

A TEI Project

Interview of Harris Hiawatha

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1

April 8, 2006

STEVENSON

OK, I'm interviewing Dr. Hiawatha Harris on Saturday, April 8th. First of all, I'd like you to tell me something about where and when you were born, about your parents and other family members.

HARRIS

I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, at home; January the 18th, 1929. My mother and father were down there with her sister, Marie, who played a very prominent role, as far as I'm concerned, as inspiring me, and sort of pushing me along. Her name was Marie Mitchell -- Marie Stewart, Stewart was her family name. My grandfather was a rural schoolteacher in Mississippi, mostly principal of a two-room school in the rural areas, and taught for more than 50 years there. Abraham Stewart, and everybody knew him as Professor Stewart. The school went to the 8th grade; one teacher would teach to the 4th grade, and Papa would be the other four grades there.

My -- I'm not sure what my father did; I just have snippets of him, because after I was born, he had apparently got what some people call a "Black Divorce," just leave: he had another family, my father was a World War I veteran, and was one of the few blacks, I guess, in that era, that had a car. And he courted my mother with -- I guess it was a T Model Ford, I'm not sure what it was, what they had in 1928, '27, '28, after he had come back from the war. Soon after I was born, I understand, my father came back -- he had another family, and he -- as my mother tells it, his daughter was sort

of in constant contact with the other family, and he returned to her, and I guess her mother.

My mother came back to Mississippi, Jackson in fact, and sort of left me with my grandmother and grandfather, and some of the other family -- her siblings there, in Edwards, Mississippi. Edwards is a small town from outside of -- between Jackson and Vicksburg, which is about 18 miles, I guess; 18, 19 miles from Jackson, Mississippi, and about 17 miles from Vicksburg, Mississippi, so it's sort of in the middle of that. And we lived farther out in the country, and my grandfather also was a sharecropper, and farmed land, and I guess in those days, a sharecropper is just what it is; half of -- somewhat -- a percentage of your harvest went to the man, so the speak, and Papa was one of the few blacks that could read, and the story's always told about how you never get out of the debt, because the proprietor of the land would loan you either seed or money or whatever to plant, and that's how you would pay him back, by sharing that with him. And blacks was often cheated, because most of them couldn't read or write; that was the legacy of slavery, with no education.

My grandfather could read and write, and people would sneak to his house late at night, and help them to figure out how much was owed to them, how much was owed to the proprietor of the land. I say all that, I talk about all that, because all of that is sort of -- has always been very important to me and my -- I can't say "struggles," because I don't see myself as struggling too much, other than being denied of some things. But always able to -- well, I don't see myself as having a struggle; I see myself as having the sense to know what it is that I can do, know what it is that I can't do; know it is that I can have, know what it is that I can't have. But I guess growing up in Mississippi, and being on the farm, and all the things that meant, was sort of the thing that backgrounded me.

I went to school early, I guess as soon as I could walk or talk, because I would go to school with Papa, and my aunt and some cousins would go also to Papa's school, so that sort of did some things, and sort of put me ahead, I guess, because I don't feel that I'm a genius or anything like that, but I was far ahead as a result of maybe that, and learning to read early. And the way I learned to read was that my grandfather would take the newspaper that would be delivered up on the road some miles away by the mailman; it was the Daily Clarion Ledger, which was the newspaper in Jackson, Mississippi. And after the paper was read and everything, my grandmother used to use that paper to paper the walls, so it became wallpaper.

And so I had an uncle who was an invalid -- we still don't know what exactly happened to him to make him paralyzed in his legs, whether or not he got polio, or whether or not he stepped on an electrical wire, or was playing with that -- whatever happened, Jack, my Uncle Jack, was paralyzed, and so he was bedridden most of the time; he could get up sometimes, and sometimes he couldn't; he could feed himself sometimes, and sometimes he couldn't.

He had the Parkinsonian things that I recognize now, because I'm a physician. And Jack used to -- I used to read words off, and Jack used to tell me what they were. And so early on -- I could read the words early on, and I was attracted to the comics even to this day. And learned how to read that way; I've always had that fascination for reading, et cetera. And I guess learning to read early sort of propelled me into all the other kinds of things; when I got to be six years old, I went back to New Orleans and lived with my Aunt Marie and her family, my Uncle Mitch and her daughter, Claudia, my cousin. We were the only two grandchildren in the family for a long time, until my younger aunt began to have children. So we were sort of like brother and sister kind of thing living together.

And so I stayed down there; I started out in school in New Orleans, at Daniel Colored Public Elementary School. All the schools then were colored, were named colored schools: J.W. Hoffman Colored Junior High School, and Booker T. Washington Colored High School. But I started off at Daniel; never went to the 1st grade, I guess I was in 1st grade for a minute. Then the 2nd grade, and stayed there a little longer time, and then was pushed up into the 3rd grade. So I guess I was 7 years old, something like that, going from the 1st to the 3rd grade. Stayed there for a couple of years, and then came back to Jackson, Mississippi, where my mother was, who had married my stepfather, Will Jones, and to go to school in Jackson. And I went to Smith Robertson Elementary School; I think there must have been somebody else who was a better historian about Jackson than I am, but I think we only had two elementary schools -- I went to the same school that Richard Wright went to, same elementary school as Richard Wright, Smith Robertson -- not Smith Robertson -- was it Smith Robertson? I think it was Smith Robertson. Finished elementary school there, the 8th grade, so I guess at 12 years old, I entered high school, and I came back to New Orleans to go to high school, junior high really and then high school.

I went to 8th grade at J.W. Hoffman, and then was supposed to go in the 9th grade to McDonogh 35, which was the academic school, but they built Booker T. Washington, and we were forced to go to Booker T. Washington for a year, instead of going directly to McDonogh 35 for those kids who were going to college. Booker T. Washington was a new school they built; it was a trade school, though. And of course, some of the kids -- yeah, you could graduate and go to the colleges also, but I wanted to go to McDonogh 35, and so I went to Booker T. Washington for a year, and then to MacDonald 35 for two years, and then I finished, everybody came to California; I had to finish high school in Mississippi.

Oddly enough, my grandfather had gone to the same school that I graduated from high school; at that time in Mississippi, when I guess he was coming up, you'd finish the 8th grade, and then you'd go to another school which was to finish the rest of high school, and take a so-called "Normal Course." And the Normal Course was -- made you eligible to teach. So my

grandfather went to Mount Beulah, and also taken the Normal Course, and was a teacher, that's what made him a teacher. I went to the school, but they changed the name -- the elementary school, I think, was Mount Beulah, but the high school was Southern Christian Institute. So I went and spent the last year, the 12th grade, and Southern Christian Institute in Edwards, Mississippi. They just had a big reunion there this year, just after [Hurricane] Katrina in September. Everybody that had gone there went back, except me.

So I was supposed to come to California, but it's sort of like, one of the family would go and bring the other member, another family member with them, and then that one would bring the other family members. And so my Aunt Marie and her husband went to California first -- this must have been in 1941 or '42 -- and my uncle was a Longshoreman, but at the time, Kaiser [Aluminum] was recruiting blacks. And you know, the Kaiser trains brought a lot of blacks from the South, mostly Louisiana and Texas, and probably Oklahoma, to California to work in his shipyard, and Kaiser's another history that people should really look at, because Kaiser --

STEVENSON

Yeah, that's interesting; I never had that.

HARRIS

-- Kaiser is, the Kaiser thing is really a story in itself, as far as so-called liberation. Maybe there should be a playwright, like August Wilson who wrote mostly about Pittsburgh and coming up from the South, somebody should do something about Kaiser as it relates to blacks, and also as it relates to the country in general; there are some other things that Kaiser did that really helped us, and at the same time helped the rest of the world too, the rest of the country, especially in California. Well, anyway, since my trip wasn't ready yet, my aunt was the one -- my youngest aunt, who's still alive now, Virgie [phonetic]-- came to California instead of me in 1943, '44. '43 -- '43 or '44, because I came in 1945; after I finished high school, I came back to Jackson. I stayed in Edwards with my grandparents and came back to Jackson with my mother after I finished high school, and worked as a porter for Lerners, Lerners stores, as a porter, making \$18 a week.

And my stepfather, who had worked at a similar job, was surprised that somebody was paying me \$18, because he was only getting \$18 too, because my stepfather also had light hands and everything, so he was working for a clothing store, Cohen Brothers, who owned shotgun houses and rental properties, and so my stepfather was a person that maintained all of those places. For awhile, I knew how to do carpentry and plumbing and all of those things, because I went around with my stepfather. Collected rent, because I don't think Will could read or write or anything, but collected the rent and wrote the receipts and everything for him.

But I got the job at Lerners, and worked from about May to August, and August of 1945 my aunt came, Marie came, and brought my cousin and I,

James Harold, to San Francisco. And then Minnie was already out here, that's one of the other sisters; she and my mother lived together until both died. Neither one of them ever remarried; Mother didn't remarry after she left my stepfather in October of 1945. And so we came out, and we stayed on 7th St. and Oakland in a garage, three of us. And when you wanted to bathe, you had to go up to the big house, the people that were renting to us, and we saw that the family followed each other; Aunt Marie was living in San Francisco, 574 3rd St. They bought a house on Spruce St. in San Francisco, and we moved into the 574 3rd St.

And from there, there's a place that I went to, continued in school. I came to California, I was 16, to go to school, because it was free. I was scheduled to go, I had been accepted at Dillard University, and most -- some of the kids at our school, 35, were either going to Dillard, Southern, Grambling [State University], or Xavier. And I had been accepted at Dillard, and was scheduled to go, but in August, I couldn't turn down coming out to California, where the oranges grew on the streets, and you could walk down the streets, supposedly, and pick off -- I didn't realize San Francisco didn't grow no oranges. [laughter] But that was my fantasy.

And came and started at City College of San Francisco, where -- really education was free at that time, and when I say free, I mean really free; you didn't have to pay anything to register, all you had to do was be either high school graduate, over 18, and if you want to participate in any of the student activities, you had to buy a student body card, which was \$5 at the time, and it let you participate in everything. You didn't have to buy any books, because all the books for all the classes were on reserve at the library, but of course you bought books but that's what you could do. And you could get a \$.50 card for the [Community?] Railway, and ride the Community Railway for 16 rides for \$.50, which was essentially free, and at the same time, I think it was \$.07 -- no, \$.07 was in New Orleans. It wasn't much more than that in 1945.

So I went to San Francisco City College, City College in San Francisco, and stayed an extra year because I thought that some of the courses that I could get if I transferred either to Cal [University of California, Berkeley], or courses that were offered at City College, so I stayed an extra year and accumulated 90 units, and when I went to transfer, they would only accept 66. So I couldn't transfer to Cal, because I'd apparently had a 70 in English 35, and 75 was supposed to be a C, that's what they told me. I was in school with Allen [E.] Broussard and Johnny Crookshank, we were all at City College at the same time. Allen, of course, went on to Boalt Hall Law School, and became a justice on the Supreme Court, with -- appointed by Jerry [Edmund] Brown Sr. And sort of that revolution that swept out the lady Chief Justice -- what's her name? --

STEVENSON

Rose Bird.

HARRIS

Rose Bird, that swept out Bird; the conservative thing swept out Allen also, when he came up for reelection to the Supreme Court. Johnny Crookshank became -- went to Hastings [College of Law], and became a judge up in the Stockton area -- Johnny's deceased at this time. But I transferred from City College to State, and graduated from State -- this was in 1949, '50 -- graduated from San Francisco State in 1951, in January, and was drafted into the Korean War as soon as I graduated. Because I had received a deferment to go to school, and I only carried nine units, and when I graduated, I was inducted into the Army. So I went to the Army in '51, and came out in December of '52, served 22 months, 21 or 22 months in the service, and came back to San Francisco State, all with a pre-med major at that time.

And in the Army -- because I didn't do too well, I thought, as far as my grades were concerned, so I was determined to come back and see whether or not I could really do graduate work. So I came back to San Francisco State [University], went to grad school, also to get a teaching credential, because my plan was to get a teaching credential and teach for a year or two, and then bombard all the schools to get into medical school. Well, the first thing I came back to was to make sure that I could do grad work. And so I'd set the goal for myself to make straight A's and to work also. And I was always almost successful, except for one class -- as you can see, I remember that more than anything else: a genetics class, with a teacher named Ms. Pickard, and she was very strict. I think that -- and she marked accordingly; there were -- she only gave out one A, and the A that she gave out was to a guy who -- I think she had an exam that was some 200 points, and he lost 13; he had -13 of the 200, and mine was -27, and we had the two highest scores. But he got the A, and I got the B. But after that, after I left for San Francisco State, every black that took a course from Ms. Pickard, she'd ask them, "Do you know Hiawatha Harris? He was one of the best students I ever had," -- meaning black students.

But anyway, at that time, I was in San Francisco, and of course, you knew all the black professionals and everybody else; I was in school at that time with Willie Brown, and quite a few other notable -- Dr. Carlton Goodlet, who was a good friend of Walt [Walter] Bremond and myself, and Dr. Thomas, William McKinley Thomas, and Dr. -- my dentist, I can't think of his name right now, it'll come to me -- but they all knew that I wanted to go to med school, so I talked to the dentist -- shoot, anyway, who had come out from Meharry [Medical College], and to train at the University of California, and then was supposed to go back to Meharry and teach, but you know, once you get to California, you don't want to go back.

So he was saying, you know, "I don't have a good reputation, but go to McKinley Thomas and Carlton Goodlet and get them to write letters for you and apply." Because I told him I wanted to go to med school, I was going to

postpone it for a year, et cetera, et cetera, and he said, "Why don't you just write them and ask you what you need to do in order to get in?" And so I wrote, and instead of telling me what I need to get in, they sent me an application. Well, filling out the application, I had the recommendations from Carlton Goodlet and William McKinley Thomas -- this was in 1952 -- no, 1950 -- not '52 -- my wife would kill me -- 1954. But I applied, and sent my application back; I took the MCAT [Medical College Admission Test] and applied, et cetera, only to one school and not expecting -- hoping, but not expecting -- and then at the same time, my wife was expecting twins.

And so -- I remember this December day; she was to go to the clinic, and I went to look for a larger place for us, because she was expecting twins. And so when I came back home, I had a registered letter that I had been accepted at Meharry for medical school. And so I was very fortunate; I don't know how many people just submit one application, not expecting to get in, but submit it anyway, and get in. I was very lucky. And I went to medical school in 1955, started in August of '55, and graduated in June -- May, June -- of '59. Came back to San Francisco to intern at San Francisco County Hospital, intern there -- San Francisco General [Hospital], it was called. I had wanted to go into OB [Obstetrics], that was my first choice, and Psychiatry was my second choice. Graduating ahead of me was Price Cobbs, who was a year ahead of me, who was from down here, and Price is, and Bill Greer, are noted for their book Black Rage, but at that time, Price hadn't become that kind of author yet.

But it was sort of like the blacks -- there was an Underground Railroad -- there was an Overground knowledge base where you soon find out where you can apply to, get into various things, et cetera. And San Francisco in 1959, '60, there had been only one black who had been able to go get training in Obstetrics in San Francisco. Only one, in 1959. And the way that he had done it -- it was Larry Neblett -- the way that he -- Lawrence Neblett, Larry Neblett -- the way he had done it was that in Oakland, there was a black man who was the head of the obstetrics department at the hospital there, Herrick [Memorial Hospital], so he had a one-year residency program, and so he had accepted Neblett to that program, so he finished the first year, and I guess it was a little easier for him to get the second year. And then he transferred back over to finish one year at Saint Francis Hospital in San Francisco for, I think, the other two years, and one of the reasons was that Lawrence was very fair, and so it was easier for that. But otherwise, the other residencies, et cetera, never went to blacks until a little later on. The class behind me, Banks was able to get a residency at Children's Hospital in San Francisco at that time, Thurmil Banks, T-H-U-R-M-I-L, Thurmil.

