**A TEI Project**

# Interview of Ernie Smith

## Table of contents



## 1. Transcript

### *1.1. Session 1 February 19, 2007*

**STEVENSON**
Good morning. I'm conducting an interview with Dr. Ernie Smith on Monday, February 19. First of all, I'd like to ask you when and where you were born, something about your family background, your parents and your siblings.
**SMITH**
OK. I was born in Haskell, Oklahoma, September 7, 1938. My mother's name is Henry Ella Smith; my father's name is John Henry Smith. My mother's from Louisiana and my father's from Arkansas. I'm the eldest of 12 children, six boys and six children. My sister that's the eldest of the sisters is the only one that's passed; all the rest of them are still living. They live here in California. No, the oldest boy next to me just moved to Texas. John, he was named after my father, John Jr. But other than that, everyone lives here in California.
**STEVENSON**
Could you tell me something about your parents' occupations?
**SMITH**
My mother was a power machine operator in the garment industry when we first moved out here from Oklahoma. This was in 1949. My father was working as a rubbish truck driver; this is in the early 1950s, there was

employment available in Alaska, so for about ten years he was up in Alaska where they were building the Army bases and Air Force bases and things that they have up there in Alaska now. Well, he went up in the early 1950s and worked on that. He died in 1958 from pancreatic cancer, so my mother had to raise all these kids by herself.

**STEVENSON**

I see. And could you tell me a little bit about your home life, having such a large family?

**SMITH**

Well, my attitude was, the best way for me to help my mother was to not be a burden on her, so -- and they instilled in me very early that being the oldest, I had to be the most understanding, so when Christmas and back to school and birthdays and holidays and that kind, when presents are being exchanged, I got used to, at an early age, that I had a responsibility to my siblings to help my mother, and so that being instilled in me, I tried to set an example; I wanted to be a model for them to follow, because if there was going to be any way out of the situation we were in, our situation -- we didn't know we were poor, but I knew that we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, and that because of that, my mother instilled in me that education was important.

And so I went to [John C.] Fremont High School, which is just two blocks from where we are. 78th -- we're at 78th [Street] and Central [Avenue], and Fremont High School's at 79th [Street] and San Pedro. I graduated from Fremont in '57; I went to LA [Los Angeles] Metropolitan College of Business; from there, I went to Cal [California] State LA [University, Los Angeles], and from Cal State LA I was out for about two years when I graduated from there in '67, and then I got accepted into the School of Social Sciences at UC Irvine [University of California, Irvine] in 1970, that's when I began graduate studies, working on PhD in comparative culture. So that's kind of my progress in education. But it was instilled in me, partly by, as I say, my mother and my grandmother who always had a belief that if I was going to get -- we were going to get out of our economic circumstances, we'd have to do it through education. As I said, I started right after I graduated high school, but it took a long time for me, because I had to work and do odd jobs -- I worked in the garment industry also, sweeping up, when the power machine operators, when all the workers got off, I would go down and sweep the floors in the factory --

**STEVENSON**

At what age?

**SMITH**

This was at age 16. 16, 17.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Let's backtrack a little bit. If you could tell me something about your neighborhood, and also about your elementary and junior high experience.

**SMITH**
OK> When we first moved here, I lived at 3501 McKinley, which is about four blocks from Wadsworth Elementary School; that was the first elementary school I went to here in Los Angeles -- in fact, the only elementary school I went to. I went to two junior high schools; I went to [George Washington] Carver Junior High School, which is on Vernon [Avenue] and McKinley, but my family moved in 1959, we moved across Slauson [Avenue], and the boundary for junior high school changed, and I had to go to [Thomas Alva] Edison Junior High for eighth and ninth grade. But from the seventh grade to B-8 -- A-8, actually, we had A and B semesters, all year in one grade, but we had A and B divided. I started at Edison in the A-8, and went to Edison, and I left Edison and went to Fremont High School.
But I lived first, as I said, down on the Central and Vernon Avenue area. And then we moved out across Slauson to 71st [Street] and San Pedro, 239 East 71st Street, and that's when I had to walk from there over to Edison Junior High, which was over on Gage [Avenue] and Hooper Avenue, and as I graduated from Edison, I went to Fremont High. I got kicked out Fremont in the -- I think it was about the ninth -- last part of the ninth grade -- no, no, it was tenth grade, because Edison was to ninth grade then. The second part of the tenth grade, A-10, I got kicked out of Fremont and got sent to an all-boys normal school called Jacob A. [Riis]; it's [Mary Macleod] Bethune Junior High School now. So on 69th [Street] and Broadway, or between Main [Street] and Broadway. But you know, it's like, if you do well and don't get in any more trouble, you're allowed to go back to the regular school. So in the A-11, I went back to Fremont, and that's where I graduated and got my high school diploma/
**STEVENSON**
Can you tell me something about your neighborhood when you were growing up? Something about the other families, your neighbors, friends?
**SMITH**
It was predominantly black. We had no Anglo, Hispanic or anything, neighbors like that, in any of the neighborhoods that I lived in. There may have been some, but they were so few, if -- there was an older Anglo woman who lived across the street. These seniors were seniors kind of like the blacks in the neighborhood now as the Hispanics are coming in, the people who own their property and don't desire to move or can't afford to move, because it would cost them just as much to relocate, even if they got a handsome price for their property, to replace it would cost them all of what they got on the house that they're selling, and the additional property tax which they don't have to pay now because they're at a tax-base now 'cause of the Jarvis Proposition 13 which was passed in the '70s; they can't go up on their taxes, so most of the blacks who are still in South Central Los Angeles, predominantly are the seniors who own their homes, and that was

kind of the way it was when we were moving into South Central, there were a few Anglo whites, elderly people, who didn't desire or have the ability to move, and they just stayed there until they passed away or went into nursing homes or whatever.

**STEVENSON**

All right. Could you tell me something about any teachers, either in elementary or middle school, that stood out in terms of having an influence on you or encouraging your academics, anything of that nature?

**SMITH**

There was one teacher, a lady by the name of Mrs. Israel, who spotted my artistic talent, and in fact I won a prize from the Rotary Club; I won the Bullocks Art Exhibit, there's a high school exhibit that Bullocks department store put on. And I still have the clippings from high school on that. That was not really my major in high school, but I had some gifts in that area, and I remember how that teacher encouraged me, because school wasn't all of that to me. Coming up in the neighborhood that I lived, there was a lot of gambling shacks, bookie joints, and players, hustlers, and that enthralled me, these guys who were driving these big flashy cars and wearing nice clothes and everything.

So when I graduated high school, I had no real post-secondary educational aspirations; my thing was, I was going to ride and lean, style and scheme, and talk out the side of my neck trying on clothes, pimpin' hoes, and slamming the El Dorado door. The El Dorado Cadillac had just come out in the '60s, '59 -- well, '56, actually, because Nat King [Nathaniel Adams] Cole[s] was the first one that I saw with one, so it would be around the early -- the mid-'50s, when the El Dorado Cadillac -- but that was the top of the line; I didn't know nothing about Rolls Royces and Bentleys and Mercedes-Benz then.

Anyway, so it was really those gamblers and those hustlers that really made me pursue a post-secondary education. Many of them would tell me about their experiences in the Deep South -- and I was from the South, but I was too young to have experienced what they had experienced -- they couldn't even go back to some of their relatives' funerals; some of them had to leave there and couldn't come back because they had gotten into it with some peckerwood, and couldn't -- it was a danger to go back. But they would tell me about the opportunities that I had out here that they didn't have, they'd tell me, "Boy, if I was your age and know what I know what, I'd get me some edumacation, boy. You know you can make money out here in these streets, but people spot that you can't read and write too good, they're going to take advantage of you." And so when they would explain how you could be cheated out of everything you earned in the streets by sometimes people that you trusted, because people who you trust have more access and you're more vulnerable, thinking that these are people who are going to protect you, and sometimes because of their need and greed, selfishness,

they take advantage of you too. So they explained to me, you know, you go to a car lot to buy a car and you can't read the papers you sign, then you don't know what you buyin' or how much you payin'. They showed me ways that you can get beat in society. Trying to make money is one thing, but having money is another. And how you going to keep the money depends on what kind of smarts you had, book learning.

