hospitals for years, and right now they're on mental health, because why they closed Gary King, ain't nobody talking about the mental health people walking around. They're still not doing nothing for them, so I mean, they meet religiously every week, and then you've got the education convention, the black education convention that they stayed, they're watchdogs on the education. When everybody else go away, on every level, the school districts, the college, the community college, they're watchdogs. They just -- and they keep on coming at you. They get on people's nerves, but they're still working. And then, you know, just working with -- I really like working

with drug programs, and I like working with these kids' programs, you know. Because right now, some of those kids are grown, and they're coming back to say wow, you all helped me out. [inaudible] tell Danny he's a doctor. And he said he asked them to because he [inaudible] them to pull his pants up, and hold his head up.

STEVENSON

OK, is there anything else you'd like to discuss before we close that I haven't covered?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Not really. I mean, I would like to say this, now that I'm at the Sentinel.

STEVENSON

Well, tell me about when you started at the Sentinel. Now, I know you came with Mr. Bakewell. And...

MARSH-MITCHELL

And I just bought a radio station. And [inaudible] but the Sentinel, he told me something when he said, he said Brenda, now we have an opportunity to change thought, and we can change thought. Everybody when they first, the Sentinel, always got the Sentinel, and they used to always have killings on the front page and we'd have just as much good stories as we have bad stories. We have just as much information stories like we were on this Say No campaign. We had to tell people that the black community is -- they can't say it if we don't want to [inaudible] said. Say no to the N-word. You've got to say it. We called up with things we never did before. We never talked about another black person. We had to talk about the white ones, because they came, after they committed the Say No, they came up and did a program that had to say nigger 20 times. You can't expect nobody to do that. We had to write about it. So it gives you a chance to bring the dialogue, get the discussion going, and get people to understand whether it's good or it's bad and then they can make their opinion, but you get to put the news in front of the people. Our issues, black people talking to black people.

STEVENSON

And why is that so important?

MARSH-MITCHELL

That's important because the [Los Angeles] Times and the Channel 7, they make our world, and that's not our world. And there's a synopsis we use around here. If Minister Farrakhan killed George Bush, we can't write the story like USA Today or LA Times. Mr. [Louis] Farrakhan kills George Bush. George Bush drove him to kill him because of profiting and lack of education. We've got to talk to him. We've got to write this story. We've got to write it different from every -- we're telling the story, but we've got -- it's a different angle, and that's what you get to do. You get to change thought.

STEVENSON

All right, Brenda. Thank you.

1.5. Session 3

January 30, 2007

STEVENSON

OK, I'm completing an interview with Brenda Marsh-Mitchell on January 30th. I have a few follow-up questions, Brenda. Could you tell me in your opinion what were the factors that led up to the '92 rebellion and in your opinion was the '92 rebellion tied to the one in '65 or did it happen for completely different reasons?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I think it happened for completely different reasons. I think -- and in some older people, it might have been a real flashback, a reminder, but I really think it happened for all because all the years from '65, African-American males especially have been beaten by the LAPD and have been beaten and just picked on by the LAPD, and now the whole world could see it. I mean, it was on TV every two minutes and we finally felt like, whew, somebody's going to believe us other than us, that this really exists in our community. And so I think the frustration was out of people telling us you didn't see what you seen. You can't believe this, this is not what you see. It is just not existing, and they explained it so that it's OK. You know, he's powerful, he was full of drugs or something, and this was the only way to restrain him. Well, we know in fact this happens every day in our community. It happened after [Hurricane] Katrina in New Orleans with a teacher. It's still happening day-to-day. Ron, the little boy they just killed or whatever, and it just goes on and on, how they have justice for us and it's two justices, justice for them and justice for us. It's the same example today. In the news, they're talking about Brandy [Rayana Norwood], ran over these people. Brandy ran over these people and they showed other actors that did the same thing, and they just got away with it. And the man is upset because she didn't personally apologize to them. Well, you know, she's probably got problems too that this can happen, so I think the '92 riots were just something that built up.

STEVENSON

I see. So just a build-up of reaction against police brutality.

MARSH-MITCHELL

A reaction, yes.