But oddly enough, I had done -- my rotation was on Psychiatry and OB, and when it looked like I wouldn't get a residency in Obstetrics, you know, you don't even apply, because you know that you're not going to get it, so you

don't want that disappointment, so I tried for Psychiatry. Well, Price had applied for Psychiatry too, and had been accepted at the state -- at that time, the state hospital system had probably one of the better training, almost set up like a university kind of thing, in the country. Well, most of -- a lot of the state hospitals around the country were training people, because they couldn't get folks to work there. So if you trained there, you'd have to -- they'd give you a good salary, and you would have to work for two years afterwards in the state hospitals. So that ensured them of getting psychiatrists there. So you train them, and you have them work there at the same time. Price had applied to Mendocino State Hospital, and so we also had a little thing that you -- let's not all accumulate at one place, and so there were other systems, and he encouraged me to apply to Metropolitan State Hospital down here.

I also applied -- and there was another reason, too, because in the internship, I was only paid \$160 a month, and my wife was teaching, and we had children. And \$160 would not -- would guarantee instant poverty, even at that time. So we signed up -- you get a little better salary, I applied to Stanford VA [Veterans Administration], and to the VA hospital in Palo Alto, which was run by the Stanford program. Price advised me not to apply to Langley Porter [Hospital]; he said, because he received one of the worst interviews that he'd ever had at Langley Porter, so naturally I didn't want to experience that, so I didn't do that. So then I got accepted at Metropolitan State Hospital and came down to Los Angeles in 1960. And the rest is sort of history; been here ever since, and been involved and doing things ever since that time. I don't know if I left anything out.

STEVENSON

Well, actually, I wanted to follow up on some of what you've already related. Going back to where you were brought up, both in Mississippi and Louisiana, could you tell me more about the neighborhoods, or in the case of Mississippi, the areas that you were brought up in, in terms of the other families there, neighbors, you know; you mentioned, was it your grandfather was a sharecropper, was that in an area where other African-Americans were sharecroppers?

HARRIS

Oh, yeah. Most of the farms et cetera was run by -- I mean, blacks were running the farms, either one way or the other. Warren Hackler was the man who owned the land that my grandfather was on at the time, when I was coming up. I understand from my aunts, there was another place called Booze Bottom, and Papa was also on that land, sharecropping on that land, before he moved to Warren Hackler's place. You didn't think -- in Mississippi, especially, we were living out on the farm, so there was not a so-called neighborhood or anything like that, the neighborhood -- you knew people because you went to church, and the people that you knew in church were the folks -- I guess you'd consider neighbors, where everybody sort of knew

each other, a little small town, [unclear] et cetera. Whereas in New Orleans, it was a little different; he lived in certain areas, and of course those theories came -- recently, with the Katrina thing -- I lived in Gert Town, G-E-R-T, Gert [Louisiana]; the lady -- supposedly, it was named after a lady named Miss Gertrude, because she owned a lot of the housing around there, I don't know how she got it, but that's -- Gert Town, it was between the two tracks, two railroad tracks, one outbound, the other inbound, going to -- on the Illinois Central Line. And it was right across the canal from Xavier University, back in uptown, back in that area.

They watched out for you, and all the other kinds of things that people talk about, I guess reminisce about and be nostalgic about, really happened; everybody was responsible for everybody else's kids. So there was some bad kids that you just didn't associate with, but even that, he was responsible for that. So the neighbors and everything were kids that you went to school with at Hoffman, and Daniel, et cetera. And then you're sort of restricted to -- not restricted, but there was some -- even at that, you might be living in a shotgun house, two bedrooms or something like that, but a little farther up, there were some blacks who were -- their parents were professionals, teachers. Boy, I remember the best job was a job as a postman; that was the best job that a black could have at that time, even better than teaching at that point. If you were a postman, you were really something.

And neighbors, people -- everybody knew each other, knew the kids, and chastised the kids. I mean, you know, somebody could -- if you were [unclear] on your way home, if you stepped out of line or were sassy or whatever else at that, then they would walk you home to your family and tell then, then you'd get another one. Or if you did anything in school that would warrant a strap, either from the shop teacher or even the classroom itself, then you'd get -- well, my folks would say, "What were you doing there that made you do that? You're going to school for an education; you're not going to school to act out," or whatever they're saying. So that was the family kinds of things, and then there were kids -- the so-called smart kids, and the so-called kids that were a little slower and everything like that, and some of them dropped by the wayside, started working, et cetera. But that was the way that it was.

STEVENSON

OK. You mentioned going to church. How much of an influence was that on you, and what emphasis on going to church was placed in your home?

HARRIS

Well, I don't know if there was any emphasis. My grandfather was a deacon, which meant he also preached at times, so it was just something that you did. For us, in Mississippi for instance, we were living way out of town, and so you'd have to get up early in the morning, and get partially dressed, have certain kinds of shoes that you walked into town, because the church was in tow, Kingsley's Chapel Methodist Church. And we'd get to a place where the

sidewalk was sort of a built-up wood, and we would lift up the slats, and hide our shoes that we walked in, dry your feet off, wipe them off, et cetera, and put the good shoes on to go to church.

And so church was an all-day affair: Sunday School, the regular service, then the afternoon, the evening, for us, was the Methodist Youth Foundation, MYF. For the Baptists, it was a little something else. And so we all went to church because everything revolved around the church; you'd meet the girls at church, you'd go to -- might not want to go fool with the girls at your church, because people know you, and so you go to the Baptist church. And so I used to attend the Baptist church and participate in some of that stuff too. It was just the thing that you did, and New Orleans was the same thing; my family was always involved in the church, either singing in the choir, and [Irshe] board, the board of trustees, et cetera, and you were always involved in church. And you'd be on the Irshe Board, or you sing in the choir, the youth choir, and then there was things that you participate in; it was just something that you did. It was just -- that's what the weekend was about; you didn't think about it, I didn't think about not going to church until I got to college, and as my aunt said, "became an educated fool."

Because I took some of that comparative religion courses, and some philosophy, and sort of learned some different things, and sort of stopped going to church at that time.

But the church was -- it was just it, that was just the important thing -- not the important thing, it was just like everything else, going to school and going to church. The other thing, of course, was that in Mississippi, because it was in a rural area, schools didn't start until a certain time of the year -- not in September, but mostly in October, because September was the harvest area -- July, August and September were the harvests, and so you were working in the fields until that time. And then school was out earlier than May or June, because the kids had to be involved with planting, school would probably be out like March or April or so, in the country. In the city, it was just a little different. Yeah, so the church played a major role.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd also like to find out about emphasis on education in the home; you talked about your grandfather, and he was a major influence on that; could you tell me more about in your family, what emphasis was placed on it?

HARRIS

Well, a couple of things. My grandfather, of course, always said, "Be something, boy. Be something." And of course, to be something meant to go to school, be educated and all of that. The biggest influence was my aunt telling me that at my birth, I was born with a veil over my face, and the midwife who birthed me said that I was destined to be something, and so she would also propagandize me, that I was smarter than everybody else, et cetera. And I realized that in school, but Aunt Marie always said, "You got to go to school; you've got to be something. You're supposed to be

something." And my mother was the other person who said to me that, "As long as you get good grades and everything, I will support you." I don't know how she was planning to do that, but she said it.

So I was lazy; the thing that encouraged me more than anything else maybe was hard work; I could not do hard work. My grandfather used to -- and during the summertime, take a bunch of us -- well, we used to have to -- we'd go to school in New Orleans up until school closed, and then we'd go to Mississippi for the summer. And Mississippi, when cotton-picking time came, my grandfather would get a posse, so to speak, which would be my cousins and my aunt and me, et cetera, going to -- and my grandmother, going to the fields to pick cotton. Cotton, at that time, was \$.50 a hundred, you'd get paid \$.50 for each hundred pounds of cotton. So Papa would take a lot of us, hoping that each one of us would pick at least hundred pounds. So in a day's work, he could pick 200, and my grandmother, I guess, picked 100, 150, 200, and others, that you'd make maybe almost \$5, \$10 a day. But I could never pick a hundred pounds of cotton, never picked a hundred pounds of cotton. And I only did it once or twice, and that was when I cheated, put some dirt in the sack and everything else, wet cotton, et cetera. So I couldn't do anything, so my grandfather, I guess, told me jokingly, "Boy, you better stay in them books, because you're a liability in the fields."

And he -- what happened was that since I couldn't pick that much cotton, there always had to be somebody at home looking after my Uncle Jack, who was an invalid, to feed him, to fix food and everything. And at the same time, that person that was at home would have food ready for the people who came from the fields in the evening. And so my aunt, who was nine years older than I, was the person that was staying home and cooking and looking after Jack. So what they decided to do was to have me cook, because I always was around in the kitchen, watching my grandmother and doing things, and also I'd have to gather up the wood and make the fire in the stove and all of that. So they'd leave me; they began to leave me at home and tell me what to cook, and how to cook it, and what to do for Jack, et cetera. And so that's how I learned how to cook, and they'd take Virgie to the fields, because she could pick more -- she's nine years older than I, and she could do the work. I mean, at least pick a hundred pounds of cotton. But my grandfather always said, "You need to hit the books, stay with the books, boy, because you can't do no hard work." And I said -- even to this day, the reason where I am now is because I was lazy, I couldn't do no hard work, I didn't want to do no hard work, although I did a lot of hard work getting up to where I did, either a lot of jobs, because I tell people, sometimes jokingly, I can out-poor anybody, and I can out-poverty anybody, because I've been all that day. And now I take the Revered Ike [The Right Reverend Frederick Eikerenkoetter] attitude about being poor; Reverend Ike said, "The best thing I can do about poverty is not to be one of them." And so -- but I've had all kind of jobs and everything, all headed for

that one particular thing, trying to make it, so to speak. And at the same time, I guess maybe inspire some other people.

But education has always been that thing, and it -- I have a cousin, I guess my cousin and I, early on, were the first to go to college, and the first to graduate from college. What happened was that my grandfather had three brothers, Uncle Dan, Uncle Jack, and one that I didn't know. I think it was four boys, and my aunt would always talk about Grandma Celie, which is my father's -- my grandfather's mother. And I guess Daniel, his father, died early; I don't know anything about my great-grandfather. But there was a brother named Dan, Uncle Dan, who stuttered. But Papa was sort of the oldest, and was seen as -- he was the only one that they educated past the 8th grade. And the same thing happened to my mother and my aunt; there were three girls, the three girls were the oldest -- my mother, Aunt Minnie, and Aunt Marie, all went to school up to the 8th grade. Papa could not afford -- maybe the 6th grade, but I think the 8th grade -- Papa could afford to send only one to high school, and that was Aunt Marie. Aunt Marie went to high school; the rest of them sort of, whatever they did, got married or whatever. But Aunt Marie went to high school, and went to the Normal School, and then went to teach. She went to the same school that my grandfather went to, the Normal Courses that I graduated from in high school. Mount Beulah; it wasn't Southern Christian Institute then.

The Christian Church, after slavery, set about organizing schools to educate the slaves out of slavery, and they even had, at that particular time, missionaries, so to speak, that had come back, because one of my teachers, her parents had been a missionary in I think India, but they were the teachers who populated the schools that the Christian Church had organized. And so -- I don't think there were many Baptist schools for blacks; it was mostly the Christian and the Methodists school, separate but for blacks. I don't recall any Baptist until maybe afterwards, but that was some of the things that -- because a lot of us, Papa was revered because of his rigidity, being hard-nosed, et cetera.

And also wanting everybody to be educated, all the kids that -- for a long time, I met people who saw me as Abraham Stewart's boy, and protected me as a result of that because of what Papa had done for them, made them learn, et cetera, didn't want them to smoke, strict religious things. Some kids tell the story about, Papa caught somebody smoking and they swallowed the cigarette; he was hard-nosed as far as that's concerned. But all the time, you realize -- early on, you realize that education has to be the key to any kind of salvation, or any kind of moving forward. And I've always felt that way, still feel that was. Tried to get my kids to do the same thing; you've got to go to school, got to be educated, you've got to do it. You've got to go to grad school, because right now, high school is like elementary school was in the past, and college will get you an interview, but other than

that -- and then grad school, et cetera. The goals were set higher, and the other kinds of things that go along with that.

STEVENSON

Right. I'd like to ask you about what the racial dynamics were in the places you grew up, in Mississippi, in New Orleans, both with whites, and then also, if you could also talk about intra-racial dynamics within your own communities, in the black community.

HARRIS

Well, growing up in Mississippi, there was no -- nothing, you're inferior, you're a nigger, and treated like that, even the people in the service. You knew your place, so to speak, and your place was always subservient to and away from the white man, and the only thing you did for him was work, and said, "Yessuh," and that kind of thing, in Mississippi. I remember seeing a black sailor, in uniform, who didn't get off the sidewalk when a white man came by, and he was beaten because of that. I mean, the white man just felt that, you know, you didn't show deference to me, and even though he had the uniform on at the time -- this was World War II kind of thing. It was adversarial, and a hopelessness, a helplessness, as far as doing anything. Everything was pointing to the superiority of whites.

Even during the Depression time, when Roosevelt had set up all the WPA [Works Progress Administration], the NYA [National Youth Administration], and everything like that, I remember having to -- trying to get a job, and I was always younger than everybody else; everybody else was older than me and larger than me, but I ran around with them because I was at that same level. Couldn't get a job, and Edwards was uptown to build a gym for the white folks, and still never had a gym; I left in '45, so the blacks didn't have -- the only gym we had was -- we didn't have a gym at SCI [Southern Christian Institute], we had outside courts. When we played other teams, it was outside courts. I played basketball in my senior year on the team, and we would play some places that had outside courts; very few had gyms.

Natchez [Mississippi], played in Natchez, Natchez had an outside court, as I remember. Tougaloo [Mississippi], which eventually merged with SCI and became Tougaloo-SCI, for the high school, and I guess the junior college too -- they had a gym, because they were in town, in Jackson, in Jackson, Mississippi. But the rest of the places, some places we went to play, we had to play outside; we ain't never had a gym. But the black kids, my contemporaries at the time, working on the NYA [National Youth Administration], built a gym in Edwards for the white school, and we couldn't play there. I remember my last year of high school, last year of high school we had such a good team, we wanted to play the white boys. But of course, you didn't mix at that time, and blacks and whites didn't play together, no way, no where.

New Orleans was about the same thing, during the time I was there; there just wasn't any interracial kinds of mixings, et cetera. And I guess there was

a reason for that, because in New Orleans, you had all kinds of colors that you wanted, but there was a separation there also. Blacks, if you weren't Creole, half-white, something like that, you were still separate in everything. The only way you break into that was by you, your knowledge, academics, and performance, as far as that's concerned. We played basketball and football; I was on the team, didn't play much, but you did those things. There was no mixing. Then, you know, you come out to California, and for a long time, there was no mixing there either. When I got to San Francisco in 1945 and started going around with the kids who were still in school, because I was 16, I was going to junior college -- there was hardly any mixing; the only mixing, maybe -- I remember one of the guys was going with a Chinese girl, and some of the other guys had fitted it into their handsome -- they might have had some interracial things.