**STEVENSON**

Right. Yeah, so it seems like they were giving you sort of an education in life --

**SMITH**

Life.

**STEVENSON**

-- or a street education.

**SMITH**

Because squares like my father, I saw what hard work for him, OK? I didn't want to be no Saturday night, once a week, Monday getting lunch bucket nigger. And so because I had no real appreciation for that definition of manhood. And I'm using the terminology "lunch bucket nigger," because that was a term that people who were in the street life had for these people; they were squares, they were suckers, and when you were in the street life, these are the people that you idolize. But again, they were people who also had a lot of respect for squares, because their mothers and their grandmothers and their brothers and sisters, they all came from families of squares; there's no lifestyle where people are raising families in three and four generations of gamblers and players. Some people may have to resort to Saturday night fish fries and house parties and stuff to raise the rent, but squares even do that, you know what I mean? And the people who are professional gamblers, then they depend on these people who are squares as their patrons in their gambling shacks.

So it was kind of -- if they needed to borrow some money, they knew they could go borrow money from the gamblers, because the gamblers always had cash money. And they weren't really always using interest rates as much as, you know, they want you as a customer, they wanted you as a patron, like a horse bookie, you know what I mean? You know that you got to work, so he let you call in a bit, OK, and if your horse didn't come in, he'd depend on you to come in and pay what you bet. If the horse came in, you got to go to him and bring him the money that he won. It was a lifestyle of mutual respect that people had, based on the life that -- we knew that we weren't a part of the mainstream, and so living outside the mainstream, it was that kind of an exposure that I had in my particular environment.

**STEVENSON**

OK. I'd like to go back and follow up -- you spoke about your parents; what can you tell me about your grandparents and maybe even your great-grandparents?

**SMITH**
I do remember my grandmother, my mother, and my auntie telling me that the white folks killed my grandfather; his name was Adolphus, Adolphus Sims, had back-sassed a white man and got ordered off the farm -- they were sharecropping -- and he comes back, he was going to try to slip my mother and my grandmother and them off, and I don't know -- my auntie claimed it was my grandmother's fault, but I'm going to take my grandmother's side of it, and say that the note that got to her somehow got to this woman who her husband owned the farm where they was working. And they laid in wait for him -- the reason my auntie says it was my grandfather's fault, because he had a gun that hung up over the door in this little old pad where they was staying, and my auntie accused my grandmother of loading his gun and causing him to get killed, because he was thinking that his gun was loaded. And so she always threw it up to my grandmother that she caused my grandmother, 'cause -- he probably would have got killed anyway, but he would have took some with him, had he had his gun loaded.
But I do recall that very vividly, them sharing that with me. As I say, he was in World War I, he was a veteran, but they don't recognize no contribution that black people make in this country, the wars, just like an old Rottweiler or Doberman Pinscher or guard dogs, send us anywhere to fight for them, come back for the same treatment. My -- as I said, it wasn't nobody but my mother and my grandmother on my mother's side; my grandmother had two daughters, and as I said, my grandfather got killed when they was young girls, they couldn't have been no more than 11 or 12 at the time. This happened in Louisiana. On my father's side, he had a large family, but as I said, we moved out here from Oklahoma, so I wasn't around them much; I was mostly around my mother and my grandmother and my auntie. So I know I got a lot of uncles and aunts on that side, but I was never close to them, because of the geographical distance. We'd go back every now and then to some family reunions, but -- and I would know most of the kids, I wouldn't know the adults that much.
**STEVENSON**
I see. Can you tell me what role religion played in your upbringing?
**SMITH**
Two distinct things come to me about religion. My mother was a Baptist and my grandmother was a Holiness. Holiness was very, very strict; they didn't wear lipstick, they didn't press their hair, didn't wear dresses above the -- if you got up to the knees, you was a floozy. So about halfway of the leg was about as short as you could wear your dress. That was my grandmother's religion. And my grandmother did day's work, meaning she worked as a domestic out in the West Side or in the [San Fernando] Valley. And she would see that we got to church, because she would come in on the weekends, and she'd make sure that, you know, you going to stay around

here, you're going to go to church. We was living together with my grandmother where my grandmother lived then when she working, but we was in my grandmother's house. And so that influence was mostly the influence of the Christian thing.
When I graduated high school, the first year out of high school, I went to summer school one summer at LA City College, and Minister Malcolm X was then the national representative for the Nation of Islam, and he was having the debate on whether black people should integrate or separate with this man by the name of Ed Warren; Ed Warren was the Chairman of the Watts chapter of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], and the NAACP took the point of view that we should integrate, and Malcolm X took the position that we should separate. And I just -- it was something about the way Malcolm X explained his position that made me understand way more than -- I had no social consciousness at all about the black people and their social condition in that sense. As I say, I knew that there was these squares; I knew there was these players, but as far as the dominant culture and its relationship to black people, the only thing that I remember was my grandmother told me, "If you keep -- the devil going to get you if you're out gambling," and sure enough, every time I got caught gambling, the white policeman got me, and Elijah Muhammad said that's the devil. [laughter] I made that connection. If there was a spiritual devil, I never saw one, but that white devil got me for gambling. Anyway, I joined the Nation of Islam in 1959; it was here on Jefferson [Boulevard] and Normandie [Avenue] at the time. Later on, they moved to 55th [Street] and Broadway, and I was in the Nation until 1964, and then shortly after that, Minister Malcolm fell away, but I had fell away even before Minister Malcolm. So the Nation of Islam was definitely an influence, religiously.

**STEVENSON**

What made you decide to join, and what made you fall away?

**SMITH**

The social, political, and economic message appealed to me, moreso than the religion, because the religion was like -- Elijah Muhammad was teaching that the black man's original religion wasn't Christianity. He said that in this sense, we were Christians by nature, but then we were also Muslims by nature, because the word "Islam" means -- a Muslim is one who submits. Islam is a religion of peace. When you say "Asalaam Alaikum," you know, you're talking about to be at peace, to be at one with God. And so as he was teaching Islam, he was breaking it down the way I could understand Islam; it wasn't like is taught by the so-called Orthodox Muslims in the Middle East, where you got to bow and pray five times a day. He would encourage us to pray five times a day, but he would tell us just to face east and hold our hands outstretched, and he would teach us the same prayer that you would say in Arabic, you have to learn it in English. "Surely I have turned myself to thee, trying to be upright." He was teaching us the Muslim prayer. Whereas