STEVENSON

Do you think, was there an economic factor?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Well, I'm sure. I mean, after a while, you might as well just go -- you don't have nothing anyway. Unemployed, no health insurance, no whatever. After the '65 riots they gave us a rock. They threw a little rock here on this street, and a little rock on this street, and out of that little rock there was housing, healthcare, job training, whatever, and everybody had divided up. Might

have not been but five for each, right. Little diversity. I mean, affirmative action, and little stuff, but everybody couldn't get it so it was a build-up of a lot of things I think.

STEVENSON

Right, and what about the people that participated in the riot in terms -- was it African-Americans? Or were there...

MARSH-MITCHELL

There was not just African-Americans in the riot. There was some people that had nothing to do with nothing. I know my friend told me in Hollywood. Those were all white people, and running into Frederick's of Hollywood and different places, but he had to stop and park and just look, because my foot [phonetic] was riding crazy. And Hispanics was going into the grocery stores and stuff, so it wasn't just black people, and I think the numbers of black people are really less than everybody else.

STEVENSON

I see. So were you still working for the Brotherhood at the time of the '92 rebellion? And was there any response on the Brotherhood's part?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, Mr. [Danny J.] Bakewell [Sr.] had us put up what we called a rescue unit, because the racism [inaudible] with the Salvation Army and the Red Cross. They wouldn't come across King.

STEVENSON

Really?

MARSH-MITCHELL

They would send people to us. We opened up a rescue unit on 53rd [Street] and Vermont [Avenue] and one on Manchester [Boulevard] and Vermont, and they used to send us to people and they wouldn't have nothing. And some were the people went to the Valley and stuff, and they would say they was getting ham and eggs and stuff for breakfast, and different things that they just gave the same thing, oatmeal or something over there, and just whatever. But if you went out further, so we was there for the people there and three meals a day. Some of them stayed there. People, we found out there was a lot of homeless, there was a lot of -- and that's why Mr. Bakewell came up with a job training, and I think they did four weeks for waiter/waitress. A lot of people didn't understand that being a waiter you could make money. A lot of people sent their kids to college and stuff, and that's when they started waiter/waitress school out of that, and a lot of folk got trained and they paid for them to get in the union and stuff but we housed people, we gave them healthcare. They didn't have it. Right there on the corner, on the spot, we did blood pressures, shots, immunizations, flu shots. We did pap smears, prostate testing, AIDS testing. We did right there on the street and people were surprised. I mean, I was surprised at the people that came for that. They don't have Medicare and they don't qualify. Everybody think black folk on Medicaid and all that, they don't.

Everybody's not on there and Hispanics came, they wasn't on there. It's just a crime. It's criminal, the way that people are treated in our community, and we walked by this every day. And it's criminal, it really is. People that stay in the house, I mean, every morning. When I came to work, there was a line of people just wanting breakfast. They just wanted breakfast, and then in the evening they came back. Afternoon they came for lunch and then it was -- and we found out that we had these little kids. You take everything for granted. These little kids was there at the big tent. They could watch videos and if someone would help them with their homework, and they started saying [inaudible] too large. You can't do this, and they tell [inaudible] mess it up for me. This is the best that ever happened to me. Went to their house, they didn't have beds. They didn't have -- you think you see a [inaudible] house and a family. You think everybody has a bed or refrigerator, stove, and that's not true. Some people are barely living. I saw things after that '92 riot in people's houses, it just saddened me. In 1992, you go in there and the dollar foam box, you see that people take to the park to put sodas and stuff. That was their refrigerator. Their real refrigerator. I mean, in 1992. There was no sign. They didn't take the refrigerator out. There wasn't no refrigerator ever there. People using hot plates to heat up their house and stuff, just -- Thanksgiving we went to somebody's house, taking meals, and a senior citizen had gas on in their house, the stove all 90 years old, and I happened to take the mayor in there with me, and we were just appalled. The house smelling like gas, so I mean, those are the kinds of things that I think helped start that riot.

STEVENSON

Do you think that the powers that be get it? Still?