And then when the Japanese came back to San Francisco after the camp, being in the internment camps, et cetera, there was some mixing as far as -- because they came back to claim that land. And we were -- the blacks were able to come to California and stay in the Fillmore district, because the Japanese had been moved out to internment camps and everything, so when they came back, they claimed much of their property and things, and still lived around that area. The Chinese didn't suffer the indignities that Japanese did at that time; they suffered indignities before that, and it sort of just closed in. It's interesting, we didn't -- I guess we still -- our segregation, et cetera, led to certain things, but it didn't lead to the kinds of things that the other segregated races did. And I think, of course, the reason for that is, they came from a country, and one country accepted that whole thing, that kind of identity, whereas we -- different tribes, and all the other kinds of things, that whole slavery thing didn't help us then much.

I mean, we had our thing; we had our own people that were good, had means, the doctors, and one or two lawyers but mostly the physicians. In the time coming up, in the '40s, dentist, maybe -- I knew what a dentist was; I didn't get to see a dentist until I came to California in 1945, really didn't go to one until just before I went into the service and had all my teeth filled. There was no mixing; the mixing came afterwards. As you go to school with kids, and girls, et cetera, then that comes. The interracial thing -- the Communist Party, at school, there were certain clubs that were Communist clubs. American Youth for Democracy, et cetera, et cetera. So they recruited us, in a sense. You go to parties and you mix with white girls and everything.

Somebody warned me -- this was in junior college, in the college me, warned me that, "If you see anybody with a camera, you tie your shoes." And I didn't really realize what they were saying, and why they were saying that, but we'd go to the interracial parties, and go to the dance, and all the other kinds of things, and white girls would be friendly to you and all that. But the -- I guess the infiltration by the FBI [Federal Bureau of

Investigation] or whoever were taking pictures, and they'd pictures, and so the guys would say, "If you see somebody with a camera that wants to take your picture, you always duck and tie your shoes." I didn't realize the significance of that until later on, when this all Joe [Joseph] McCarthy stuff and everything came up. That was the sort of mixing that was had. I didn't realize what a Chicano was until -- and that was a Mexican guy who ran a hot dog stand in Jackson, and we'd all go to get his hot dogs, because he would put hot dogs on a bun, and not the little ones, the big ones, where you cut them into four pieces, really, and then put chili on them. And he was Mexican, but I didn't realize that much about that at that time, and then came out to San Francisco, and I still didn't get the real significance of the Latino population, et cetera et cetera, in San Francisco. There was a little girl that I was sweet on who -- we were in class together, we took several classes together; she wanted to be a lab tech, I was pre-med. I can't think of her name now. But realized that she was a Chicano. And then when I got married, Louise, my wife, had a Chicano friend that she worked with when she was working at the field pole company, was in our wedding. But I still didn't -- didn't hit me; I got more Chicano, kind of, Latino, et cetera, as I got older and became more in touch with that down here during the movement.

STEVENSON

OK. Could you tell me something about your political involvement in college? Or sort of the beginnings of our political awareness, political involvement?

HARRIS

Well, coming to -- I've always been -- I read. And I think -- I've always wanted to go to the places where I read about. My mother -- my grandfather tells me that when she was pregnant, she used to lay up in the bed and read. And so my mother didn't graduate from high school until I graduated from medical school. She went to night school and everything. And so after I graduated from high school, my mother graduated from -- kept going, working, et cetera, and graduated from high school. That's how much education was to her. My Aunt Minnie used to tell her, I don't know why you're going to school; you ain't gonna do nothing with it -- she just would go.

So that in itself -- and I guess that's why my mother wanted me -- I was the only child -- wanted me to get some education or to do some things. My mother sort of -- well, my mother always pushed me, and so she had money when I needed it, washing dishes, working as a porter or something, a pantry girl at the restaurants and things. I've always been sort of political, because I've always been either the president or vice-president of anything that I got into. Church clubs, any other kinds of organizations; I've been elected, campaigned for, and elected. Same thing -- any other situations I sort of got into. And that, ever since, I've always been political. And the other sense is, I've always been interested in what's going on in the world, and what's going on around me. So I've been political in that respect too.

College, at City College of San Francisco, there wasn't much to be political about in 1945 to 1949, only to the extent that the guys came back from -- what do you -- turn it off, I think that's Sam [inaudible] -- (break in audio)

STEVENSON

OK, could you continue maybe talking about your political involvement? I'd be interested to know if you were involved with any of the quote-unquote "mainstream" political or civil rights organizations?

HARRIS

Well, you know, I've always been in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], the youth group and all up in San Francisco, whatever. Also sort of affiliated with -- Carlton Goodlet -- what I'd call is -- Carlton Goodlet probably is the father of any kind of things that was pushing blackness and everything. Carlton had a newspaper, The Sun Reporter, and being a physician also, was that, and also very much an influence on my life, and on Willie Brown's life, and on Walt Bremond, and any of the people that came up to San Francisco. And we -- and then the church itself, because I was a member of Jones Methodist Church, the church itself was instrumental in doing things. For instance, all the kids used to go to either one or two theatres on Sundays. Sit up, the [Buzzard Roof], I guess before it was the Fillmore Theatre and the Uptown Theatre. But the NAACP folks started saying, "Why should we be paying all our money, and don't have anybody working? No ushers, nothing else like that."

And so they started that; the same thing spread out to the businesses on Fillmore Street, that they didn't hire any blacks, but the blacks were purchasing and doing everything else with that. So that started, the NAACP, the loud part of being in the NAACP, the picketing and all the other kinds of things. I didn't do any of the picketing or anything like that, but I was involved in the planning, plotting, whatever, talked louder, all that other kind of things. And we started out -- The Uptown Theatre hired someone -- Betty Amos, I'll never forget that -- this was in '45, '46, '47, '48 era. And then one of the stores hired -- one of the retail stores -- Margie -- Margie married a -- Broussard, Margie Broussard. But then when we went down to picket the new Fillmore Theatre, et cetera, they sued the NAACP for a certain amount of money, and got a restraining order as far as the picketing is concerned, but of course, we boycotted it. And they didn't last too much longer after that. The Uptown Theatre, that lasted a little bit longer. And spread to the stores, all that kind of thing. The guys that were in -- Carlton Goodlet was one of the people behind it, and all the other kinds of things -- Joe Kennedy, all these guys were sort of early players in the San Francisco era, et cetera.

So that -- touching that particular situation, yeah, I've always been somewhere around trying to be instrumental in seeing some change, instrumental in doing things, instrumental in hopefully building things,

institutions that -- one person can't do anything by himself, but if you build an institution that can house and protect that particular person -- because that's what happened to me, I was protected because I was in an institution that was interested -- my kind of involvement would enhance that institution, so that's what I got into. Even at the -- when I was at the State Hospital, I became -- after I finished the residency, became the second-in-command for the training program, and then eventually took over the program. But part of my -- and this is one black, and two or three -- one or two blacks in the training program, but one black up in the decision-making part, as far as the training program was concerned. But when [Governor Ronald Wilson] Reagan tried to cut out not only the program, but also reduce the -- putting people out of the hospital, so-called deinstitutionalization, I was one of the people that was involved in trying to get some of that changed, and eventually left the state hospital system because there was not going to be any change. But people elected me, these white folks took over to Sacramento to try to get the legislature to do something about it. The interesting thing part about it is that the folks out in Norwalk, et cetera, Republicans primarily, et cetera, and so the people that they knew were the white Republicans. Well, at that time, I knew all of the black legislators.

STEVENSON

Mm-hmm. Such as...?

HARRIS

Willie, Leon Ralph, Maxine [Waters]. And -- who else? I guess -- whoever was up there at that time. And so when I went up to walk around the legislature, the guy was taking me around to introduce me to certain people, and then all the blacks, ah-h! -- et cetera, including, I remember [Assemblyman Courken George] Deukmejian, who was one of the people from Long Beach who was sort of involved, and we talked, met with him at the time; I guess he was an Assemblyperson at that point, maybe -- he might have been a Senator at that point. Always looked at Deukmejian as seeing himself as a -- the guy who could beat black folks, because he beat Yvonne [Braithwaite Burke] for the Attorney General slot, and he beat Tom [Thomas] Bradley for the governorship.

STEVENSON

That's an interesting perspective.

HARRIS

Yeah. I would say the [unclear], but I'll say the other thing. But, you know, I guess by virtue of the fact that being a physician, and being involved -- so you're involved with all the other people; I was involved with Yvonne when she first started, when she first ran for Assembly, primarily because I knew her from the college scene, in a sense. You know, that was a time in the Bay Area where we knew everybody who was in college at that time, and the colleges was Cal [University of California, Berkeley], San Francisco State

[University], San Jose State [University], and of course the junior colleges; at that point, there was -- some of the junior colleges, not only San Francisco, but Santa Rosa, San Mateo, and... who else? But, I mean, we knew everybody, so in the college scene kind of thing, where all of these people came from, I sort of would like one day to see somebody do a Sociogram, do a PhD treatise about people -- even just the Links, for instance; I tried to get the Links to do that -- what happened o the girls and their escorts over a period of time, which is a history in itself, that of the teenagers going on to college, et cetera. They're selected because of being in certain spaces, et cetera, mindful of the racism that existed, and the -- colored, I won't call it racism, colored thing, because racism has a different definition for me. The color thing, and our community, the Links, and the other folks. And also the sororities and that.

So the people that you're involved with are the people that you're involved with growing up, et cetera. Willie Brown was in my wedding, you can see that he was an Alpha, I'm a [unclear], and see all the other stuff that comes about and everything. I guess it was predictable that he wasn't going to be just a student and everything, very bright, from Mineola, Texas, and all of that. So I knew -- and you had to know, to even think about being a part of anything, and then we came down here, getting involved and Tom Bradley winning a seat on the City Council was -- you're the doctor, you're a doctor in the area, and not that many other people, lawyers or whatever, dentists, et cetera, and so we were sort of expected to be around and supporting and helping, all that kind of things. And so you do that and then you know people; it was a small world when your father and I, et cetera, were coming up; you sort of talk about the fact that there ain't but ten niggers in the world and you know eight, and know somebody else that knows the other two. And sort of at our levels and our participation, you know somebody that knows somebody -- even in the other states and things like that, you either know somebody who went to school with somebody, et cetera.

So there was a thing that you are what you did. Even my contact with Martin Luther King [Jr.] was a result of going to school at Meharry and guys from Morehouse [College] being in the class, and they're all from Atlanta [Georgia], had been around Atlanta being at Morehouse, and they thought that they had gone to school with M.L., as they called him, and knew his father, who used to brag about his son being up in Boston [Massachusetts] taking Latin, or something like that, the classics or something like that. And so when 1955 came around, 1954 or '55, the Montgomery Boycott came around, we were able to have M.L. come to Meharry to speak. And of course, all his boys and everything else. And the few times that he came out here that you might have had the privilege to sort of be around and be in that company, et cetera. And I've been fortunate, because I've sort of been somewhere affiliated, or close to, passing my space with a lot of great people. I remember Mary McLeod Bethune who spoke at the church, at

Jones Methodist Church, because Jones Methodist and Third Baptist was the sort of hub of any kind of political action in San Francisco, and you either belong to Third Baptist or you belonged to Jones Methodist.

We had a minister, Revered Boswell, who's still alive, who married us, but he was very much a political person, and who at that time had the guts to be able to say to our Methodist Judas Fellowship -- because a lot of the stuff that came out of the San Francisco NAACP stuff sort of started with us in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, NYF, the Young -- there's another group. But anyway, not the Methodist Youth; we were in the other group, the adult group. But Boswell, the young minister at that time, said that -- was able to talk about the various splits, what religion gives and what religion doesn't give, and the explanations, et cetera, that it gives and doesn't give; he -- so he, you know, gave me a different kind of perspective about religion and the church, and to some extent I sort of blame the church, et cetera, for a lot of the non-progress that we have, because it's still the only place that you have a majority of black folks, and I don't think that it's done its job, as far as any liberation. It's building mega-churches, and worshipping the wrong thing, as far as I'm concerned.

Maybe we can worship Judas now, now that he's been reinvented. The Gospels of the -- what is it, The Gospel of Judas? The Gospel of -- just recently been found. But I like the other -- the guy who wants to discredit that; he says, "This thing was discovered 1700 years ago, and was written by those Gnostics that didn't have anything else to do but sit in the cave and speculate on things." [laughter] So maybe we should find someone like that. So if we've been around, and been as fortunate as I have to be involved with people -- you know, since I came down here, when I first came down here, because I went to school with Ed Tucker -- you know, Ed Tucker was my classmate, and we were like brothers and everything; I was involved with the Tucker family, and they stayed in Compton and everything. And so that made it possible to do and see and feel a lot of stuff.

STEVENSON

OK. You mentioned having met Walter Bremond and his brother Harry in the Bay Area --

HARRIS

Yeah, we were -- when I came to San Francisco in '45, I hung around the teenage center -- we had a teenage center in the Fillmore -- and everybody, even the kids that was living out in Double Rock and Hunter's Point, used to come to the teenager center, because we did everything; played football, basketball, track, all the other kinds of [unclear] things. So Walt and Harry were -- and they have a sister, they had a sister -- I don't know if she's still alive -- but his sister also. But they all went to Commerce, Commerce High School, at that point. And so many of my friends went to Commerce; they either went to Commerce -- some went to Mission, some went to Poly -- Polytechnic; Girls' High School was there at that point, there was a

separation, Girls' High. And so, you know, the teenage center was a place that everybody came to, and that's why we sort of grew up together. I've known them, I guess, almost since I came to [unclear]. They both played football and basketball, et cetera. And I lost touch with them when I went out to medical school, and then I looked up, down here, Walt was down here and everything. And we quickly connected and everything, so it was easy to do. I -- so, you know, it was just natural to be involved, and that kind of thing, anything that -- you know, you support me and I support you kind of thing.

So that was my entry, so to speak. I guess -- I looked at your -- this, and thought about -- because I don't remember -- what I did was got heavily involved in the Congress when [Martin Luther] King was killed. I remember -- I had a patient, a white lady, who came into my office here -- I worked across the hall at 1404 -- and said, "Have you heard?" I said, "Heard what?" "Dr. King's been shot." I said, "What?" She said, "Dr. King's been shot." She said, "I don't think you're going to see nobody right now." So after she left, I called Walt, and he said, "Come on down." I guess it was something -- "Come to the Congress." We were up all night that night trying to keep the city from burning. And it was very successful, because although Los Angeles set the state of Burn Baby Burn for the 1965 thing, didn't go up in smoke like the rest of the cities did. And part of that was because of the Black Congress; part of that's because the people that were organized enough to do anything were members of the Black Congress, and we were determined to keep the city, not destroy our own -- if you're going to destroy anything, then you go get the Man's stuff, and destroy that. And so that was part of the thing that sort of kept that. And we met all night; we were there all night. And anybody that had any questions would come; it was really a fantastic thing. A lot of stuff that was happening before that, as I speak to you, because we were meeting -- that's why I was saying that maybe you should -- if Ernie [Earnest Preacely] and I were interviewed together, we could remember certain things, because there was a lot of stuff going on that I guess I'm not going to talk about. And Ernie won't talk about either, because there was a lot of so-called revolutionary stuff that was going on at that time. Meetings, and -- meetings on a regular basis, organizations, doing things and being prepared, et cetera.

STEVENSON

OK. Well, maybe we'll finish there for today, and then in our next session --

HARRIS

OK/

STEVENSON

-- pick up with the [Black] Congress.