in Arabic, you say, "Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem / Al hamdu lillaahi rabbil 'alameen / Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem / Maaliki yaumid Deen," that's the same thing, but you sing it in Arabic.
He was teaching us the prayers in English, so a lot of people have some question as to whether or not we were being taught Islam, because the way it was being presented by Elijah Muhammad through Minister Malcolm and Minister John Shabazz was the local minister here, it wasn't following strict Orthodox Muslim ritual or Arabic -- in other words, you didn't follow the Arabicized Islam, you weren't a Muslim; that's kind of the prevailing knowledge that people have today, that there's these Orthodox Muslims and then there's black Muslims. They're more and more beginning to appear one and the same in the eyes of the white people because of [Osama] bin Laden and Ayatollah [Khomeini], he called America the Great Satan, OK, so we were beginning to see some commonalities in terms of the way many people in the Middle East view America and the American Europeans in terms of some of the ideology that Muhammad was talking about in the early '30s, '40s, and '50s, and in the '60s when I first began to pay it any attention.
I used to see the Muslims, but I just thought they were like the Elks and the Masons, and just -- or to be comparable to the fraternities, the Alphas and the Omegas and the Kappas, little secret societies, Prince Hall Masons being the black Messianic order, I didn't understand until I saw this debate between Malcolm X, and he told us about Islam as Elijah Muhammad was teaching it, that's what more appealed to me that the strict -- I didn't drink as it was, I hadn't got that involved in street like where drugs and alcohol appealed to me, and so it wasn't hard for me to join the Nation and give up cigarettes, because I didn't have no cigarette habit; it wasn't hard to give up drinking because I had no drinking habit. The hardest thing probably would have been to pass up some ham and some bacon, you know what I mean, because they had strict religious rules against eating pork. I'm laughing because I remember they had a talk about how pork makes you violent; you go to a family reunion and see a man eating a lot of swine, and when he gets full of that swine, along with that liquor, they start getting violent.
And I was laughing because I saw that acted out in so many situations, that alcohol or that pork, they seem to make a person's personality change. I know it's associated with high blood pressure, and high blood pressure and hypertension runs in my family, so I attribute that to the pig. But to whatever extent, there were these dietary laws, that was very strict, you understand? And they'd tell you to abstain from that [hoochie patch] -- oh, Lord, I had to get away.
So if it was anything that kind of forced me to just stop going was I couldn't live up to the high moral standards of the Nation of Islam. And my biggest weakness was women, you know what I mean? Women would pull me away from the Nation of Islam, that prohibition against fornication. I couldn't find one -- I take this back. There was one woman that I got married to, but I

was already out of the Nation then. And that didn't last but a quick minute, because she was a Presbyterian Christian out of Ohio; that's my son's mother. I had one son and two daughters. And that experience of the Nation of Islam, of the strict dietary laws -- I could live up to the no eating no pork and stuff like that, but -- because they encourage you to only eat one time a day, but that wasn't as hard, as I say, was the sexual abstention; abstinence was very, very important, in terms of judging your moral character. And brothers who didn't have control of their libido, they fell away often. Or they were being hypocrites by staying in.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Well, let me ask you this. Probably at the time that you left the Nation, had the revelations come out about Elijah Muhammad's --

**SMITH**

There was rumors, but the rumors were being spread by people who were not in the Nation. That's the first thing. The second thing was the extent to which what pulled me in was more Minister Malcolm than it was The Messenger. I have to say the appeal that was the street life experience, and the way Malcolm could break down things in a way that a street life person could understand it. If you just go by the oratory ability of Elijah Muhammad, he would have never impressed me, because he had a Southern Ebonics speech, and his Southern Ebonics speech at that time I associated with people who were kind of lightheaded or not too tightly wrapped, in terms of their cognitive capacity. Now, he was a very wise man, and Malcolm X always praised him to his death; he had some problems with his perceived hypocrisy, but as far as the knowledge that he got from Elijah Muhammad, he never, in the time that he, when he left, and in fact he started making his appeal to brothers who had fell away from the Nation, OK, and trying to form his organization called the OAAU [Organization of Afro-American Unity], the Organization of African Unity, he had the American African Association -- Organization of African-American Unity, he was trying to formulate that. And I attended some formulating meetings when he came back from Mecca and began to make news in that direction.And so to whatever extent Elijah Muhammad had children out of wedlock and all that, that never was something that I had any knowledge of, and I had left the Nation for my own reasons; I'm admitting that it's my own inability to live up to it.

Now, why can I look at him like he was -- if people are saying that he had a problem and he was the leader of the Nation, how can I look at him when I know I can't live up to it, you know what I mean? [laughter] And I'm just not going to be misrepresenting the man's program by being in and claiming I'm one, and knowing that I love the [hoochie patch] worse than a hog loves slop. And so, you know what I mean? That was the situation that I found myself in, and rather than misrepresent the Nation, I'd rather just not going around there claiming and perpetrating; I ain't in that no more. I'm a black

Nationalist. In fact, this picture here, you see me -- if you read the caption under that picture, where it says, "Save Malcolm X," that's me on that picture. It says -- can you see it?

**STEVENSON**

Here?

**SMITH**

Yeah. "Los Angeles coroner inquest hearings on the killing of Leonard Deadwyler by police officer Gerald Bova." [reading caption under picture on wall] Hundreds of Negroes appeared at the inquest, OK. But it goes on; in the next sentence, he says -- read that, I can't see it from --

**STEVENSON**

"Court guards lost control as the crowd packed the courtroom, leaving no seats for witnesses. To regain control, officials did a surprising thing; they asked the Black Nationalist leader, Ernie Smith, to come to the bench and take charge. At the microphone, Smith denounced the number of Negro ministers present as Uncle Toms, but then asked people to clear the aisles and give seats to witnesses. The old tactic worked, but the semi-official recognition of Nationalism worried moderate Negro leaders."[reading caption under picture on wall]

**SMITH**

Mm-hmm. OK, so as I said, I kind of went away from the Nation and became just kind of a Black Nationalist. Malcolm X was de-emphasizing religion and putting together an organization that you can be a Muslim, but this is a movement, the liberation of a people, this is the Black Nationalist struggle; this is a non-self-governing nation. We have to take our situation to the United Nations; we are people who have been subjugated by foreign people, and we need to take our appeal, like other African nations because free through the United Nations, we need to make an appeal as non-self-governing people to the United Nations and get the rest of the world to hear our situation and make a decision to help us gain our independence or whatever. The right of self-determination includes the right to separate, amalgamate, or federate, however you decide, you have to have first self-determination. So we were pushing first for self-determination.

There are a couple of other things that that this here, this book Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness, there's a -- if I can go over there and get that one -- this is from that book by Robert Conant called Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness, it was on page I think 361 in this book says, "Musical merchandise and Doberman Pinschers," says, "Lines were forming at a half-dozen food distribution points that had been set up in the area. Some houses had no electricity and hence no refrigeration for days. A good deal of spoiled food, much of it scavenged from the stores after they had burned, was being consumed, and a rash of food poisoning cases ensued. National Guard was still halting people at road blocks in a not-insignificant number, both Caucasians and Negroes were arrested; they were arrested for carrying

guns for self-protection, but self-protection or no, they were in violation of the law. Perhaps they had been stimulated by watching the Joe Pine," -- this is that version of Rush Limbaugh in the '60s --

**STEVENSON**

Yes, yes.

**SMITH**

"-- conversation-type television show on station KTTV Sunday night. Pine, an articulate needler of conservative men, had as one guest, Ernie Smith, a Negro Nationalist. In the middle of a shouting match, Pine pulled out a pistol, slapped it on the table, and indicated he was ready for whatever might come, whereupon Smith flipped back his coat and revealed a shoulder holster," -- I had two -- "and declared Pine wasn't any more ready than he." And they said this was fanning the flames of the -- this was the night of the August 14th -- that the Watts Rebellion was going on. There's another article from Newsweek Magazine where I'm quoted -- and this is all pre-Martin Luther King [Jr./Drew Medical Center] Hospital; this is 1965, the hospital and Drew University didn't even exist them. But the need for a hospital and job opportunities for black people was very definitely a social problem.

**STEVENSON**

OK. All right, I've got a couple of follow-ups before I move forward. One, for the record, could you tell me the name of the church you attended when you were coming up?

**SMITH**

Elder Jenkins, it was on 51st [Street] and Avalon, Community Church of God in Christ [C.O.G.I.C.].

**STEVENSON**

Avalon? Community Church of God in Christ?

**SMITH**

It was on 51st and Avalon; it was just called the Community Church of God in Christ. Sometimes I'd go there -- this was my grandmother's church -- sometimes I'd go to Capernium Community [Church] --

**STEVENSON**

Capernium.