MARSH-MITCHELL

No. No. I don't. I mean, if you're in their face every day and you get something. If you're not in their face, you're just a lost voice, and you have hopelessness. No, nobody gets it, and they just don't get that, because every day they say "Why are kids failing school?" They're failing school because they're hungry. They're failing because they're at home with alcoholic parents. They fail at school because they can't hear. They fail because they can't see. They don't have no glasses and stuff. If we don't have the health fairs and stuff on the streets and stuff, some of these people never get that stuff. They fail because their teeth hurt. They fail because they've got some kind of malnutrition. Sure, education is free, but you've got to have all this other stuff to go with it. If you can go to school feeling good at home, you had a decent meal, you know when you get home you don't have to fight or stay up and listen to fights all night. You don't have to sleep on the floor. You don't have to worry about the helicopter flying over. You don't have to worry about the police riding up and down the sidewalk on the streets. Some of the neighborhoods, the police terrorized people, and a lot of people don't believe this. If you -- and never in their life would they

believe this. But they do, they terrorize the neighborhood. Poor little kids, they've got to run from drug addicts, run from the gangbangers. Sometimes gangbangers is better to them than anybody else. They go through a lot to get to the school, so you never know why a person is failing, and the teachers, a lot of the teachers there in the classroom, "I got mine," and these kids ain't got theirs, never knowing that a little kindness, a little hug or something to say, Mary, you know that it's going to be all right. You can do it. Some encouragement.

STEVENSON

So you would say it's about quality of life issues.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, I would, and I just -- no, they don't get it.

STEVENSON

So, given that, do you think there's a danger of yet a third rebellion?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I'm sure. If you keep on grinding people down, you keep killing people, you keep having laws for just for them and just for us, sure. I do. Some days I feel like just running screaming. When I ride down skid row every day and I see nobody cares. Nobody cares. I mean, I grant you some of those people, some of those people might -- they're having fun because they've adjusted to look like they're having fun. Sometimes you've got to have fun to keep from crying and keeping making a bad situ... But when you go downtown, and every day I do that to remind myself that it gets no better and most of the politicians they don't give a damn. They just care about a vote. They don't care how you're situated. Vote for me, give me a chance. They didn't do nothing for you, but give me a vote.

STEVENSON

And does that apply to...

MARSH-MITCHELL

All of them.

STEVENSON

All of them, including African-American politicians. OK.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Because they so busy, now that they have term limits. They're so busy, scrambling for the day they get elected, swore in, they scramble for where they're going after that. So they don't really -- not everyone, but I mean, for the most part. It's not getting better. It's getting worse.

STEVENSON

OK, you had mentioned to me about a gang treaty that you knew about. Could you talk a little bit more about that? And I think this was...

MARSH-MITCHELL

In '92?

STEVENSON

Yes.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, when they wrote the gang... They was trying, and I can't give you the names of them, because I really didn't care. But they was trying. We would allow them to come, and I really don't want to. I just don't care, because somewhere, they owe us -- they owed their community, their mamas, their sisters, their brothers. They need to do something, so I try not to spend a lot of time on that but they did come to the table. They would come to the tent and sit there and talk about their problems, whatever. They'd go to the park and whatever and talk about it, and some of them said they did it for their mothers and whatever, whatever. So if they're trying, you've got to try to help them. So we made a space for them. They could have their meetings, whatever, and they respected that and they worked on it and they tried to live on it, but somewhere, I mean, and I learned a lot from that because I heard young men say, well, the men in the neighborhood don't talk to me. I'm the man of my house, but the men in the neighborhood, they just don't talk to me at all. So you know, and Miss So-And-So, she acts like she's afraid of me. I'm the same little boy who used to take her trash out. She called me and said, "Look, Johnny, pull your pants up." He said, "I respect that, but they don't do that. They start throwing stuff at me and hollering at me and cursing at me. I know I'm the same. I still want her love." So, I mean, we have problems, I have to admit, we do.

STEVENSON

Can you tell me when you first became aware of the local chapter of the Black Panthers?

MARSH-MITCHELL

When Mr. Bakewell sent me over there to give them a check for their breakfast.

STEVENSON

That was your first encounter with them.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Yeah, and I used to see it on the news and stuff, but I never knew how passionate they were. On the news I said, dang, wow. The news gave you one story, and they was trying to address the same issue that I just told you, to kind of help the children so they go to school, they can learn. And they were into education. And most of them were educated.

STEVENSON

What were some of the programs that you knew about that they initiated in the community?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I know the breakfast program, and they used to do tutoring for the kids. I don't know a whole bunch, but I know about those, and I thought that -- that's again, if everybody did that, we'd have probably more scholars. And they did not like the Crips and the Bloods. They did again, and this is important, most of them were real educated.