1.2. Session 2

April 28, 2006

STEVENSON

Good morning; we're continuing the interview with Dr. Hiawatha Harris on Saturday, April 29th. I'd like to do a couple of follow-ups on last week's. One: could you maybe tell me briefly what your parents' views were on what the response should be to racism and discrimination as you were coming up? Anything they specifically told you?

HARRIS

Well, I don't think -- I guess the best measure of that is that they always -- the people that were close to me always reminded me that I had to be ten times better than the white man in any kind of situation, and that I would get no slack, so to speak, for anything that I did. Anything where it came up to that kind of comparison, I suppose. And that the thing that they emphasized more than anything else was that you had to be education, and you had to be prepared to do that. I don't think they even talked about racism, or knew the word racism -- they became a new fancy word. But discrimination and prejudice was always the thing; you sort of recognize that coming up in Mississippi and Louisiana, especially in Mississippi, the little small town where I spent the summers and also my last year of high school. I mean, it was just blatant, the prejudice we called it, rather than racism. We learned about racism later on, as to what it was, what's the effect. And the people that I was surrounded by, and coming up in the church; the Carlton Goodlets and William McKinley Thomas, the Joe Kennedys and Leroy Gannons, Reverend Boswell and all those folks who were -- the church was protective of their young kids, and tried to provide for them means in which to do things.

STEVENSON

OK. Were your parents, or grandparents for that matter, politically involved at all, when you were growing up?

HARRIS

You talk about politics, I guess most of the politics was more involved in the church than anything else. You must remember, I'm 77 years old, and back -- things didn't begin to happen until in the '50s, late '50s and '60s, and things like that. Some things happened after the war; most of the migration and the sort of people knowing that there's a better place and a better way and better chances outside of the areas that we were in. But other than that, no.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to pick up with where we left off at the last session, regarding your first involvement with the Black Congress, which you indicated happened with the first Watts Rebellion. So could you tell me how you first became involved?

HARRIS

I think -- when you talk about the Black Congress, more than anything else I identify the Black Congress with Walt [Walter] Bremond, and my

involvement with Walt goes back to when we were both kids in San Francisco, and playing -- hanging around the Teenage Center and Hamilton Playground, and he and his brother and his sister were just as -- that was the place that we went, and that's the place that we -- I guess got anything and all. And that's -- when Walt came down here, I guess -- and I'm not so sure about the dates and all of that -- but, you know, my thing was supporting Walt in which way I could.

Immediately after the Watts Riots, which was in 1965, I was still employed at the State Hospital, and so wasn't in any kind of organization at that particular time, other than being their Chief of Professional Education, and being involved in the political aspects, because Reagan was the governor then, and the threats was closing down the hospitals, and closing down our training program, which I was very much involved in, and eventually became the head of that program. But my involvement with the Black Congress probably -- I mean, formal involvement probably goes back to when I started working at the Community Mental Health Center, Central City Community Mental Health Center, which now is Kedren Community Mental Health Center. So at that particular time, being involved in the community, you had to be involved in black organizations; you had to be involved in organizing and sort of agitating for your rightful place and rightful things for your community. And Walt was sort of the spearhead of that, as far as that's concerned.

And so I became closely associated with the Congress as far as that. 1960 -- I came to the clinic in 1967 -- '66 or '66 -- and from that time on, I guess that was my sort of involvement. We had to be -- because most of the fundings of the programs came from that community involvement. So you had to show that, and you had to show that you had people and everything to do things. And so there was so much other stuff that was going on in the community, and you had folks on your staff -- your staff was made up of quote "community people," because you had to hire a certain amount, and have some kind of training situation for them, et cetera. So we came up with a lot of names in order to provide the services that the Community Mental Health Center had to provide. And then a lot of this was being involved with Al Cannon, who was the founder, so to speak, of the Community Mental Health Center. We all, as psychiatrists, provided psychiatric services at a clinic at the Church of Christian Fellowship on Adams in the basement of the church. And all the black psychiatrists and black social workers and psychologists et cetera were part of that effort, and we provided services that was not too organized, but in the sense that was the beginning of the Community Mental Health Center. So I took the job as the Medical Director at the Community Mental Health Center at the behest of Al Cannon, who was at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] at the time, and was in the Social and Community Psychiatry Program, and I was very much involved in

the community. And so that is the sort of -- whatever beginning there was that I sort of know was associated with my being three.

STEVENSON

Let me ask you, getting back to the Black Congress, what was your understanding of its beginnings? Why it was formed, the mission and goals, as it were?

HARRIS

You know, I wish I was -- my memory was as direct, but there were a lot of organizations around at that time, and they would sort of spread out. And not speaking with the common voice, and I'm not sure -- I don't remember what -- where Walt's funding came from in order to start the Congress. All I know, you sort of look up and it's there, and the people that became involved in it belonged to -- well, part of all those many alphabets that was in the black community at the time. You know, because I guess the powers-that-be felt that if we had programs, that would stop us from burning down the city again, as in the riots.

So there was -- Watts became everything. And of course, Watts became anything in Los Angeles that was black. So wherever I traveled, I became the psychiatrist from Watts, and, which -- a lot of notoriety, and also was very advantageous, as far as the funding agencies were concerned. We had a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] as the Community Mental Health Center, and of course, we had to be involved, we had to be providing the nine services, which I can't -- I can remember nine, but I can't remember all the services that we were supposed to be providing. And we didn't have any money, and so we were using some of the money for bricks, so to speak, paying the rent and everything, and all the other kinds of things it went along with. Of course, ours was a staffing grant that we were supposed to use particularly for staff, and the staff sometimes, we were very creative in signifying -- designating certain kinds of mental health situations that people were involved in order for them to be on the staff, and then hiring community people.

The Black Congress was the agency where everybody sort of came together, I guess; I don't even remember the formal meeting times, but it was Walt more than anybody else; Walt's responsible for a lot of stuff. He knew a lot of people, and got a lot of things as a result of that. And then bringing together black folks, which was even more of a chore, because some of us had our own agendas, and being a part of an organization sort of like being in the United Nations [UN]; you have your -- you're trying to push your own agenda too. The Teen Post, NAPP [Neighborhood Adult Participation Project], all the other things; the Watts Writers Workshop, the Watts -- a lot of stuff that was in, and me being a psychiatrist sort of let me indoors as sort of a spokesman and everything else. Head of program -- not head of program, but being a consultant to those programs. And I think my real involvement with the Congress was, to some extent, selfish, because my organization

needed to be involved in the organization of people like that. And then the other aspect was my friendship with Walt, which goes back to the time we were growing up in San Francisco.

STEVENSON

Let me ask you this: what was some of Walter Bremond's training, background, before forming the Black Congress?

HARRIS

You know, I can't answer that, only to the extent that I know Walt went to college -- I don't know the training... social work, public administration -- I'm not sure. Because his brother went on to law school, and Walt went to social work way, I think. I think what was happening -- I don't even know what he was doing in San Francisco, because after I left, I left -- I dropped out -- essentially dropped off the map in 1951, and that's when I was drafted into the service. So I went into the service; it was 18, 22 months I spent in the service. And when I came back, I was dedicated to showing up my grades so that I could get into medical school, and at the same time teaching, getting teachings credentials, so all of that went had in hand. Walt was at San Francisco State at that time with a bunch of other guys who were there, Joe White, Willie Brown, Eddie Barnes... who else? Some of the -- I can't think of the names now. But that group, when I came back in 1953 to go to school.

And so after that, I went to med school in '55, so from 19- -- really, essentially, left San Francisco in 1955, went to made school, came back, interned; in 1960, acme down here. And so when I looked up in 1965 or 1966 or so, Walt was down here. And I'm not certain if Walt was working for someone, social work, I'm not certain about that. I don't know to this day either. All I do know is that he just knew a lot of people, and a lot of people trusted him, and a lot of people rallied with him. They might not have liked the way he did things; he maybe wasn't militant enough for some people, you know, take up the gun. But he was also smart enough to bring people like the Panthers and the US organization together, in the same room, so to speak, for a period of time.

STEVENSON

OK. Would you say that maybe the reason for the formation of the Congress, or for them starting to meet, came after the '65 rebellion?

HARRIS

That's the only time that I would know for any. What came about was that, you know, you had a lot of poverty programs and everything going on at that time, and there was a real need to have -- somebody thought of it that to have one organization that one could come to and get a lot of things done, or get a lot of things out. And Walt was that person who brought that together. We didn't have no Black Congress before 1965; the only thing we had was NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, and those kind of things.

And a few people were always involved in things at that time, Celes[tus] King [III], and Tom [Thomas] Bradley, Bill [William] Elkins, all the folks that emerged into a political thing; David Cunningham and all those people around. We didn't even have a councilman until Tom -- the folks got together to elect Tom to the City Council. And then after that, Billy [G.] Mills, and then blacks began to assert themselves, and we had Gil Lindsay, and we had Kenny Hahn -- I guess Kenny Hahn was our godfather, because a lot of things came as a result of Kenny Hahn.

STEVENSON

Did you know anything about an organization which predated the Black Congress called TALO, Temporary Alliance for Community Organization?

HARRIS

No.

STEVENSON

OK, because Walt mentions it in a very brief interview that he did in the '60s, so I was wondering if you knew anything about that organization.

Another question --

HARRIS

In the '60s?

STEVENSON

Yes, in the '60s. It pre-dated the Congress and was sort of a one-issue organization dealing with issues of police brutality.

HARRIS

No, there was somebody else -- I think about what started the Watts Riot, the whole police brutality thing, and Chief Parker was the J. Edgar Hoover of Los Angeles. And some of his words spearheaded the riot. TALO, I don't remember that.

STEVENSON

Also, the many organizations and groups that you're speaking of, did any of these organizations and groups that you're speaking of -- did any of these have federal funds from the War on Poverty?

HARRIS

I think most of them do.

STEVENSON

Most of them. OK.

HARRIS

I even associate our Community Mental Health Center thing as part of the War on Poverty and everything. The War on Poverty was -- that lasted for a long time, too, because I think I said something before, that it was used by the Bradley Mayor thing to bring people into government and give them jobs, and the pay, et cetera, and to give them experience. And a lot of things came from that; a lot of people trained in that. And I -- my first association with Tavis Smiley was a result of his working in the Bradley -- I

hesitate to call it "machine," but in the Bradley situation. And part, maybe, because of the Teen Post and Bill Napp, et cetera. [phone ringing] [unclear]

STEVENSON

You mentioned that meeting -- I think it was held the night of King's assassination -- could you tell me a little in detail about that meeting, who the key players were there, and particularly the role of that meeting in keeping things cool in the city?

HARRIS

I remember -- I have to start maybe free-associating and see whether or not I can come up with all the sort of players at that particular time. I called Walter when I found out that King had been shot and was killed, because one of our patients came in and told me; I hadn't known, and she told me. I closed my office and I called Walt, and Walt said, "Come on down here," and so we all came -- I came to the Black Congress building, and they had called a meeting of all the people that I guess were part of the Black Congress. I don't think -- I don't remember the Panthers playing a big part because of their sort of war with the US organization, but they might -- somebody might have been there. But all the folks was there, Tommy Jacquette, somebody -- a representative from NAPP, someone from the Teen Post; I don't remember Bill being there, but some representatives. And we sort of all got together and said that, you know, we'd keep the place cool. And the person that was able -- you know, Charlie [Charles] Knox, and there was a guy I can't remember who was a good friend of your father's that was there, later went to Washington and stayed in Washington. And I guess -- it's just a whole host of people; I can't remember the names now, any of the names now. It'll come to me probably later on.

But we met, and the organization that probably was most organized to do anything was the US organization, [Maulana] Karenga. They also -- he had people within his organization that were trained in many things, so to speak, and part of that was, he provided the security around because of his Simbas, and that was the sort of thing. And I think the Muslims were involved in it also -- I know the Muslims was, because when we needed certain things, I guess Walt could always call whoever was the minister for the Muslims at that particular time. But most of the so-called whatever organizations that could burn the city down were part of the Black Congress, and ours was that we're not going to burn our neighborhood up, and the perpetrators go free, so to speak. And of course, if you venture outside of Wilshire Boulevard, go anyplace else, then things would happen. I think that everybody sort of felt that there would be some retaliation, and I guess that's the word; came down as we were getting news about what was going on in other cities, and all the other kinds of things at that particular time. We had sort of said that we were not going to burn our town down, because in the riots, the only things that went down were the things in the black neighborhood, and not anything outside of the neighborhood.

And so we decided not too -- I mean, the decision was made not to do anything. It's funny, I guess all of us had been studying the revolutionary books and all that, but of course, you didn't have the firepower to do anything. I'm not so sure that we sort of got some warnings from Sacramento about what would happen if that becomes another riot, and the sort of rapid-response that might happen that would mean the destruction and killing of a lot of us with no real -- you didn't get nothing out of it. If you're going to die, you should die for something, and you wouldn't get anything out of it. And that was the thing; we met all night, and I guess receiving news. And much of that was -- had to be the result of Walt's organizational ability, and his ability to bring people together at that time. When it happened, you know, the first place I thought of calling was the Black Congress, and I guess most other people thought the same way, because when I got down there, there were -- all folks had come, and the word has been out, I guess, to assemble at the Black Congress. And I think that was the sort of feeling anyway, because there was the feeling about the Black Congress; if there's some kind of crisis that is going on, regardless of what it is, the Black Congress would be the first place we would try to meet to resolve some of that crisis, and at the same time, that -- and that's what happened.

I think, as I taught them, the greatest thing about Walt Bremond is that he wasn't seeking anything for himself. It was all for the common good, so to speak. And Walt, I guess just by -- a lot of people trusted Walt, and didn't see him seeking something else. As far as I'm concerned, Walt died because of that same kind of thing. He postponed getting a cardiac bypass so he could get the Black United Front up and running at that time, and I wasn't aware for a long time that he was even having heart problems, because I guess I left the Community Mental Health Center and sort of struck out in private practice after that; that's when the Brotherhood Crusade and -- you know, the Black Congress led to the Brotherhood Crusade, and the Black United Fund, et cetera.

STEVENSON

I see. So I think you've said very well what you think Walt's real organization ability is the ability to pull people together, the fact that he wasn't in it for self-aggrandizement. And is there anything else that you could say about what, why, or if -- how successful was the Black Congress, now that you're looking back, for the short period of its existence?

HARRIS

Well, you know the success can be measured in the fact that the organizations believed in it, and I guess being a member of the Black Congress was something you could put on your grant applications and get funded. Probably what killed the Black Congress, and all the other black organizations, so to speak, is a lack of funds. And when the poverty programs got pulled for the Vietnam War and all the other kinds of things,

and it was less money, and we had to raise money -- money had to be raised. I mean, you had to have the means in order to provide services; an organization like that, you had to have fundraisers and all that. If you don't have any of that, that will soon cause the demise of the organizations. Even Walt Bremond needed to have something in order to feed his family, et cetera; a stable salary and all that.

How successful was it? I think everybody recognized that there was a need for us to come together under some kind of umbrella, much like -- but even at that, some people saw the Black Congress as a necessary thing; some people -- other people saw it as, "I better belong, or else I'm not included in anything." So that was part of it. I'm trying to think -- my own selfish reasons for being with the Black Congress was that we got support when we needed certain things to be done. There was a time in this whole poverty sort of thing that we could put 100 or 200 people on somebody's office door in an hour, who could round them up because they were working at all these agencies and things like that, and I think somebody probably got wind of that and threatened to cut the funding of some of the organization. But we could put people protesting on somebody's desk in their office, and blocking the office and raising heck, in an hour. And that was the beauty of it. Non-violent and all of that. The Congress was sort of there, and we could make a call and say, we need people down at such-and-such a place, because they threatened to cut off the funding for certain programs, and we need to be protesting.