**SMITH**

Yeah. Community Church. But that was non-denominational. In Oklahoma, I went to Friendship Baptist Church; that's where I got baptized. Friendship Baptist Church, Reverend Moore was the pastor there.

**STEVENSON**

And now also, do you remember where that debate between Ed Warren and Malcolm X was?

**SMITH**

At LA City College in the auditorium, in the student --

**STEVENSON**

Do you remember what year?

**SMITH**
1961, '62.
**STEVENSON**
All right. Let's see. Go back a few years and ask you, when did you first become aware of the concept of race, of racism and discrimination? At what age, do you think?
**SMITH**
I would say conscious of it in the sense that I am not, it would have been in the 1960s, OK? In fact, when I was going to Cal State LA, I was taking some art classes, and I had rendered a little storefront on San Pedro and Florence [Avenue], and I had on exhibit in my store some pictures that I had drawn in my class, because this was going to be a way that I could make some money, draw some pictures in the class and then put them up in my little studio and make some money; I lived in the back of my little storefront, because as I said, I didn't want to be no burden on my mother, so I figured I could live in the back of this storefront and sell my pictures and pay my way through school. That was the plan. Anyway, the police came to my store while I wasn't there, and they saw these pictures on the wall, and they wanted to arrest me, but what they really were offended by was some cartoons and caricatures that I had made -- in the next interview, remind me before you come, and I'll bring these pictures, because I have photographs of the pictures that they arrested me for. But what they arrested me for was having obscene and -- nude picture on display where it could be see from the street parkway or sidewalk. Now, the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] was so outraged and appalled, they fought this -- Hugh Manis was the attorney that took the case as an American Civil Liberties --
**STEVENSON**
Hugh Manis?
**SMITH**
Hugh Manis, he was an American Civil Liberties lawyer that took it all the way and got it won on appeal, because the judge convicted me. And we brought evidence, "Look, these are nothing but pictures this man drew in school," I had pictures that you could find in the bookstore -- Tam's Bookstore was the big bookstore across the street from USC [University of Southern California] at the time -- had the same kind of pictures on display, sketches, charcoal sketches on display, nude women, a nude woman, because they had these nude women in the art classes. And they were going to address me for having on display what everybody displays in any art gallery? The man's got an art store; this is not a pornographic store, he's not selling pornographic movies, stuff like paraphernalia, this is his artwork from his class. But I had a cracker judge that believed in supporting the police, so that would be my experience in terms of racism where people use the law,

under the cover of law, to act out some other issues that they have. And so in that sense, that was an encounter with it.
But in terms of systemic racism, the believe that the white race is the best equipped and most deserving of all the racial groupings, that came to me as I studied Islam, studied the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, because I came to understand what Wade Noble now calls the The Three Laws of Black Mental Health, and Elijah Muhammad wouldn't use them as --- didn't describe them in terms of these laws, so I'm giving Wade Noble, a black psychologist in San Francisco State, the credit for these coming to me as The Three Laws of Black Mental Health. Three Laws: one law is the law of not knowing; the second law is the law of not being; and the third law is the law of not undoing. Not knowing, not being, and undoing. The law of not knowing is that if you don't understand white supremacy, everything else you think you know is only going to confuse you. You must view things at all times through the prism of white supremist culture and what it is about. Because if you go to sleep, you wake up confused. So you must always view everything going on in a white supremist society through the prism of that lens to get what it is, because if you don't understand white supremacy, everything else you think you know is only going to confuse you. The second law is the law of not being, that you were born something biologically, and that thing that you are biologically is your genetic essence, it's your DNA; you can't un-be what you are genetically, OK? And because of that, if you don't live in accordance with your African essence, everything else you do is a diminishing of your African essence. So you must be vigilant in every way you can to be what you are. And if you don't be what you are and you start trying to be something that you're not, you're diminishing, self-diminishing, your African essence. So that law was to me made plain by the teachings of Elijah Muhammad although they weren't explained as laws, OK?
But there were some truths that he gave me to understand about being black. Why are you calling yourself black in Latin? OK, you say the word "Negro" comes from Spanish and Portuguese and French and it means black, why don't you just call yourself black in English which is a language you've been exposed to. You don't know no Spanish, you don't know Portuguese, you don't know French, OK. So they would bring certain truths to you in a way that it made all the sense. Why do you call yourself black in Latin? You're black. Call yourself black and be proud you're black. So that teaching, if you don't live in accordance to your African essence, everything else you do diminishes your African essence. The third law, the law of undoing, is, today is yesterday's tomorrow. You can't change yesterday and anything that has gone on in the past, that's done. You can't change it. The only way you can change the history of the future is what you do today. If you want to make some change in the history of the future, it starts with what you do today. That's the law of undoing. You've got to be every day trying to change the history of the future. You can't undo the past, but you can have

an impact on the future, and the history of the future, because today is yesterday's tomorrow.

**STEVENSON**

Right. Very profound. OK. Let me ask you a follow-up to early life before we move forward. When you were coming up, what did you do for recreation, and I guess when you were a teenager or young adult, what did you do in terms of social activities?

**SMITH**

Street life. Mostly gambling. And I freely admit to that, because my first street moniker was given to me by gamblers; it was Two Ten Blood. Then ten cent was what you always had to put up as your fee for the privilege of gambling in the gambling shack, so if you wanted to bet somebody $10, you had to say two-ten, meaning the ten goes to the house. The house man was sitting at the front of the table with the cut sack, the sack of coins, and he'd cut on all bets being made around the table. OK, before the dice rolls, you had to put your cuts down, and the house would get the cuts, and you win if the dice came up in your favor. So I would say that one of the primary activities I engaged in -- this is very young, I'm talking about 15, 16 years old, was gambling. And learning how to cheat at that, because the extent to which you could give yourself the edge was the extent that you were going to be successful in anything that you were doing in life.

The way it was broke down to me was a brother named Schoolboy, that was his street moniker, and he told me about horseracing. He said, "You know something you can go do, get $50, $60, $100 a day, you know what I mean? Now, why would you go and give a dumb horse that decision on whether you're going to have some money. In other words, this is a dumb animal here. And you know something you can do to get $150, $200 -- whatever amount of money you get every day, you know something you can do to have cash money in your pocket. Now, why would you give a horse the decision? You're going to go out to the racetrack and give a dumb animal the decision." So that taught me against -- I mean, you put it like that, that taught me against horse racing. Don't worry about what the gamblers in the mafia and all of them are doing, just -- you read the racing form, and all these people tell you what this horse did, and so many furlongs in the last race, and how it closes real fast at the end, and how if the track is muddy, it'll do this, but if the track is this, all that signs -- they said, "Blood, don't give no ignorant horse the decision. A horse ain't human. You got good sense, and you're going to give an ignorant horse the decision on whether you gonna have some money?" He paid [inaudible], and I ain't bet another horse in my life. I just knew right then I knew better than that.