STEVENSON

Were there any -- like I said, what little you know about them, who were the key players or say the most visible members back in those days?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Angela Davis, Rap Brown. There's a few more. Who else? There were some more I can't think of, but I remember Angela Davis real well. There was another lady. They're professors! You know, they're scholars. They write books and stuff. Just for the life of me, I just can't remember their names. They wore big naturals and they were proud. I mean, it's like -- they almost, to me, they almost revolved same time James Brown, "I'm Black and I'm Proud." But the TV did not show the side where they were helping the community.

STEVENSON

How did they -- how were they portrayed?

MARSH-MITCHELL

Thugs, and just outlaws. Kill the pigs, that was their slogan, kill the pigs.

STEVENSON

I see. How would you say the media portrayed the community in general, because this is still an issue today about how the media portrays our community.

MARSH-MITCHELL

Lazy, thieves. Con folk. It's like we're an underdog, I mean like, it almost [inaudible] we're black. I mean, you don't care about the community, you don't care about nothing but yourself. That's the way they're portrayed and every time there's a crime, [inaudible] somebody killed somebody else, you can tell when they're not black, because they'll just keep on talking about they're looking. African-American just killed so-and-so, African-American did that. And it's almost to the point when they say somebody robbed a bank or whatever and they don't say African-American, you're like, whew. They never, ever say "five African-Americans graduated from Harvard this year." You'll never hear that. You absolutely never hear that. You never hear about these kids that go to Grape Street School and all in the Watts and all in the traffic, the drug traffic, the drug traffic, gangs members feed them and send them to school and buy the school clothes. You're never going to hear nothing about that. You just hear that we're no good, lazy, robbers, killers, con artists, you know, shiftless.

STEVENSON

Has that changed much?

MARSH-MITCHELL

No, because everybody, they've got to find something bad with everybody. Everybody, ball players, everything. If [Earvin] Magic Johnson [Jr.] was caught drinking, his drinking would never -- Mel Gibson would be the king, you know what I'm saying? And so no, absolutely no.

STEVENSON

Did you ever personally participate in any Black Panther sponsored programs or activities?

MARSH-MITCHELL

No, other than every time [inaudible] they'd drop off their check or something, and I went over there that day, my first. I went over that day. They was burning up the street looking for a [inaudible]. They didn't care how many people they run. But, no. And I have worked with some of them since then. On one Thanksgiving they called our office and I picked up the phone because the answering service called me and there was a killing by the police in the projects and the only people that I could reach that day, they just happened to be ex-Panthers. And it was good. They helped us, the Brotherhood and Danny, organize the residents and they were -- I forget who it was. It was a real high-profile killing or whatever, but they came. And they helped organize them and organized the residents in the Jordan Downs. I think it was the Jordan projects. And since then, you know, like some of them we work with them on different community events and stuff like that, and that's about it.

STEVENSON

When did you start working for the Sentinel?

MARSH-MITCHELL

About three years ago.

STEVENSON

Ah, very recent, very recent.

MARSH-MITCHELL

When Mr. Bakewell bought it. [inaudible]

STEVENSON

And I guess, how -- what is your role then with the Sentinel and how do you see it evolving?

MARSH-MITCHELL

I see it evolving by - it's important that people read, read the paper, and it's like [inaudible] I saw we're black people talking to black people, so we're not the LA [Los Angeles] Times, or we don't write the LA Times story. For an example, if -- just say that Johnny Cochrane, they say if Johnny Cochrane killed Bush, you can't write Johnny Cochrane killed Bush, just he just murdered him. There's a reason he pushed him. He didn't do something for the black people. Something, there's a different reason. We have to tell the black side of the story. It's the right story, but it's just a different angle because we're black people talking to black people, and that's good.

STEVENSON

Anything else you want to say before we wind up?

MARSH-MITCHELL

No, I don't know. I think I've talked too much.

STEVENSON

OK, I told you think wouldn't take too long. Yeah, I just want to be
[inaudible].

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible]

STEVENSON

Nichelle told me to let her know when I came this morning, because I was
going to try to -- I was going to try, but she said that, yeah. She said if...

MARSH-MITCHELL

[inaudible]

STEVENSON

OK, that'd be great.