STEVENSON

So that would be called "direct action?" And was that part of the training that Walt --

HARRIS

Well, sure, Walt got some of that, because Walt knew everybody; Walt knew about -- knew those kinds of tactics. I don't think Walt was directly involved in directing that kind of stuff, but at least knowing how to organize that. You know, sometimes we talk about Saul Alinsky, and that -- so Walt certainly was schooled in that kind of thing, the non-violent aspect, Walt certainly was that much involved with that kind of -- not necessarily like [Mahatma] Gandhi, and not necessarily like [Martin Luther] King [Jr.], but somewhere in the non-violent thing, really know that we're not going to get anything -- you know you can't win with violence. A lot of us didn't believe -- a lot of us had that Malcolm X kind of feelings, that if you hit me then I have to hit you back, the self-defense sort of things. Not as radical, as you might say, as the Panthers, but certainly self-defense.

And Karenga probably had a great deal of influence on Walt, and a great deal of influence in the Congress. Some people might have seen that the Congress was being controlled by the US organization, and maybe that was the reason for the Panthers to sort of not be a participant. But Karenga had an amazing ability to organize, and to do the right things to get a certain

group of people together, and had a certain kind of ring for kids. The whole black thing that he -- do I say invent? -- but at least, you know, like Kwanzaa, et cetera; speaking Swahili, teaching, educating. Some people might call it cult-like, but I admired that, and even to this day, that is really the last organization that came out of the '65 things that still exists to this time, and pushing blackness.

STEVENSON

OK. Who was in the inner organizational circle in the Black Congress? Those that maybe formed the mission and goals, formally?

HARRIS

You know, I don't know. I -- you know, Preacely, Ernie, certainly, because Ernie and Walt were -- John Davis, I guess I was a hanger-on somewhere in there. Walt, Ernie, that was the group. I think it was, because John Davis probably was our -- I can't think of the name now -- but I think certainly John was very bright, and Preacely. I can't think of -- because I couldn't meet with them, because I had my own organization to run. Those are the names that I think of right now. Karenga, of course. Who else? There had to be some other people, because those folks, you know -- I think of people that I don't know whether or not they -- names that keep coming up, like Dimely, Merv Dimely, his group, which was sort of opposite of Tom Bradley's group, et cetera. The -- but they weren't that much involved with the direct actions and operations of the Congress. I don't even know where their funding came from. But they had some; they had to have some.

STEVENSON

So in terms of black elected officials, I saw that Charlie Knox was involved --

HARRIS

[unclear]

STEVENSON

-- Hawkins at that time. And most of the black elected officials either participate directly, or have representatives --

HARRIS

More had representatives; I don't think it was direct participation. The person that -- you know, folks talked about Tom, but Tom Bradley was quietly involved around his people in most of the black stuff. He wasn't outspoken like some people probably would have wanted him to be, you know, très très black, which would be the death knell as far as him being elected to something. But as far as I know, we could always call on Tom to do things to help us with things, and then after -- even when he was a City Councilman, because I used to go to meetings, and the only elected official that was there -- early morning meetings like that -- was Tom Bradley; the other guy, Charlie Knox would be there representing Gus [Augustus F. Hawkins], but Tom was that person. And then -- I can't think of the name now, I see the face -- you should have interviewed me when I was younger.

STEVENSON

And in terms of other [unclear] factions in Black Congress, what was the representation of the churches in the area? And also, were there other political factions, such as Communists, Socialists, other political leanings?

HARRIS

I don't think we had any out-and-out Socialist/Communist kind of thing; we might have had some people who might have thought that way. But the churches, of course, was a big part of that. And the ministers, I guess, had their own separate kind of association with Walt. But the -- well, Second Baptist [Church] are always involved. First A.M.E.[African Methodist Episcopal], because [Bishop H.H.] Brookins was the minister and pastor there, and then he [unclear] the Bishop, that church over that's still around - - I can't think of the name, but the churches were involved, let's put it that way. So a lot of the ministers were a part of that. I don't remember ministers being down there that night, but they were all involved; we all could call on them, and use their facilities, and everything else. So they had to be involved. Because you couldn't have a black organization without having the churches involved in that organization.

STEVENSON

I see. Could you tell me something about the philosophical differences in the Black Congress from all the different organizations, how those were dealt with, in terms of coming to consensus on what they were trying to do?

HARRIS

Well, I think Walt was the sort of a conciliator. You can't do things if you go off on one level, and go off with this philosophy, something like that. You had to have that sort of common thing, and it's sort of like, what's good for the community, rather than what's good for one organization, what's good for one philosophical thing. And you could be a part of the Congress, and do your thing, but don't get in difficulty and say it was the Congress' fault or something like that. The big thing about the Congress was that we all might not think together, want to do things the same way, but we're all for the certain kind of good for black people, and that's what we need to do. If you got a constituency that you're serving, you serve that constituency. But at the same time, when you come into the Congress, you might have to leave some of that stuff outside, as far as that's concerned. So you can't -- you can't be a Panther, and preach the Panther thing in the Congress; you can't be in US and preach the US philosophy, whatever that was; and the two together -- you have to come together for the common good of the community, because it was a Congress of community organizations, not of one particular [unclear]. And the thing was, what's good for black people and what's good for Los Angeles, et cetera, and what's good for black people should be good for everybody.

So that was the sort of thing -- I remember some time, I started thinking now, we did a marathon thing with people that had come from -- was sent from various organizations involved in sort of the same thing. We had

somebody from Cleveland, somebody from Florida, someone from -- where else? But it was about 20-something people, and we did a marathon weekend, marathon thing, and recognized that this ain't going to happen no more, because what we did and what we were doing was bringing together people, and we would be communicating with each other. So something -- and if an issue came up that was going to affect us all, let's get together and have a unified stance on it. At that time, we sort of recognized also that there were the usual law enforcement people somewhere involved in that, because certain people would pop up and spout a lot of militant stuff and disappear, and we sort of thought that they -- I often wonder where some of those people are at this point.

But we were trying to set up, and what I guess you could say a philosophy of the Congress was to be able to communicate with black people all over the country so that we would not do things so destructive. If something is happening in Cleveland, for instance, or something is happening in Florida, for instance, let's get on the phone and find out what kind of things we can do to help each other. And there was a lot of sensitivity stuff going at the time, so the weekend was -- a sensitivity thing, at the same time it was a coming together kind of thing, and that was sponsored by the Congress, because Preacely was involved, and I was involved because I was a shrink, I guess, and John -- a lot of sort of our core folks were involved in that.

STEVENSON

These representatives that came from other states, did they actually have formalized organizations like the Congress?

HARRIS

They had some kind of organizations. I don't know if it was a Congress, because I don't think nobody else had what we had out here. Because we did a lot of things, you know -- when we went to King's funeral, we decided we weren't going to wear black armbands; said we were going to wear white armbands for life, et cetera, and we all wore white armbands. And that sort of caught on, because if you see any pictures of King's funeral, you see a lot of folks wearing white armbands instead of the black armbands. The -- that group -- oh, my goodness -- the group of people that was sent were from a kind of -- shoot, not church, but -- I'm not sure, at least, I can't think of it, but they were there. And I said at that time, we're not going to be able to do this again, because this is too dangerous, what we're doing. And if it's successful, you know, it'll do something that has not been done before, sort of create a network that it was. And it never was repeated.

STEVENSON

Could you elaborate that a little bit, when you say -- you mean that it would be a threat, if it was successful, in terms of...

HARRIS

Yeah, it's my feeling that there are folks that would be greatly threatened by black people coming together speaking as -- not necessarily as one voice,

but unified in a lot of things, and doing a lot of things. And there are folks that feel that is anti-democratic, democracy, whatever it is. Think of what would happen if a black organization just said, "We're not going to buy Coca-Cola anymore," which was done. "We're not going to buy Coca-Cola anymore, because of their hiring practice," such-and-such things. And people could call it a boycott or whatever it is, but it's unity. If we could just unify on one or two things -- we were trying to get that kind of unity that stopped the city from burning down after King's assassination -- then what an economic potential that would be.

And all you had to do was just get folks not to spend a penny on one thing, two things, whatever, because it's the economic aspects of the thing, rather than anything else, that pushes America. Everything that we're involved with, even now overseas, is the results of the economy; it's not because we want to push Democracy, we want to make sure that the business of America continues. Nothing else. I mean, there's no -- so recognizing that at that particular time was that if you -- because we had planned to not only do those, but we were going to try to cover all the major cities at the time. I don't know who was -- we got some funding somewhere to pay for that, rather than anything else.

But we got some funding -- you know, bringing people here, putting them up for the weekend, and providing everything for them -- it was something. As I keep talking now, I remember some of the other things that the Congress was able to do with the -- was in Boeing? No, not Boeing -- because a lot of youngsters worked -- a lot of young blacks were working in the aircraft industry out in Hawthorne, and we had a similar kind of come-together with us on a weekend with a group of black people in Los Angeles, and the facilities were furnished by the -- whatever aircraft company was big at that particular time. You know, when you asked me the whole philosophical thing about the Congress, and doing things, the major philosophical thing was to do things, whatever's necessarily to help black folks, and to bring things together, make it work better; to improve upon and to expand it anyway fashioned. That was such a connection with the Jewish organizations; that was part of it, because Walt was very, very well respected.

Walt was respected all over, and so that was the other thing. I guess you have to have a leader who doesn't threaten anybody, and especially the white folks. Walt didn't threaten the white folks, but Walt had people who could speak with a certain voice. The Urban League, I guess, John Mack was there when I sort of think about that; Urban League was involved in the Congress. If you had a list -- I don't even have any papers or anything; I got some papers I got somewhere that could sort of list the organizations that belong to that.

STEVENSON

Going back to the Jewish organizations, can you elaborate a little bit more about what the nature of the linkage or the relationship with the Jewish organizations, and what were some of those organizations?

HARRIS

I can't say, because we needed -- the link-up was, I guess -- there was a big linkage with the Jewish organization to get Tom elected to the Council. And also, the continuing kind of thing, like the Jewish support for organizations like the Black Congress. Who? Federation, probably, which included all the organizations, some people involved with that. And the rabbis, the religious folks. Certain rabbis that Walt mingled with and was the spokesman with, et cetera. I can't --

STEVENSON

Were there other whites locally involved as allies, as it were, with the Black Congress, or were there other people of color involved with the Black Congress in any way?

HARRIS

Walt had a particular thing with the Chicanos, the Black -- not the Black, but the Brown Berets, which was similar to the Panthers in that sense. Another guy, Reies Tijerina, who was one of those people. I met Tijerina through Walt the Sunday that we had this big meeting at the sports arena, sort of a coming-together, more or less, the Panthers, because Eldridge Cleaver came down, US organization, the -- what's Stokeley's organization? SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]? And it was one Sunday that we had there, and we were supposed to have some meetings of those, the leaders that were there, at people's houses, at a house. And so pretty soon, all the folks backed out, and they had it at my house, and at the time we had [H.] Rap [Brown], Stokeley [Carmichael], Cleaver, Tijerina.

I met Tijerina, he was interesting, his stuff and everything; the way in which he was doing things. He was going back to the Spanish occupation, and the land grants that was given to the people at that particular point, and then he went and researched it in Spain, and he came back and claimed the lands that Americans had, and that got him in trouble. And -- [laughter] it got me in trouble too. After all those folks met at my house, for four years in a row, I was audited by the IRS; I had no money at all, only thing I was making was the money that I was being paid on salary and everything. And I remember the lady that was auditing me, and my accountant was there, and she would not allow me the dues that I was paid for the black psychiatrist, some of the other black organizations, but only for the APA and the white organizations. And I think all of us were under surveillance and everything at that particular time, I'm sure.

STEVENSON

Could you elaborate on that a little bit, about the surveillance?

HARRIS

I think -- you know, I think the whole FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation]/COINTELPRO [Counter Intelligence Program] thing was very much an organization. Shirley Better is a name that comes up now, so Shirley was involved in Watts and also in the Congress. The -- you know, we all thought that there was certain people that probably was agents for the COINTELPRO program. Some of those folks you could recognize, because they would be the most militant, talking about getting a gun and doing all of this stuff. Well, you look at a cat like that, you say, "What's wrong with him?" Because we knew that brandishing a gun or something like that kills the whole program. So some of those folks were there. Some other things happened where the police came, and this particular person was not arrested, or was arrested and released. Those kinds of things was happening. We also knew that a portfolio was kept on most of us. My brother-in-law, who was just a probation officer, but he had some Panthers on his case load, and was called in and asked to cooperate with them, and when he said he wasn't going to do it, they should him his profile all the way back to junior college, when he was going to Santa Rosa. So I knew if they had something on him, they certainly had something on me, because I wasn't the quietest of people.

STEVENSON

So this surveillance that you suspected, all of you suspected, you didn't know it as COINTELPRO at the time.

HARRIS

No, we didn't know what they called it, no.

STEVENSON

And did -- what was the nature of LAPD surveillance on the local level that you were aware of or suspected?

HARRIS

We suspected there were certain people who were meeting with the LAPD, and sometimes it was confirmed by certain kinds of things happening. The Man is the Man as far as we were concerned -- as far as I'm concerned; I don't know about we, but as far as I'm concerned -- I mean, there's no separation from the LAPD all the way up to the Justice Department and whatever, the CIA. That used to be the word -- "Oh, he's CIA" -- at that particular time. And it was jokingly said, but then you find out that it wasn't a joke. The whole thing about -- my thing about Geronimo [Pratt] is -- the little that I had known, the association of Geronimo -- when they accused Geronimo of robbing somebody on a tennis court and killing somebody, I said -- that wasn't his style, that was -- and then they convicted him, knowing full well that he was in Oakland at the time that it happened, and all of that. So it had to be that -- things going on. So of course, it had nothing to do with the Congress, but it had something to do with our being vigilant, being careful with what you do and who you associate with. So it came down to that inner circle of people who you could trust.

STEVENSON

And on the same subject of the LAPD, I assume the Black Congress was meeting and in force when there were several high-profile LAPD incidents, such as the shootout at UCLA, and also the shootouts involving both the Muslims and the Panthers, during this same time period. What was the response of the Congress to any of these incidents?

HARRIS

The big response, you know, we were -- the Congress was meeting, to some extent, had a hand in the negotiations for the African-American Studies Center. And some of us were involved with that negotiation. At the same time, the organization on campus was the High Potential program, High Pot program, that there was a struggle between the Panthers and US, necessarily, for control of that particular thing. And Bunchy and John Williams [Huggins] were sort of the leaders of the Panther group on the campus, and there was some other folks involved in the US organization. The day that -- the night before the announcement was supposed to be made for the African-American Studies Center, I was involved with the Chancellor and the person that was going to be named the leader of the [unclear] that night. And so Charles Thomas was to be named the head of the African Studies Center; Charles Thomas was the father of Black Psychology, Dr. Charles Thomas. And so Al Cannon left for Washington, DC, and the thing that the Chancellor was concerned about was whether or not there was going to be a disruption on the campus. And we -- if -- the problem was that if they didn't do the right thing, there would be some stuff on the campus. Well, we went to DC to try to save Central City, meeting with the National Institute of Mental Health director, along with Gus Hawkins. We got out of that meeting about 3 or 4:00. Somebody -- the black psychiatrist, Elise [Galati?] or Frances [Cress] Welsing said, "What's going on your campuses? What happened?" And they said, "Two kids have been killed. Shot." Said, "Oh, shit." And so we called back, and found out that that's what happened.