And he showed me all of the ways that people can cheat you with crooked dice. I didn't know that there was such a thing as tops or tees, when you're getting tops or dice that are top-heavy. See, a true die is even on all four sides, but if it's slightly more rectangle that square, it'll always favor the

rectangle side when it falls. You don't see it with the naked eye, but this is physics. A die that has equal chances of falling on any side is square on all sides, but if it's shaved a centimeter or millimeter more on one side than another, it's going to favor that side, and if you bet them points, you're going to keep winning, because the dice are already loaded in that sense; they're shaved to fall that way. Or they can put some weights in the white spots on the dice and make them heavy to fall on that side 'cause of the weight that's in the dot. And he showed me the different ways that they do this when you're playing with craps. And he said, and even at this, he said, "Even if there ain't no shaving and there ain't no weights," he said, "when you're shooting dice," -- he said that the odds is with the house, and if you stay there long enough, you're going to lose. He said, "You ain't got but three ways to win. A five-deuce, a four-three, a six-ace, that's seven. And you got more ways of losing than you got of winning, OK? Because the only points that you got a even chance is six and eight; you can throw eight, six, two, a five, and three. You can throw six -- no, six-ace -- six-deuce, that's eight; five-three is eight, and four and four. There's three fours, three sevens. And there's three ways to throw a six: three and three, four and two, five and one. So you got three ways of winning and three ways of losing, because those are even odds. If your party's six, eight, against seven, you got just as many ways of winning as you got of losing. If your point is five, there are two ways to throw a five: four and one and three and two. If your point is four, ain't but two ways to throw a four: two twos, a three and one. If your point is nine, ain't but two ways to win -- make a nine: that's six and three and five and four. And if your point is ten, five and five and six and four. All of these are numbers on the dice that can come out. So you -- the house has got more ways of winning than you got, OK? Now, if you get seven on the first toss, you win automatic, because that's the object of the game is throw a seven, or catch a point and make that point again before you throw a seven. Once you throw a point, six, eight, nine, ten, four -- any of those points, you have to throw those numbers again. That number that you catch when you first throw the dice, you have to throw that number again before a seven or you lose. So he just showed me that if you stay, they're not going to win every bet, but they gonna win more bets than they lose. That's the object; the house is playing percentages. And if you stay there at the table, you going to lose, because that percentage is the house's favor. So he broke me from gambling, just by sitting me down and teaching me street life.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Any other social activities vis-a-vis music -- what was the music like when you were --

**SMITH**

Now, I like to sing, but I ain't no singer. I go to some singers that I pay and go to see, Gladys Knight, you know what I mean? Beyoncé, Mary J. [Blige].

I'm just talking about some of the current ones; Gladys ain't all that current, but she's current for my generation, because she's timeless.

**STEVENSON**

Well, in the '60s, when you were younger, who were some of the --

**SMITH**

Yeah. The [Four] Tops, Temptations, Sam Cooke. Johnny "Guitar" Watson. I like that kind of entertainment, but I just got there to be entertained by the performance, I didn't --

**STEVENSON**

What were some of the venues that you went to that were located in the neighborhood, or fairly close, when these acts came through town?

**SMITH**

Most of them were the clubs, like the Five-Four Ballroom, California Club, the Elks Auditorium down here on Central -- it's torn down now, the Muslim place, the Bilalian Muslim temple is there now, but the big auditorium, the Elks Auditorium, Club Alabam, Gibson's out on Imperial [Highway], but a lot of the places, they don't immediately come to mind, just the old places with sawdust on the floor and good blues bands. When these entertainers come to town, they come in their big buses, you know what I mean? They wanted them small gigs, because they could play then three and four places and they would like be on tour; they'd make two or three places in town, they didn't just come to one place and stay there, they would play this joint this week, this joint here the next week, and so wherever they were, they were your favorites; you'd go to that joint to see them.

**STEVENSON**

Yeah. The Club Alabam -- when did that close? I know that club is from the early days.

**SMITH**

Yeah. Club Alabam would have still be around in the '50s, but it would have been probably right after or right before the 1965 uprising that all of that went down and closed. Dooto's was coming up then, Dootsie Williams; he also had -- he was a record producer, and he produced a lot of artists, but he had this nightclub called Dooto's, that would have been one of the places I hung out at.

**STEVENSON**

Let me ask you about class division within the community, or in black LA, what you can tell me about that.

**SMITH**

Class division, in terms of people making more money, it didn't make that much difference. Judge Griffin lived right there on 48th and San Pedro, not too far from South Park. Earl Broady and all the -- Loren Miller, all them people who was considered class, in the sense of prominent, Sentinel, Dirty Gerty news in the [Los Angeles] Sentinel -- Gertrude Gipson -- those people that was like artificial class, in terms of, if you was in tight, you was a

member of the crowd that gets quoted as being of class. So the word class in that sense didn't have the meaning that I'm talking about when the person ain't got no class, meaning they don't keep their word, you know what I mean? They're [scandelers], you know, do anything and everything for money; they're treacherous in terms of their dealing with people.
That's what I'm -- I'm using the word "class" in perhaps not the traditional sense of economic stratification, OK. We have a thing of using foreign ideals, in terms of who's got class and who belongs to society. What does that mean? Sororities and fraternities, Links, Jack and Jill and all that; that was for people who were High Yellow. If a darkie got in, he had to belong to the darkie one, because they probably had one for the darker complexion. But that was an artificial thing; it didn't mean much in terms of, we know that brothers like light-skinned sisters, you see what I'm saying? And we know that sometimes, being light-skinned would get you a job as a banker and a bank teller quicker than being dark-skinned. And right now, a lot of our sisters still have to press their hair just be considered socially accepted, because even my own people: "Girl, why don't you do something about that head?" You see what I'm saying? So this thing of, what does it mean to have class? I can't get a handle on its meaning for black people, because in certain senses, it didn't mean nothing.
Bryant [Charles] Gumbel speaks English fluently; as I use the expression, he's down with it, can't quit it, and best that ever did it. But he ran into that glass ceiling, you see what I'm saying, up against that old cracker -- what's that one that do the hundred-year birthdays? Willard [Herman] Scott [Jr.]? And that old cracker that's doing evening news now, that broad -- Katie [Katherine Anne] Couric, you know what I mean? They undermined him, OK. So there's this thing -- I've never had -- Nat King Cole, tried to buy in Hancock Park. So what did all the class, all the money that he had, all the wealth that he had? He made Capitol Records; they still living off the royalties of his records. You see what I'm saying? So what do you mean by class? If there's ever been a class act, I'm talking about a real man's man, Harry [Harold George] Belafonte [Jr.] would be ideally a class act, not just in terms of his performance on the stage, but in terms of his commitment to the uplifting of grace, his commitment -- unsung commitment, he did this for no recognition, you see what I'm saying? But he would speak the truth, the power, at any and all times. You see what I'm saying? And certain people who I would consider men of [inaudible], [Sir] Sidney Poitier being another one. OK? But some people would have issues, because of them had wives that were not black women, you see what I'm saying.
But in terms of them being guys that I felt have demonstrated commitment in a quiet and unheralded way, and still out there in their late '70s going on '80s, not trying to get no recognition, but doing what they know is the right thing because they don't want to be sad that they didn't do what they could wherever they were, OK? So class in that sense, very few are going to get

called -- I could probably get them on ten fingers here. But just so the class division or the race, the workers as opposed to the elite, because as I say, our elite ain't nothing to white people no way. OK? What is elite is sports people, you see what I'm saying? Because they are allowed to legitimately claim to have big money; I know some people who got way more money than a lot of these athletes, but they can't legitimately talk about how they got it, you see what I'm saying? Because they, you know -- working for the Colombians, working for Bin Laden and pushing that heroin. So what is class? If it's just money, how long has the money been in the family? Class, in that sense, a lot of white people, they got no class, because they're newly rich, you see what I'm saying? Whereas some people are Pilgrims, and had money since America was -- old money, you see what I'm saying? So if we try to compare class in that sense, what are we talking about? How many blacks got generations of wealth, you see what I'm saying?

**STEVENSON**

What you're saying is the concept of "class" is almost an artificial concept.

**SMITH**

An artificial construct -- OK, for somebody's political, or socio-economic political purpose, you know what I mean? The Marxists got their agenda, and so they talk about the class struggles, or proletariat against the capitalist class, and that didn't wash with black people, because the white people, it didn't matter what economic strategy it was from, you see white people with high school diplomas got more authority, you know what I mean, over blacks with PhDs, just because of white privilege, and getting it every day. Every day, right now, and they brag of how many black PhDs work under them, and they don't have nothing but a high school diploma, and it reinforces their notion: "I must be superior, because look at all these black PhDs I got working under me, and I don't have nothing but a high school diploma." That notion of, "I'm white, and that inherently makes me superior."

In fact, there's a book that just came out called Racism is Learned [Racism: Learned at an Early Age Through Racial Scripting]; it's by the brother who invented the word "ebonics," Robert Williams. He talks about racial scripting. Robert Williams' find -- it goes into an analysis; he did interviews, this is empirical work, this is not just some theory that he's come up with, studying how white people script their children with racism at an early age, it's learning; it's not something that they inherit throughout DNA and RNA [Ribonucleic acid]; this is something that is scripted, but it's scripted early. And once you get a script, that's almost as devastating as having it on the DNA, because you have -- how can you unlearn that kind of scripting? Unconsciously sometimes, unwittingly, it comes out.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Could you talk about your post-high school years, what you did after you graduated from high school, and --

**SMITH**
When I graduated high school in '67, and again, already having an attitude about working on a 9--5 square job, that wasn't for me. So most of the time while I was going to school, I'm at Cal State LA, LA Metro, Cal State LA, I sold costume jewelry; that was my hustle in the streets. And for two years, that's pretty much all I did, was peddle jewelry and kind of hustle it in the streets. The thing that I remember that got me into grad school was I was working with Operation Bootstrap. Lou Smith was the western regional director of CORE, Congress Of Racial Equality, of which I'm still a member; Adrian Dove is the California chairman.
But I worked with Celes[tus] King, when he took over and formed California CORE, and I'm still working kind of with CORE, 'cause we were the only people that filed a lawsuit against the county about Martin Luther King, only civil rights organization to actually file a class action lawsuit, and it still is -- Justice [Bryant Slow] -- but I got -- I was working with Operation Bootstrap; Lou Smith was teaching a sociology class down at UC Irvine, and he would invite students from his class into inner city Los Angeles; Operation Bootstrap was here on 42nd and Central Avenue, and he would invite people from various organizations and from the street life to come for these Encounter Groups or Racial Sensitivity sessions that we would have at Operation Bootstrap. And the one restraint was there can be no physical contact or violence. Now, you can call each other all the names you want, vent all you want, but don't you put your hands on nobody or you're not welcome here, because it ain't that kind of party.
But this was where I met formally Dr. Joseph White. I say formally because I had known of Dr. White, he's a psychologically who got into it with S.I. [Samuel Ichiye] Hayakawa at San Francisco State, and he did a Deadcat Bounce and became a professor of psychology at UC Irvine. And Joe White came with Lou Smith, and he was impressed by my presentation, and he was questioning -- "You got a B.A. degree, and you back in the streets hustling? What kind of systemic -- these people owe you, man. You don't need no B.A. degree to do what you doing, you were doing that when you were 16 years old. Now what you going to school for to get a B.A. degree an keep doing this?" I explained to him that I can't get the kind of money I'm getting with no BA degree that I'm getting -- it don't make no sense to me. I don't want to be square. If that's what I got to do, accept $50 a week with half of that taken back for taxes, when I can get $50 a day or better. And that was a lot of money then. I know brothers nowadays getting $400 and $500 a day easy with their so-called costume jewelry, fake Rolex watches and stuff like that. Anyway, the -- Joe White was the guy who recruited me into the School of Social Sciences at UC Irvine in 1970. So from 1967 to 1970 -- I did work for awhile out of KTTV Studios as assistant producer for the Joe Pyne show, in fact.
**STEVENSON**

KTTV.

**SMITH**

KTTV, yeah. That was Channel 11 then; it's Fox now.

**STEVENSON**

All right, so can you tell me more about what influenced you to take that path in your studies? Was there -- and did it dovetail with you --

**SMITH**

When I was a student at Irvine, the war in Vietnam was not over yet, and they were having a lot of demonstrations all across the United States against the war in Vietnam, and they had big anti-Vietnam rally, especially when Richard Nixon extended the war over into Cambodia, similar to Bush now wanting to extend Iraq over into Iran. Richard [Milhous] Nixon had escalated the thing from Vietnam proper over into Cambodia, and so there was a big demonstration, and I gave a speech in the free speech area at UC Irvine to this big crowd of students, and I used a lot of ebonics, and I'm not just talking about the curse words, but I was making rhymes, and it was very exciting to the crowd. Some secretaries in the Finance Department, the vice-chancellor of Finance, didn't like the fact that I used some four-letter words in my presentation, and made a complaint to their boss, the vice-chancellor, his name was L.E. Cox, L.E. C-O-X, who was the vice-chancellor, and he got the university chief of police -- they have their own police on-campus -- to issue a warrant; he went to the DA in Orange County, and issued a summons for me for using obscene and profane language in the presence of women and children. He dusted off the books to find a law. I beat that case, meaning the jury found me not guilty, OK, of that charge.

That's when I decided what I was going to major in, because three linguists who were of the not conservative persuasion came to my defense in the trial, offering expert testimony that there's no such thing as a bad word. There are words that annoy people. And in the context of what he was giving as a speech in the free speech area, he had perfect right to use whatever he felt was situationally appropriate to describe his feelings that those words had no meaning other than the meanings that he wanted to convey, and that was that if there's something that is bad -- how about murder, that's a bad word -- words that connote vile and vicious things, genocide -- why not arrest him for those words? Why are you isolating B-I-T-C-H? And the way that one got into it was I was talking about a meter maid who was liberally giving out tickets, and had target me for every time she saw my car, she'd find a reason to put a ticket on it. And some of the times, she wasn't right, you know what I mean? Sometimes she was, because if there wasn't no parking and I had to go to class, I just parked and went on to class, and deal with the ticket later. But I wasn't going to be late for my class, because I wasn't living on campus at the time; when I got a chance to live on campus, I'd walk to class, but the first year that I was there, I didn't have a graduate research assistantship, and so not having that kind of revenue, I just parked

and paid the ticket. It was less expensive that coming to class late, and the teacher says, "Why don't you get there on time?" Ain't no time to get there early. If you don't come to school at 7 in the morning, ain't no parking. It was that kind of situation. There was very little or no parking on that campus; it was either [inaudible]. All the other parking, there was none, because it was a rural area, so you could just park way 50 miles away and walk to school, you either drove to school and parked on campus, because there was no parking up in Turtle Rock in the residential people's neighborhood, you couldn't park up in there and come down and walk. So even if I wanted to make a long trek to class by driving into the suburbs near the campus and then walking, there was limited parking; you're likely to get your car towed away, and that's very expensive. So it was just, to me, cheaper to just park at a meter, put some money in the meter, and if I didn't get back in time, I had to pay the ticket.

**STEVENSON**

Was it called ebonics, the language called ebonics, at that point?

**SMITH**

No. In fact, one of the first rallies, on of the first conferences held, Wilson [C.] Riles was the state superintendent of public instruction. But his wife was an educator, and she was very concerned about the literacy, the failure of black children in the schools, and she was the first one to put on a conference concerning the language of black children. This was in 1970. In 1972, the Association of Black Psychologists filed a lawsuit against the San Francisco Unified School District, and in that lawsuit, it was called Larry P. v. Wilson Riles, the -- first it was Larry P. v. the San Francisco Unified School District, then they expanded it to cover the whole state, that's Judge Peckham, the US District Court Judge, Judge Robert Peckham, and they had charged that the school district of the state of California, and that particularly San Francisco, was using culturally and linguistically biased test to assess black children and label them mentally retarded, that only 9% of the students in the state of California and in the San Francisco School District were black, yet 60% of students in EMR [Educable Mentally Retarded], TMR [Trainable Mentally Retarded], and PMR [Profoundly Mentally Retarded] classes. EMR is educable mentally retarded; TMR is trainable mentally retarded, and PMR is profoundly mentally retarded, and that's rated on how low you score on, quote, these "standardized tests." Essentially, what they were arguing was that the tests are biased because they're linguistically biased in the English language, and the children who are taking these tests are not native speakers of English; they're not familiar with the English culture. And they basically told the judge this, that any test does not measure what the person knows; it measures what the test-maker thinks they ought to know. Start from a premise that I know something, I'm intelligent. Do you know what I know? -- because if you know what I know, you're intelligent, too. But if you don't know what I know, you're not

intelligent, and anything that you know is not worth knowing, so it doesn't count as intelligence. That was very clear to Judge Pecker, that the test is inherently biased towards a norm of a culture. And if it's given in a language that the students don't understand, that's a double bias. You can't measure a Chinese child whose main mother tongue is Chinese in English and then claim that the Chinese child is mentally retarded when the test is not in a language that he understands. And then you start loading the test up with items about a culture that the child is unfamiliar with and then label the child mentally retarded because they're not familiar with these cultural items that are on this test, that's biased towards a culture. And as I say, that test grew against the school district and the state superintendent, and they could no longer use these culturally and linguistically biased tests to assess black children.