When we got back in town, you know, there's certain things -- the police, I guess, arrested Panthers, and didn't arrest the US people who were responsible for -- the twins were the ones who did the assassination, responsible for the shootings. So, you know, there had to be something going on with the police at that particular time. The other stuff was, you know, you demonstrate in these high-profile things, but you keep it within a certain context, et cetera. It wasn't that planned, but I mean, as far as how effective can you be in the demonstration; you just let it go on and see what happens. But you know, in all of this stuff, the demonstrations and the accusations that were made about the police brutality, of course, were true. And so I guess because of the truth of it, there was minimal kind of retaliatory stuff.

STEVENSON

OK. Going back briefly to the Black Congress' role in the choice of a director for the African-American Studies Center at UCLA -- Charles Thomas was the choice of which -- was it the Black Congress choice, or were -- who was the choice of the opposing, or the other people?

HARRIS

There was nobody else, I don't think; there was just Thomas, because we were doing it. First, we wanted an African-American Studies Center set up, and then we wanted also for it to be somebody of our choosing of course. The problem -- not problem, but what they always wanted to be was, we wanted an Afro-American Studies Center that could eventually become a -- how do you say? -- become like it has become, a program within the university that could give out --

STEVENSON

Degree-granting.

HARRIS

Degree-granting kind of things. And so much of the time going on, there wasn't that many blacks who had the potential to be tenured, in a sense. We wanted to hire somebody that could be appointed as an associate professor, because as an assistant professor, there wasn't that tenure kind of thing; we wanted someone -- the idea of the Center was to have a director of the Center that intellectually and educationally could not be questioned, or could stand up under the question; could be a part of the Senate, et cetera, the university environment, because at that particular time, people were saying that you don't have any quote "intellectuals," so to speak -- that means PhD, as far as what they were talking about. And so Charles Thomas fit that bill: not only was he PhD, but he's also -- writings, and all the other kinds of things, of course people worshipped Charles as far as psychology stuff was concerned. And so that was our aim, to have a Black Studies Center that would eventually become a -- what is it, a school, or what...?

STEVENSON

Department.

HARRIS

Department in the university, because other Black Studies Centers had been set up that did not have -- everybody was an assistant professor, something like that, that did not have that kind of role, so to speak. So we wanted -- that's what we wanted, and Charles Thomas fit that bill, et cetera. Now, the Panthers, of course, weren't involved in that kind of negotiations or anything else. I mean, Karenga -- we all met with Charles Thomas to sort of tell him, you know, don't be black. Don't be pushing all the black things; let us do that, and then you just be there. And so Chancellor Young wanted to meet with Charles Thomas, if he's going to appoint him, et cetera. And so we met Thomas' house, and drank --

STEVENSON

So the shooting happens, and could you continue talking about what effect the shooting had?

HARRIS

The shooting, it just negated everything. The shooting negated everything; it pushed the -- that was somebody else's agenda, as far [unclear]; I guess they wanted to have control of the High Potential program, High Pot program. But that messed up everything, it pushed it all the way back. Then they sort of developed the program -- we weren't involved anymore, and we couldn't be involved, because I guess we were seen as part of the people that killed Bunchy and John. So that was postponed, the development of that Center, that was postponed after that. Then it started, you know -- after that, we weren't involved in any of the talks at that particular time; we had messed up. Yeah, Chuck Young didn't have a demonstration on each campus, he had murder on his campus. So thinking that we were part of that -- of course, I wouldn't deal with you or anything. So Charles wasn't appointed, and that was that.

STEVENSON

Were there black faculty, staff, students at UCLA who were members of the Congress, or involved in the Black Congress?

HARRIS

Not that I know of. I guess Walt knew some people on campus at that time - - in fact, we met with some, but I can't think of their names now. [Boniface] Obichere, is that a name?

STEVENSON

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Boniface Obichere.

HARRIS

Boniface Obichere. Who else? Then there was some young guys who were there who were in school at that time, Lou King and Hector, Jackie Kimbrough. Oh, the kids that were involved, that went on to become -- Virgil, that's the name that sticks, because Virgil was around at that point. Virgil, who else? Some of the other folks. Let's stop for a minute. [pause] It's turned on here? Is it on?

STEVENSON

Yes. We were talking about students at UCLA that were involved with the Black Congress. Were there students from other colleges in the area? Cal State, for instance, community college students that had any role in the Black Congress, in the meetings?

HARRIS

I'm sure the students were, but I can't pinpoint them. The -- certainly from Cal State LA, and Southwest Junior College. As far as their being participants and getting funds, things like that. Dominguez came up probably during that era also.

STEVENSON

What was the level of involvement of women in the Black Congress, and who were some of the women that were involved, had a prominent role? Or women's groups?

HARRIS

I can't say. It -- to name them or something like that, I wouldn't be able to. They were around, so to speak. I'm sure -- I'm not so sure that it wasn't the same kind of thing that was reflected in the white world, where women were there but not necessarily making -- there were some people, because we were working closely with Walt. But I don't recall their involvement and their names, but I know, you know, when we got ready to do something, and we needed somebody, that they were always around. So someone else can better talk that way.

STEVENSON

OK. If, looking back at the Congress years -- what were some of the major issues that the Black Congress addressed? If you were to name some of the most major issues.

HARRIS

That I can directly associate with the Black Congress? I don't know of any. And I'm sure a lot of stuff was -- I know a lot of stuff went down. They were involved with the question of police brutality, always. The whole education thing; black principals, that was another thing that we were involved in, because we got the first black principal at [John C.] Fremont [High School], we went -- people demonstrated, and went down and talked to folks, and a black superintendent, the first black superintendent was a lady.

STEVENSON

Was that Josie Bain?

HARRIS

Yeah, Josie Bain. The Congress was certainly involved in that. You know, specifically, certain things, I can't say. Because they were involved with us -- us being my center -- and the demonstrations and things that we needed to do in order to get the Regional Center.

STEVENSON

Well, maybe you could elaborate on the background of the Regional Center, the individuals involved in getting that conceptualized and started, and then how the Black Congress helped [unclear].

HARRIS

Well, the Regional Center -- you know, when we started the Community Mental Health Center, then the Community Mental Health Center's thing was to be involved with mental retardation. At the time -- and I think -- who has to be given credit for the thinking around this is Al Cannon. Al Cannon wanted to have sort of the same kind of thing that the Jews had in everything -- education, culture, arts, and writers, and supporting everything; he wanted to do that. So he had organized, for instance, Headstart, Frederick Douglass Headstart, and the Center City Outpatient

Clinic first was started in the church, Jim Hargett, in the church, because - as just a volunteer clinic, and then we got somebody, Al was successful in getting someone to donate an old furniture store down on Broadway that we started out the center in, and built that -- used money for staffing it.

So the natural progression had to be the mental health, mental retardation. Well, at the time, Children's Hospital doled out all of the funds for mental retardation, and instead of having areas with their own regional center, Children's Hospital was the big center for mental retardation, and the guy that was over there -- I can't think of his name right now -- was a person that was sort of doling out the funds. We wanted our own thing. So Al set up the people around Central City, and other folks who had children who were challenged, to demonstrate, to get something else. And pretty soon, that demonstration led to him allotting more money to the area for services, but not granting anything else. Then somehow, we got legislation passed to set up regional centers throughout the state, and certainly throughout California. And so we had to appoint a regional board, and the board would select the sites for the thing.

So I was put on the regional center boards, the City of Los Angeles Regional Center Board, and got myself elected president so that we could control whatever else was going on. And so through that, having people before all of this happened, having people just -- if you needed 100 people to go down to Children's Hospital and protest what they were doing as far as providing services we had -- that happened for awhile before the other thing occurred. And the results of that was the legislation, and the regional board. And so naturally, they wanted to put a professional on the board, someone, a psychiatrist or someone who knew. So I was appointed to the board, and then I got myself appointed president. And then as a result of that, when it came up time for the selection of the South Central site, et cetera, this site, then we got selected. I don't think anybody else presented other than us for that; I probably shouldn't have been as active as I was, in the political sense, but I mean, there wasn't no other black folks around who had the letters behind their name, et cetera, and who had been identified as providing services; Central City was the agency, and so it goes without saying that we should have got it -- either that or Kedron; Kedron was Jim Jones, a Community Mental Health Center, which was really in Watts. We became the place for Watts, but Jim Jones' Kedron was in Watts, and they eventually took over Central City. But that -- we got the regional center, Anna Smith was the first medical director, and it has grown since then. We had to separate -- it would have been nice if we could have commingled the funds, because the funds for mental retardation are much more than funds for mental health, mentally ill. And so we got the funding, we had to separate and had to get our own individual -- first the space was in the Central City Community Mental Health Center, but then it had to move out

of that, and what you had now was this separate organization, independent, and has done well since that time.

STEVENSON

Before the regional center was developed, what were the needs in the community? More specifically, what did parents and children with these needs do before --

HARRIS

Before the regional center, they all had to trek up to the Children's Hospital. And I think they might have had a site out here, but it certainly wasn't enough to service the community. And so that was the basis of the process. People who have challenged children often didn't have the means to go up on Sunset Boulevard to Children's Hospital.

STEVENSON

Transportation.

HARRIS

Yeah, transportation and all that. And some of them didn't even know -- people talk about the fact that black people kept their kids with them, and never put them up for adoption and all the other kinds of things [unclear], was because we didn't know the services existed; black folks didn't know that there was certain services for their mental retarded people, social Security and all the other kinds of things, because nobody told them that. And so they just thought that we just keep this person in our community, and take care of them, and in the neighborhood, everybody realizes who is in need, et cetera, and they sort of take care of that. They didn't know about the services that were available. So it became an education process, and also at the same time, a challenge for [unclear], so to speak. And that started that; that's what happened to that. They didn't -- oftentimes, they didn't get the services at all, because they didn't know about that.

STEVENSON

So once this legislation was passed, establishing regional centers, there was then a regional center in I guess what we could call South Central or Watts. And where was that located?

HARRIS

First, it was in Central City, at 42nd and Avalon. And then they went out on their own, up on Adams Boulevard -- is it on Adams now?

STEVENSON

Adams and Figueroa?

HARRIS

It isn't Adams and Figueroa; it's Adams and someplace else now. Before then, first. Ruth -- Ruth -- was the director after Dr. Smith. Ruth -- my memory.

STEVENSON

OK. So going back to the Black Congress, what was your recollection of how long the organization --

HARRIS

Existed?

STEVENSON

-- lasted -- yeah, existed.

HARRIS

I really don't know. See, I left Central City, I think, in 1972, or something like that, and sort of lost contact. I know, about 1970 or so, '71, Walt was also branched out to develop the Black United Fund. And then, you know, as the money dried up, so did the Congress; it's as simple as that.

STEVENSON

So you would -- that would be the major reason why both --

HARRIS

Yeah. The organizations -- there were no organizations; the organizations sort of became non-existent. The Teen Post was closed down; NAPP was closed down; some of the other black things were closed down. Westminster -- Westminster was one of the -- it's still going on, I hope -- was there. And they just couldn't keep up the funding, because as the administrations -- the momentum was stopped after Johnson --

STEVENSON

After the Johnson Presidency.

HARRIS

Yeah. Yeah.

STEVENSON

OK. So you would see a direct correlation, because with him not being President, a lot of those programs, initiatives, die out.

HARRIS

Guns and butter, so they couldn't have butter if they were going to have the guns. So those programs, the funding gets less and less. We got funding to build the building at 42nd and Avalon, we got funding for that. That was only \$3 million -- \$3 million from us, \$3 million from the state; we were the only Community Mental Health Center to get the money from the state, because Al Cannon and I went and got -- Leon Ralph and Willie Brown got us an audience with [Governor Ronald Wilson] Reagan, and so we got to Reagan, and at the time, Lanterman was the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, and of course he had a brother that was either retarded or mentally ill, and so when we presented to Lanterman what we were trying to do as far as that was concerned, he supported putting the item in the budget, and when Reagan signed that, we had talked to Reagan, when it came time for the signing of the budget, he didn't line it out. And the state gave us the money, [unclear] share. So we were able to raise that through Seniel Ostrow, who was the Sealy Mattress man, and the Ostrow Foundation. His daughter was heavy into the -- supported the International House out at UCLA. So that was how we built it. And I left soon after that, after we built it.

STEVENSON

What would you say were the greatest achievements, and/or legacy, of Black Congress, looking back?

HARRIS

The legacy's what has developed since then, the Brotherhood Crusade being that, Black United Fund. And, you know, if we really want to look at it, keeping the city from burning after King's death. And I wonder what would have happened if we'd had a Black Congress after the non-conviction of the police, that riot.

STEVENSON

Yeah, that was going to be my next question. Did you see a correlation -- the dissolution of the Black Congress, of course, because of the funds drying up, and is there any correlation between that and what led up to the second rebellion in '92?

HARRIS

Well, it didn't have any organization whatsoever, as far as that's concerned. Didn't have any organization such as the Black Congress, which might have been able to meet and say, you know, hold on, et cetera. I think the demise of organizations that were successful during that period of time, and their not being able to continue, is a testament to our being in the same place over and over again. We don't have the permanency of the organizations, and the effectiveness of those organizations has to be seen as the kinds of shortages and things -- you know, like the whole thing about the criminal justice system, and its effects on blacks and Latinos. Had we -- if we had some kind of things that not only after you get out of jail, to get you back into society, jobs and all the other kind of stuff.

And if we had organizations that could put this kind of pressure, and then get funds, et cetera, for the education and hiring of all the people, et cetera, then I don't think we'd have the kind of crimes that we have. All the crimes, as far as I'm concerned, is a result of poverty, and the poverty brings on so many other things. The Bloods and the Crips are a result of poverty, more than that. And I guess at the time, somebody has said that at the time the Congress was going on, the Panthers and the US is just an extension of the gangs that were operating at that particular time, and then they reorganized into something else other than that.

STEVENSON

So those would be like the Slausons and those other gangs?

HARRIS

Yeah, the Slauson Street gang, and those others were the -- somewhat you can say that; I mean, I don't think Karenga and none of the other folks would sort of agree to that. But people go to gangs because they don't have anything else; the gangs provide a lot of things for them. And if they direct it in a certain way, jobs and all the other kinds of things, then that would be helpful. I mean, you can keep a kid in school if you can give him a little job,

rather than not having -- not being able to act as a little man, and so you go and do big man things, and get yourself put in jail. I saw a kid up in Oakland the other day that said that he was helping his older brothers and sisters -- he was in the third grade, helping his older brothers and sisters with their homework, and they wanted to skip him to the sixth grade from the third grade, and his mother said no. And he said, after that, he just lost all interest in school, and became a fuck-up, so to speak. And right now, having a lot of problems, not only the psychological problems, but also some physical problems. And I encouraged him to go back to school, you know; he's 30-something years old now, but to go back to school. So those are some of the things -- I guess he might have been put into the gifted school, the magnet school, had those things existed at that particular time. But either -- the other thing is that when the parents are not educated to certain things, then the children suffer, because their parents are not willing to let them do things that they don't know anything about, or let them focus on things like that. It's a long ways from the Congress, though, from the Black Congress thing.

STEVENSON

Can you think of any organizations involved with the Congress where there are some lasting positive results, or organizations that are still --

HARRIS

Still in existence at this time?

STEVENSON

Yeah, still --

HARRIS

Well, certainly the Black Film Festival, which is people that were involved in that. The Brotherhood Crusade. Well, US, because of the leadership of Karenga, but US is still in there. CORE is still sort of there; they were involved with the Congress. I don't know how much they are or not, but the CORE is being a national organization as such, Celes King in that. Who else? I can't think of any.

STEVENSON

What about in the realm of education, looking at what the situation looked like when the Congress started, which, as I understand it, there were no black principals, and say, you know, what it looks like even today, even though there has been some backtracking in some areas?

HARRIS

Well, you know, if you really look at it, you've got black principals, but we don't have any education. We're lacking the means of -- our kids are still dropping out; kids are not -- some, proportionally -- going to college, et cetera. But it's not the kind of thing that we would like. So we have the black principals, and we have black teachers, and all the other kinds of things, but you still have the bureaucracy that does not allow them to function as they need to be, in order to help kids. And so now the black and

Latino kids are fighting each other, which shouldn't be, but is. And that's part of somebody not coming together with those kinds of things. I don't know when they got Latino principals, but I know the first black principal was at Fremont, and then some others, I can't think of the --

STEVENSON

Who was that, the first black principal?

HARRIS

I don't remember his name. I see him, because the thing that he said: "OK, you guys got me the job, and then you left me a year or two after that," because he was still there. The student that was the most vocal in that protest for the black principal is in the law firm of [Ivie, McNeill & Wyatt] --

STEVENSON

Rickie Ivie.

HARRIS

Rickie, yeah. Yeah.

STEVENSON

OK. We stop --

1.3. Session 3

June 3, 2006

HARRIS

Where'd you get those things?

STEVENSON

My father's files. Meticulous file-keeping.

HARRIS

That's what I need.

STEVENSON

And one last thing, we talked a little bit about this before, about what you see as the legacy of the Black Congress, even though it was actually in existence for a very short time.

HARRIS

Well, you know, the big legacy that it -- the people that it was associated with, and what they have gone on to do. I think that in itself is something that we should, in some way, try to illustrate and demonstrate and all the other kinds of things. The folks that were involved with it, and what's come up as a result of that. And then also what happened -- why the demise so quickly, which really is probably associated with the decrease in funding for all the organizations that were there. Because most of the organizations that were involved with the Black Congress are organizations that rose up out of the War on Poverty and that kind of thing. And of course, the Guns and Butter philosophy, funding thing, always came into the fore, and maybe that's the reason for the demise. But there are a lot of people that came out

of what the Black Congress represented, et cetera. The tragedy is that it takes money to sustain itself, and to sustain the organizations and things. And that's always a problem within the black community, the sustaining of organizations. It would be nice if some of those -- the organizations that still are around, like the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and to some extent CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] -- the fraternal organizations could do some of the same things, but of course, they're off on their own agenda, and not necessarily dedicated to the whole of the African community, African-American community, people, which would be something to catalogue, characterize, and write about, and sort of do something like that. I always wanted somebody to do something like, "Where are they now?" sort of thing. I mean, the sports people do that to their athletes, but if you could establish something like that, "Where are they now?" and people sort of would, at some point, want to be involved in that, and at the same time, it might inspire other people to sort of continue in a certain vein to make certain that these things continue to exist.

Right now, we need a Black Congress; we need organizations to protest the continuing institutionalized racism. And there's no continuation -- I guess everybody feels that there is no more racism; there's equality, there's Affirmative Action, and all the other kinds of things. But their institution -- I guess we should establish institutions to fight racism; the institutional racists have their own institutions that continue to rise up, to change the economic situation, or to continue the economic situation of black America. We certainly need it in education; we certainly need it in the economy as a whole. But if the people don't get educated, they can't even commit good, educated crimes, since we are keeping the criminal, industrial complex going, the Prison Industrial Complex going, funded by black males. Jesse Jackson points out all the time about how much it costs to keep a guy in prison, as how much it costs to keep him in college. And of course, there are more black men in prison than there ever will be in colleges here at this point across the nation.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to talk in a little bit more detail -- if you could tell me about the Community Mental Health Center. The impetus for it, the nature, the unmet needs, key players?

HARRIS

Geez. It's been so long since I thought about that. The Central City Community Mental Health Center -- we always tell the story about it -- began in the basement of the Church of Christian Fellowship, where a group of -- Al [Alfred E.] Cannon, in the Community [unclear] Program. But that was only his paying job. Got together by a group of mental health professionals, social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists, to start a free clinic at the Church of Christian Fellowship. And they would meet -- there was sort of a conduit; some of the guys would see the patients for free in

the clinic, in their offices; some of them also would see them when the clinic was open in the evenings, Monday, I think, and Tuesday, something like that, and then -- Tuesday evenings, to provide mental health services to the South Central Community, where there was no mental health services at that particular time. Some of us, like when I first started out -- those were the only patients that I had. But was seeing them there. There were -- the early guys were George Mallory, Herb Robinson, Al Cannon, myself, Rose Jenkins, who was a child psychiatrist, Charles Lewis, Chuck Lewis, a social worker -- I can't think of his wife's name now, who was also a social worker. And most of us worked in the various mental health facilities around, but gave that free service.

And then when the Community Mental Health Centers Act passed, giving a staffing grant, they applied; Al got people together, wrote a grant, and it was funded. The funding was for staffing only, but we used some of the funding for paying rent, et cetera, because there was no other way to do things. Of course, the staffing on the Board of Directors were people that volunteered -- either gave us a building, an old furniture store on Broadway, for the opening of the facility. And so I came into the directorship of the Community Mental Health Center, I guess, in 1966, '65 or '66. And we immediately, of course, set out on a building fund thing because the -- by that time, the [unclear] part of the Community Mental Health Centers Act had been started; [John F.] Kennedy started the [nature] thing, and then it just continued with the development at NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health], et cetera. So we got a fundraiser, someone donated his salary for that, a professional fundraiser, who got us the chairman of the fundraising -- the Chairman of the Board, and the founder of Sealy Mattress [Seniel Ostrow] was our fundraiser.

And we, at the time, the Community Mental Health Centers Act was -- for the building, you had to raise -- one-third of your money would come from the community, one-third from the federal government, and one-third from the state. When we came in, the state -- the government was Governor [Ronald Wilson] Reagan, and his folks vowed to cut the costs of government, so they did not want to fund any Community Mental Health Centers, so that would mean that the burden of raising two-thirds, and one-third from the federals, for the building. We overcame that; we went to see -- Al Cannon and I went to see Governor Reagan, and through the help of our political people, got an interview with him, and told him about the program. When it came up for budget, because of the political people involved, Willie Brown, Leon Ralph, and others -- Mr. Lanterman, who was famous for the Lanterman-Petrie-Short Act [Lanterman Development Disabilities Act], who was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee at that time, and so inserted it into the budget, and we got that funded. And it was only \$1.3 million; we raised the other \$1.3 million through our fundraiser, Seniel Ostrow. He -- the first time I'd ever seen a check for \$100,000 was his

contribution to that; he raised more throughout the Jewish community; that's where most of the money came from, through his shepherding that. So we raised it; we set out with the ambitious plans of 100,000 square foot building, a psychiatric service for children, adolescents, and adults, in-patient and out-patient. And of course, all of the other kinds of programs that run along with that. That sort of was my -- allowed me to be a direct participant in anything that was going on, black, because I could always say that it was a community kind of organization -- community project. And it was for -- almost we redefined what community mental health was for our people; anything that would help to raise the health of the entire community was of course some of the things that we wanted to do. It was -- the riot had helped to get funding, and so that was kind of easy to do.

And so we were involved with a lot of stuff, organizing in the community, providing services that had never been provided before directly to the community. All kinds of services; we had -- and we hired community people, renamed them with a mental health kind of name, but have them involved in all kinds of things, providing services for welfare recipients, schools, all the other kinds -- anything that would promote the health of the community.

Part of that also meant that we had people free to do any kinds of protesting, et cetera, and that's what led to being able to get the South Central Regional Center developed. That was -- Lanterman passed a law, that instead of one Regional Center serving all the community, they would be divided into areas, like the Community Mental Health Centers were divided into, to provide direct services to people. That meant setting up a board; when it came time for the allocation of the Regional Center for the area, we were in the position to provide the people, and got the first Regional Center. And Dr. Anna Smith was the first director of the Regional Center in this process. I guess, you know, at the time, we were so poor that some of the funds got commingled, and they needed to separate from the Community Mental Health Center. But we built the building, could not -- it was an idea kind of thing, because I wanted an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a gym, an auditorium, meeting rooms, et cetera, for people to be included in the building. Gil [Gilbert W.] Lindsay was very instrumental in helping us to get Wrigley Field, which had been turned over to the city, because of the Dodgers coming to town. And Wrigley Field was renamed Gil[bert] Lindsay Center, and Central City was -- they became a part of the Gil Lindsay Center. Gil was instrumental in getting us the land for a dollar, or whatever. And that's where the bill went up.

Interesting, we had a black architectural firm to build a building, Kennard & Silvers, and tried to involve people in things that had never been -- black people in things that they had never been involved in before, especially community people. We stressed not only mental illness, treatment of mental illness, but we stressed the things necessary for the health of the community, and pushing the need for education, the need for

professionalism, and the need to come back into the community too, from Central City for a lot of things. The Black Behavior Scientists was divided, after we got a lot of psychiatrists and psychologists, into the Black Psychiatrists of America, Black Psychiatrists of California, and the Black Psychologists, the BPA [Black Probation Officers Association], so to speak, that developed out of Central City, the Black Nurses Association was somewhat involved in that, the Black Probation Officers. And of course, some of these organizations continue to exist at this time. The Probation Officers, of course; the Black Psychiatrists, the Black Psychologists. I don't think we can take credit for the nurses, but that stimulus is somewhat associated with the Black Medicines Association, the organization of people [unclear]. For awhile, you know, like everything else, we all met together, and then as we got larger, and more people came in, then we split off into the various working organizations that still exist today.

What else? There's so much to -- anecdotes to the story. One that I'd really like to include: there was a lady that came in for services, for our social workers. And she had three children, and she was living not too far from the Center, and so I, and the chief social worker at that time, Mary Helen Thomas, went around to the lady's house, looked in the refrigerator, and there was an empty Kellogg's Cornflakes box, no milk, and nothing else. And so we had -- we were able to mobilize food. And thought she was pregnant, she was supposedly pregnant, and it -- and we took her through those months of pregnancy, we thought, and it turns out she wasn't pregnant; that was a good thing for her, as far as continuing -- she thought -- to receive those service.

But there were many stories like that; many stories -- getting people a home, getting people housing, because we had a Community Center. Our Malcolm X Community Center, started by a guy who has his PhD, Eddie Lynn, started over there, young Eddie Lynn. And a lot of things flowed from there, to provide things -- we had something that I wish we could continue at this time called the Westside Forum that developed out of that, where we would bring the black people who were in the news to speak to Greater Los Angeles. People like [Imamu] Amiri Baraka, and of course, guys like Al [Alvin F.] Poussaint and Jim [James] Comer, and other artists and other people that were in the news at that particular time. We had one time the head of the Deacons for Justice, which was an armed group in Louisiana that resisted the Klu Klux Klan at that time, the leader of that. We also had the politician who was instrumental in getting an investigation in New York for the Attica uprising. I can't think of his name, but he was out to speak.

Those were the kinds of things that came out of Central City. It was Al Cannon's ideas to have -- to duplicate the kinds of organizations that are very prevalent in the Jewish Community. Arts -- because Al started the Frederick Douglass Childcare Center; when funding came up, the Headstart Program. Frederick Douglass might still be going on at this time, some

phases of that. Watts Writers Workshop, and a lot of things that was going on in Watts, was sort of the progenitor -- I won't say progenitor, but sort of the ideas pushed by Al Cannon, who was energetic, forceful, and all the other kinds of things in trying to get these things together. The only thing that hurt these programs was that Al wanted to be the leader of all of them, and consequently, things broke down because of that. Central City -- I guess what happens at organizations such as that is that we get to a point, and we can't go any further because we haven't had the experience to go further. One of the things that I realized in building Central City -- you know, we didn't have experience about how to sustain, fundraise, and all the other kinds of things like that. And so when the idea of you needing to do certain kinds of payable services in order to service the mortgage, in order to upkeep the building, in order to pay your staff -- it became difficult, because you were asking people to work a little harder than they had been working before, and to do other things in order to fundraise. The Ex Felons Program came out of that, drug treatment programs came out of that. The -- I guess in some forms the Welfare Rights kind of thing came out of that, at least the participants came out of that. It's just a whole host of services that the community needs that the funding agencies can't afford, and the community can't afford because they can't raise the funds to continue such programs. Jim Jones was the -- along with us at Kedren Community Mental Health Center. And his is really in Watts, but we all sort of said that if you're black, everything in LA is Watts. And Jim Jones was doing the same thing, raising funds for Kedron, with a different group of people, but at the same time, was able to get it built. And then Kedron eventually took over Central City, and the building that we built on 42nd and Avalon at that time, now that name has been changed to Kedron Community Health Center. And it's still in existence, the reason being that after I left, I guess there was a series of people that eventually -- because of the funding and the other kinds of mistakes we always made, the place went bankrupt, because we couldn't meet the financial needs, getting grants and all the other kinds of things. And of course, the Regional Center always has more funding than Mental Health. The developmentally disabled have enormous funding; the Regional Center is able to exist with a minimal kind of fundraising, because they get all of their funding from the services that they provide, administrative, et cetera. And so they're in a separate area, and I guess the -- only those folks who are old enough and still alive remember the fact that it used to be involved with Central City. I can sit up and reminisce about all the things that came out of Central City, the Black Congress, et cetera. One thing that stands out, when [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] got killed, I think I have said before, we stayed up all night in order to keep the city from burning up. Our part of the city, because it wasn't going anywhere else. And we went to the funeral, and previously, people had been wearing black armbands for that particular thing; California folks, Walt [Walter] Bremond was among those,

the delegation that went down there, said that California people are going to wear white armbands to signify life, rather than black armbands that signify death. And so that caught on, and I guess if you see some of the pictures of the funeral processions and the march, et cetera, you'll see white armbands, et cetera.

King's death and my attending that funeral was somewhat of a turning point for me, and also for the Center, because coming back on the airplane, I met Sammy Davis [Jr.], personally. And to -- Sammy was -- we were having a big fundraiser for us at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, and we talked, because on the same trip was Eartha Kitt, and Sammy -- was it Eartha Kitt? -- yeah, Eartha Kitt, and Sammy, and some of the other folks; James Baldwin was on the plane going down, sitting by himself as usual, but not coming back.

Sammy -- I told Sammy about the Central City project, et cetera, and he agreed to come to the fundraiser that night. He said, "Look, I'm going to -- I've got to sing at the Academy Awards, but after I sing, I will come to the Beverly Hilton." And, you know, I didn't expect him to be able to get away and come, et cetera, but coming back to California, I guess those five hours or so on the plane, we had long talks, because [Maulana] Karenga was there with us, and we're sort of sitting in the first-class section and just talking about things. And Sammy, talking about his involvement, and wanting to be involved, and wanting to help it, et cetera. And then I told him about the fundraiser for us, and he said that he would do what he could. He came; we were almost about to break up, he came, and pledged to do something for us. I wish everybody could have pledged like he did. Sammy performed in the yard -- they set up these tents, and people would come, et cetera, and on the grounds of a -- I guess, had I known what it was at that time, what the man did at that time, I'd be rich now, because I could have invested in his company. But that's what Sammy was able to do, Seniel Ostrow was able to pull together Jewish entrepreneurs, et cetera, for fundraising. And Sammy said, "I will perform at a fundraiser for Central City;" Sammy performed, and we got pledges for a quarter of a million dollars out of that. My association with Sammy, et cetera, was after that sort of brotherly kinds of things, but that's the kind of man that he was, raising funds, et cetera.