**STEVENSON**

What was the name of the test?

**SMITH**

They were using a battery: the Wechsler [Intelligence Scale for Children, WISC]-Peabody [Picture-Vocabulary Test, PPVT], the [Minnesota] Multifacet, the Stanford-Binet [Intelligence Scale]. All of these tests were being used by the school districts to assess black children for mental retardation.

**STEVENSON**

And your major was...?

**SMITH**

Comparative culture, with an emphasis in comparative linguistics. Comparative linguistics is historical linguistics. My dissertation was The Evolution and Continuing Presence of the African Oral Tradition in Black America.

**STEVENSON**

Yeah, I'll get that title from you. So this was your dissertation.

**SMITH**

Yeah. I had originally evolution and continued presence of the African linguistic tradition, but my dissertation supervisor said they'll understand if you just say "oral;" they don't understand this word "linguistic" as much as they understand you're talking about the way Africans talk. Evolution and continuing presence of the African oral tradition in black America. But essentially what I did, and I consider my contribution to the whole subject of ebonics, which is what you asked about originally, the term "ebonics" was coined at this conference on the cognitive and linguistic development of the African-American child in 1973, Robert Williams had been given some funds by the National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] to bring together some scholars who had been doing research on the cognitive and language development of black children.

And at this conference, it became evident, and I think it had became evident even in NIH [NIMH], the National Institute of Mental Health, because there

were people that had been funded to do these studies who were giving them information that was conflicted. Hey, Dennis, how you doing? The conflicting information was, some people were using the term Black English, and others were using African Language System, because they were trying to describe it from a non-Eurocentric paradigm. In other words, if you use the word English, inherent in using the word English is the assumption that the language that you're describing is a part of the English language or the Germanic language family to which English belongs. And to use the word English when you're saying it's not English that's what they call an oxymoron; you can't call it English and say it's not English at the same time. So they were searching for a term that would say, "Well, what are we talking about?" Well, everybody kind of agreed, we're talking about some sounds that are made by black children. So let's just call it black sounds, and we can debate whether these sounds follow the rules of grammar of the Germanic language family or the Niger-Congo African language family from which black people historically came.

So the term "ebonics" was a neutral way of describing a subject without assuming to be fact something that many argued had not been proved, that is, you have evidence here that this is the tension of an African language system re-lexified, re-lexified meaning you're using European words, but the thought process, the grammar system, is African. It's no more than a Chinese person who's speaking English with an accent, or speaking Chinese with the English word in it, OK, depends on looking at a zebra, and you're saying it's a black animal with white stripes, and I'm saying, no, this is a white animal with black stripes. Those who would see it as a black animal with white stripes were coming from the ebonics paradigm. This is black, this is an African language system. Yes, it has European influence from the contact languages that these African descendants have had contact with, the French, Portuguese, Spanish, English, and the Dutch, primarily. These languages are introduced, these African languages I've adopted, these words, I use "adopted" as opposed to "borrowed," because when you borrow something, that implies you're going to give it back.

These languages that are spoken by Africans in the diaspora have adopted words from the European languages that they've come into contact with, but they don't know how to pronounce these words ideally, according to the European language that they were influenced with, because of the phonetic structure of the language they were speaking originally. So they're speaking these words with an African accent, or they're using these words with an African syntax. So somebody says, "Where your mom at?" "Where your mom at?" means, "Where is your mother located?" It is incorrect grammar to say "at;" you don't end English sentences with prepositions, so that's not grammatical, "Where your mom at?" "Where Bobby and them at?" "Where your coat at?" So you look at something and you see poor grammar, as opposed to an accent from another language system where locative markers

explain the presence of prepositions at the end of the sentence. Or you answer the question, "She gone." Now, "She gone," is not English, in terms of English grammar, because English has verbs "to be." You can say, "She has gone," that's an auxiliary verb, and it's not "to be," that's a have verb. Some people think that when you say "She gone," you mean "She has gone," but what they're telling you is that she's not here, not meaning past tense; it means, "She's not here." If they want time to be important, and it's been considerable time, they say, "She been gone." Now time is important and they give you a long amount of time. That's different from just, "She gone," meaning she's not here. But if you say, "She been gone," that means not only she's not here, she's long time not here. So we thinking still in an African way of expressing ourselves, but we're using European words. That's called re-lexification.

An example of that in Spanish would be if I say El Bionica Hombre. "El" in Spanish is "the," "bionico" is "bionic, "hombre" is "man." But that's not Spanish, because Spanish does not allow you to put the adjective in front of the noun. The Spanish grammar rule is that the adjective comes after the noun. So you'd say, El Hombre Bionico, not El Bionico Hombre. Or, La Casa Roja, the house red. OK? You don't say La Roja Casa, the red house; you say La Casa Roja. And "el" means "the" and "la" means "the," so you have to know the gender system of Spanish to know when to use the masculine form from the feminine form. So you don't know a language just because you know its vocabulary; you know a language when you have knowledge of its grammar.

And what ebonics is about is explaining the thought process of black children and black people who talk this way, and showing that this is a linguistic retention of the African historical base from which these differences came. It's obscured by the extensive relexification that has occurred, that is word adoption. So people who have never studied it from an African perspective see broken English, lazy, don't want to study, don't want to learn, when no one has any control over the environment they're born into and the speech habits they develop as a result of being born in an environment that's different. Some people see differences and they automatically associate difference with deficits. OK, being linguistically different does not make you linguistically deficient, OK, and associating cognitive abilities with some type of linguistic differences is even more hurtful, because it doesn't really take a lot of cognitive ability to mimic speech. A myna bird or parrot can mimic human speech, and it doesn't take a huge brain to do what a myna bird is able to do.

So to associate language with cognition in that sense of intelligence is very demeaning and degrading. Differences are not deficits, and the base of the historical process, the differences in black speed have African origins, for the most part. It's not to deny that children born with Fetal Alcohol or drugs or whatever, even before that phenomenon, there were people born with what

they call congenital birth defects, which related to an attack on the fetus during embryonic development, and that's congenital; congenital meaning present at birth. Anything that's present at birth is congenital. But there are two reasons that things can be present at birth. Some are exogenous and some are endogenous. Exogenous means it happened during embryonic development on the fetus or assault on the fetus by bacteria, virus, alcohol, drugs -- those things can assault the fetus and cause birth deformations, organ deformation, deformations in the organ development. Endogenous means, this is something that goes all the way to the DNA and RNA of the family, this is genetic. OK, that's going to be present at birth, but it's endogenous, meaning it's in the genes and the chromosomes, whereas exogenous means nobody else in the family, but this person during pregnancy had -- this malady occurred during the development, and it caused it to be congenital. So what we do is try in linguistics to explain speech behavior absent a lot of clinical bias, cultural or any other kind of bias, just see what's there and try to come up with an explanation other than pathology.