And the thing about the Black Congress and Walt Bremond, Walt was able to bring together those kinds of people -- because Walt was on the plane, of course, with us going down there. And I don't know how we all got on the same plane going back, but we did. So that was one of the things that -- then I guess out of Central City, I was the whatever, for whatever it was worth, the psychiatric advisor to Diahann Carroll's program, Julia, the Julia Show. Sort of like reading the scripts, and taking out things that might be offensive to black folks, et cetera. But that's my life, not necessarily the community's, so to speak. But all of that, the Black Congress, Central City, et cetera, afforded me the ability to linger among the shakers and movers of this city and of this country.

STEVENSON

OK. One follow-up question about the Community Mental Health Center. In the beginning, to what extent was there a stigma on mental illness, and did you have to deal with that? Also, how did you educate, say, people in the community to seek out treatment?

HARRIS

Well, that stigma exists, even to the present time. But, you know, what we did was provide so many quote "normal" services to people that people would gladly come see us. But the other thing is that the stigma exists because there was not hardly any people; they didn't know that there was any black psychiatrists in the world, in the community, for a long period of time. And there wasn't for awhile, and so for us to be involved at 42nd and Broadway, and providing all kinds of service, including the mental health services, that stigma sort of was erased, because they didn't see themselves coming just for mental health services; they came for other kinds of services. And, of course, we provided services for children, which meant being involved in the schools, and that kind of a thing.

The stigma of mental illness still exists; people just don't -- they wait until it gets serious. People think that to be depressed is just something -- you be depressed; you don't know that you get treatment for it, and medication, et cetera, at that time. And schizophrenia -- at that time, people were spending -- going to the state hospitals, and the state hospitals were sort of warehousing people at that point. And so they just -- somebody designated as being crazy would just disappear and go into the state hospitals. And when they come back, depending on how they're discharged, they're not going to come back into the community, but go into some [unclear] care homes, something like that. I guess we overcame it by providing other kinds of sort of one-stop servicing for the community, because if somebody's mentally ill, there are other problems that the family's going to have, besides that one particular person. At that time, the theory was going around that individual in the family might be the designated person to be crazy, so in order to keep the rest of the family sane -- that was one of the - - I guess what we operated on, so we could take in the whole family.

But it's interesting you ask about a stigma, because I was at the American Psychiatric Association meeting last week, and there was a presentation on the African diaspora, and the stigma of [unclear]. So we had to have speakers from South Africa, from Haiti, from Ethiopia, [unclear], Nigeria, all talking about the -- you just don't -- I guess it was almost like AIDS; you just don't say that somebody has mental illness. One guy was talking about the -- there's one psychiatrist for every 15,000 people, where in America, I guess there's one psychiatrist for every 750 people. And the Nigerian got up; he said, "How about one psychiatrist for every 7 million people?" But more and more, the Africans are saying that they're sort of able to provide treatment. The Medicine Man provides most of the treatment at this point,

and getting medications and all of those things is a serious problem. And a beautiful presentation was made by a Jamaican, [Dr.] Fred [Frederick W.] Hickling, who someday someone should bring him to -- he's at the University of West Indies; he's chairman of the Department of Psychiatry in Jamaica. He had a presentation using Bob [Robert Nesta] Marley, talking about the theories of treatment, et cetera, for black people. It was really beautiful. And he did the same kind of presentation -- not Bob Marley, but about the kinds of things that they did, getting away from the Eurocentric psychology theory of behavior, which is Eurocentric, but that's not necessarily taking into consideration the cultural aspects of black people. And I guess that was the reason for the program base presented, too, because that's where the culture comes from first hand, and we're still not completely wrapped up in European culture, although we're wrapped up in European other kinds of ways, the economy and all the other things about that. [unclear]

STEVENSON

OK. Could you talk in a little bit more detail about the impetus for, and the beginnings of, the South Central [Los Angeles] Regional Center?

HARRIS

Well, the one thing about that that we always stress was the fact that there were no services in the community, no medical services in the community, and of course, the Regional Center was one of those places -- I mean, developmentally disabled, mental retardation, et cetera -- was on of the places that didn't have treatment within the community. The treatment facility was at Children's Hospital, and the people that had children that were challenged would have to go to the Children's Hospital in order to get services. And so we were trying to get services down in the South Central Community. And Al Cannon's, and his folks, some of them from Central City, et cetera, and I think one of the mothers -- I know one of the mothers that was involved in the early -- had a child who was mentally retarded, or developmentally disabled. But they couldn't get -- then after you travel to Children's Hospital, you still might not be able to get the services that day; you might have to come back. Well, for some people, that was very difficult. Funding and resources and transportation, et cetera. And so the same -- the community being absent of services directly where people could just get to was the main impetus for that.

And of course, we wanted our own, because we also wanted to focus on the kinds of things that our kids might need, as opposed to whatever Children's Hospital deemed that it was. And then all these people that are providing servicing for our communities were not of us, because they weren't black and they hadn't been trained in any black kinds of settings, where they would see certain kinds of -- see the way people have it. You know, for a long time, black people were kept out of the statistical thing, because we didn't realize that there were services available for certain kinds of illnesses, et cetera. People would just stay within the community, and the community

itself would accept them and protect them, and the kids might taunt them, but the community accepted them. So we weren't involved in getting the treatment, and of course we weren't involved in giving it, because they did not have it, did not have the trained people.

Well, Al and the folks, Al Cannon, at that time, we realized that by protesting and demonstrating, et cetera, that we were -- that things could be done. And so that was that kind of thing. When they tried to -- they being Dr. Coke -- would be in certain places, then those folks would be there protesting against them, and telling the state, "We want our own; we want our own," and that's what sort of led to the legislation, et cetera, as far as that's concerned. But our people -- that was a time, because of those organizations in the Black Congress, et cetera, that if we need to put 100 people in somebody's office in an hour, we could do that. And of course, we had to do that, because some people were designating funds going someplace that we knew that wasn't going to be helpful to our community, et cetera, while we didn't get a share of that. So the only thing that we were asking for was a share of the pie, and being able to designate and distribute it whatever it is. And that was the impetus, and so a lot of folks were involved in protesting and finding out where the secret meetings were, and they would look up and see a group of people from Central City from other agencies -- other areas, et cetera -- and that's how it came to fore.

I was appointed to the Mental Retardation Board, probably because of my experience on the statewide -- when the Lanterman-Petrie-Short Act was passed, Governor Reagan appointed me to the board, Mental Health Board, that was overseeing the Lanterman-Petrie-Short Act, as the implementation of [unclear], so I sat on that board -- I guess I got to be vice-president of that board, but then when the Mental Retardation Board came up, I was appointed to that, and politicked and got myself appointed to -- elected president, and then we were assured of having a Regional Center in South Central, and Central City would be the main purveyor, so to speak, because we're the only organized, really organized group within the community. Avalon Carver Community Center has always been there -- I guess it's still there -- and they were also part of the protesting, and going for services, because they provided services for some of the mentally challenged folks. So that's sort of what we did was bring together people to protest, and by the time, when the bill was passed, and the money to be allocated, and we made our application, and of course were selected. That was a foregone conclusion.

STEVENSON

OK. And you mentioned before about Frank Lanterman's personal interest, and why he championed this bill. Could you say a little more about that?

HARRIS

Well, Lanterman -- Mr. Lanterman had a brother who was mentally ill, and I'm not certain whether or not he was mentally retarded, both mentally ill

and mentally retarded, but he had a brother that he cared for until he died. And so that was, I guess, might have been the impetus for his interest in mental illness, but we always got -- if you went up to see him, regardless of who you were, Frank Lanterman was available to talk about mental health issues, mental retardation issues. And of course, after the passage of the bill, Lanterman-Petrie-Short Act, for setting up the [unclear] and all of that, he continued to see them. And he was a person that we also visited when we visited Reagan, to talk about the participation of the -- our monies -- I mean, our need for the funds to build a Community Mental Health Center, and of course he was for that, and it was able to be inserted into the build, and was not -- what do you call it -- not redlined. We were the only Community Mental Health Center during Reagan's era that was funded, during the whole eight years that he was in office. But because we got up there and told him that we're trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. I guess we should have been shoeless, but we weren't.

STEVENSON

OK. You'd talked before about the fact that we tended to keep our mentally retarded within our community. How did you, in the beginning, overcome that, and also, as with mental illness, did you -- was there a stigma on mental retardation?

HARRIS

Well, probably more retardation, because along with -- mental illness, people look just like you and I, but with the mental retardation, people might have some physical stigma, physical appearance, that sort of -- so the people that was associated with that illness. So people would hide their children, and not know -- we didn't know of any services, and the services that were being offered were so far away that we just stayed within the community. And that's the way that it was. We got the reputation of -- we used to brag about, we treat our own within our community; the reason was because there was no services that was offered -- we didn't know about what services were available, and we didn't know where to go to get them in the first place. And so it became self-contained; religion was a sort of part of that; it's God's will, so we just have to accept it and deal with it. Same thing with mental illness, of course, but I think the stigma about mental retardation was even worse, because that's from birth. And there was -- mentally ill people got ill -- mostly it manifested itself after awhile, and so but you more associated with a mentally retarded person from birth; they don't overcome some of the physical handicaps, et cetera, and they have to be helped in certain ways. But a lot of times, people didn't know what, why, where you could get services, and that was a part of -- a good thing that came about with that.

STEVENSON

Let me get that.

HARRIS

[unclear].

STEVENSON

OK. Going back briefly to the Black Congress, so many of the organizations died out, but both Community Mental Health Center and the Regional Center are lasting institutions. What do you attribute that to?

HARRIS

Well, first the needs, and also the needs they're also funding. It's the continued funding, and the leadership was able to -- the leadership, especially South Central, Regional Center, was able to take advantage of that. Ruth -- what's her name? Ruth -- I'm trying to think of her maiden name... she's married to a doctor. It'll come to me. It's my Alzheimer's. But the -- having people that were able to tap into the funds, and keep the funding, and keep it going, and expand it. As I said, they have the best lobbying in the -- as far as funds is concerned. Funds might be cut for welfare and everything else, and mental illness, but no funds ever really cut for the developmentally disabled; their budget just keeps either static or expands, [unclear].

STEVENSON

OK. And either the Regional Center or the Community Mental Health Center, do they ever deal with any issues of prevention?

HARRIS

Oh, yeah. I'm sure. I left the Center, and also -- in 1970-something. '74. But yeah, that's part of your mandate, prevention. And so we used to get funding for mental health -- a lot of funding under the guise of prevention; prevent juvenile delinquency, prevent mental illness by providing certain kinds of -- [diet?], and all the other kinds of things; school situations. et cetera, and all of those kinds of things. But there -- but see, there's not much money for prevention; there's a lot of money for treatment of illness. And we sort of talk about that, and try to get some kind of changes. It seems like it's -- they want to treat things after they happen, rather than trying to make it before. Because I guess they say they can't -- I mean, mentally ill is right there looking at you; prevention, whether or not it works or not, they don't believe that it does.

STEVENSON

OK. Also, whether it was, in the early years of the Mental Health Center, or even more recently -- can you speak about the correlation between racism and mental illness in our community?

HARRIS

Long time ago, 19- -- and when the black psychiatrists sort of challenged the American Psychiatric Association to involve us more in their -- in the dealings of the organization, recognition, minorities exist, and all the other kinds of things -- we declared that racism was a known health issue, of disease. And some people even did some theoretical stuff around it. The effects of racism has to be the cause of a lot of things. I was trying to get

funded a project about blood pressure, high blood pressure in blacks who are under a racist kind of a situation, as opposed to blacks who are not under the racist thing. And it was done by a survey, and found that we have more high blood pressure here, because -- and I attribute it to the racist structure -- than some of the African nations, that although being under colonial were freed, and didn't have that disease; they might have some other diseases.

But racism is alive and well throughout these institutions and things, and as a matter of fact -- you know, [Dr.] Chet [Chester M.] Pierce, who is a psychiatrist, talks about the microinsults in racism -- people don't even realize they're doing anything or saying anything that smacks of racism. And the fact that -- well, you know, call you call UCLA [University of California Los Angeles] racist? Sure, we did. And we continue to do it, because of the kinds of things that they set up, for admission, for instance, are things that are only associated with their folks. And if you come up in a community that does not do those things, to have those kind of challenges, goals, et cetera, to reach, then that in itself is exclusion. And my definition of racism is that -- because a lot of people talk about "blacks can't be racist," -- I say that, black folks can't be racist. My definition of racism is believing that you are superior to a certain people, but having the means of perpetuating that belief. George Bernard Shaw spoke about America only having the means for a shoe-shine boy to operate, and not to get any higher, and having the means to maintain that kind of separation.

And it's the same kinds of things that -- you know, for instance, during World War II, where you -- in order to be a pilot, they set up certain things and said that people couldn't fly and everything. And so the Tuskegee Airmen, of course, did things about that. They set up height restrictions and weight restrictions, and all the other kinds of things that keep people away, police for instance. Even in policy. And I looked at it and said, "Japanese are short, but they're flying airplanes, so what is it about that?" But those are the kinds of things, the kinds of -- I guess in Japan, if you're 6' tall, 6'5" or something like that, then you can't be certain things, because there are no Japanese who might be -- few Japanese who would be that kind of height. But in America, you know, you have a diversity, and so the white institutions keep you away. You're not allowed to be in the upper echelons of the business world, because you don't do the same things that they do. And then when you do those things that they do, and you do it better than them, then there's a stigma attached to it. Barry Bonds, I mean, I don't know what they're going to say Tiger Woods has even done, et cetera. Hank Aaron, and all the hate that goes along with that. And then people just get out of certain things; you look at athletes today, there's certain sports that whites just have deserted, and left it to black folks and gone on. That's why soccer has become a phenomenon in America, because the other things were taken over by black folks and everything.

So I guess the question is, racism affects mental health? Yeah. Mental health; not necessarily mental illness. Racism affects the health of people. If you can't get certain jobs, then you can't eat certain things. I'm treating a lot of folks, giving them medication and everything, and people -- medication that makes them fat, and you tell the folks to exercise more, and work out more, and everything. How are you going to tell somebody who only gets \$600 a month that they should work out more? The best thing is to starve yourself, because it's what a lot of women are doing. But the solutions are white solutions, rather than cultural kinds of solutions. Same thing about -- long time ago, the diets that came out, and the pyramids and things like that. Then somebody, black person got together and started making it, saying, fatback is this, and you shouldn't do this, as opposed to that. White folks didn't eat fatback; white folks didn't eat those things. Fried chicken versus baked chicken or whatever, because we fry chicken and stretch it, making gravy and all the other kinds of things. All our soul foods are things that we -- are hand-downs of things that folks didn't want. And that's all within this whole racial kinds of keep-downs, so to speak.

STEVENSON

OK. That's all the questions I have for you, unless there was anything else you wanted to cover before we conclude?

HARRIS

I'm cool.

STEVENSON

OK.

HARRIS

Thank you very much, though.

STEVENSON

Oh, you're welcome. Yeah.

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