**STEVENSON**

OK. What was the outcome of the findings of this process, and how were they applied?

**SMITH**

The book came out of the conference. The book was called Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks [People], published in 1975 by the Institute of Black Studies in St. Louis, and it's been reprinted; Robert Williams had to reprint it after the 1996 open-school resolution, so it's back in print. As a matter of fact, let me run to the car and get something for you, if you don't mind. [pause; break in audio] I thought I had an ebonics book in the trunk, but -- next time we get together, I'll --

**STEVENSON**

Can I have this?

**SMITH**

Yes, that's yours. This is the new book by Robert Williams.

**STEVENSON**

OK. I'd like to talk a little bit about your involvement with both Operation Bootstrap and with CORE in those early days.

**SMITH**

OK. I got involved with CORE, as I say, primarily because I had a lot of respect for Lou Smith and what he was trying to do, because again, CORE operated from a premise of black self-help, even though it was considered one of the civil rights organizations, they weren't as much into -- well, they were into the Freedom Rides and all that, and that was under the leadership of the national chair who was James Farmer. But at a local level, Bootstrap, they created Shindana Toys, they were trying to create job opportunities and training for black people, youth in the streets, they were dealing with the

literacy problems of black children. I belong to an organization called United Front, and United Front was dealing with the problem of literacy amongst black children.

And one of the reasons I decided to get into linguistics at UC Irvine, besides being arrested and having come to appreciated the scientific approach to language, was that I had, as Minister of Education with this organization, United Front, had no success in trying to teach English literacy to young kids that I would see. I met kids coming out of high school with diplomas that couldn't read their names in ten-inch upper-case letters, and that just really perplexed me. And I've discovered that first of all, I learned to read in Dunbar Colored Elementary School in Oklahoma, that's first of all. I didn't learn to read out here in California. I got black people teaching me English as a second language -- didn't know that's what they were doing, but these were people who spoke my language who could transition me from what I was bringing to school from home to what they wanted me to learn in school, which was standard American English. That wasn't called bilingual education or ESL [English as a Second Language] at the time, but that's why you find black people who went to school in the South who can read. The only black people you find who can't read that went to school in the South is black people who didn't have a chance to go to school. If they went to school, they can read. Black people from the South that you find that can't read, most of them were living in the rural areas and had to work, couldn't go to school, so some of them checked out at the sixth, seventh grade, and didn't get the chance. But most black people who I have met who had a chance to go to school, at least they can read. I'm telling you that, you can check that out.

And you find kids coming out of school now, high school diplomas, still can't read, can't write. The point that I'm making is that the study of ebonics was to find some mechanism that would help in the process of, A, understanding what is the nature of the problem, and then trying to use some applied linguistic methods to transition children. Decoding and encoding graphic representations of speech can be done several ways. All languages don't use a phonic system or phonetic system; the English alphabet is a phonetic system, meaning the characters represent sounds, and you have to know how to combine these sounds to make works. Well, some language are very strict in their phonetic system, and English has kind of a polysemy of sounds for words, and so in this word, it'll have one sound, and in this word it'll have a different sound. So English is very difficult to learn if you're trying to learn it using phonics, because 80% of the English vocabulary cannot be spelled phonetically or phonetically; you have to know the whole configuration.

So the other thing that we learned from this conference was that there's this thing called Learning Modal Preference. That is, people get messages throughout their ability to process the message. Some people are what they

call visual learners, and they learn and retain through the visual apparatus, and to the extent that they relied heavily on the visual recognition of something, that's how they will retain it and that's how they will recall it. Other people who don't get it visually but get it orally, auditory learners, they call them, because they can memorize whole songs, like this song, "To the left, to the left, everything on in the box to the left," these young girls, my granddaughter, three years old, knows every word to Irreplaceable, by Beyoncé. Three years old! So she has the auditory ability, memory, that is to me remarkable, and she just turned three; she was doing this at two. So I'm just saying that the Learning Modal Preference has to do with if you are an auditory learner, and you're learning to do something phonically, you're only going to get to about the third, fourth grade of English using that method, because the rest of the English vocabulary can't be comprehended through phonics. So a nice rudimentary way to start, but if you're trying to teach someone comprehension and other aspects of the English language, to read and understand English, comprehension, which is a part of knowing the English language, OK, being able to read and understand the English language, then phonics is not going to be that helpful. So while I support phonics, I qualify my support, in terms of I know it's effective, because I've had success at it at a certain level.

But beyond that, they have to get them into recognizing the complete configuration. Now, multi-modal learners can do both; they can do visual and auditory, and so they are comfortable using either one or both at the same time. But some people seem to have a hemisphere dominance in how their brain's wired, for auditory as opposed to visual learning, and you have to plug into their learning modal preference in order to teach them the English language. The method that I was using, having nothing to do with literacy, but I'm stupid and didn't know at the time -- and I say stupid because I thought I was so smart, and I'd say stupid in the sense of ignorant; I'm saying stupid because when the person doesn't know they're not stupid, they just don't know, that's ignorant in that sense. But when a person's ignorant and don't know they're ignorant, that's stupid.

So I'm saying I was stupid, because I had brothers, I'd line them up: what is a sentence? And I'd make them memorize. A sentence is a group of words that express a complete thought; to express a complete thought, two elements are necessary, a subject and a predicate. A subject is a noun, a pronoun, a word, a group of words that functions as a noun. A predicate is the verb, its complements and its modifiers. There are four kinds of sentences: a simple sentence, a compound sentence, a compound/complex sentence. And they can recite all of this from rote. A sentence is a group of words that express a complete thought. To express a complete thought, two elements are necessary, a subject and a predicate. A subject is a noun, a pronoun, a word, a group of words that functions as a noun. A predicate is the verb, its complements and its modifiers. There are four kinds of

sentences: a simple sentence, a compound sentence, a compound/complex sentence. They knew it, had it down pat, but they couldn't read. They just knew English grammar, the rules of English grammar, knew it by heart and sounded like they were smart. They couldn't read. You put that very thing that they read, what they recited, in front of them, they couldn't read it; they couldn't find the words that they were saying. Now, I was able to recognize that 'cause you say something don't mean you can recognize graphic representations of what you saying.
So the cognition, you were talking about the conference and what came out of it, was the understanding of what it means to be able to decode and encode graphic representations of speech, and separating the learning of English speech as opposed to the learning of English reading and writing, make that distinction because if a child is reading, and he comes upon the word that's pronounced "truth" and they pronounce "troof," or "bath" and they say "baf," or "death" and they say "def." And you stop them: "It's not 'def,' it's 'death.'" You're not correcting their ability to read; he just pronounces the word with his own phonology. He's not incorrectly reading; you're not talking about English speech. Now, are you teaching English speech or are you teaching English reading? He has correctly decoded the word, but he has pronounced it the way the ideally competent speaker talks. Well, Henry [Alfred] Kissinger is not an ideally competent speaker of English.
**STEVENSON**
Arnold [Alois] Schwarzenegger --
**SMITH**
Arnold Schwarzenegger is not an ideally competent speaker of English. [Albert] Einstein was not an ideally competent speaker of English. In fact, he admitted to being dyslexic. And he's considered a genius, in terms of his mathematical abilities. So this thing of associating speech with intelligence, was something that we were able to address at this conference, and that came out in the book Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks [People], to prepare speech teachers and educators, linguists, and other people who were interested in that phenomenon of where these differences come from, because there is systematicity, systematic, rule-governed differences. And the systematicity is in the African languages that we were speaking before we came here, and the history of segregation and social isolation has served to preserve these differences. To the extent that we've been socially isolated or segregated, we tend to have these differences. Blacks who are more integrated don't present those differences, because the association and integration has given them the ability to code switch, or to use both languages. When they're around whites, they know how to shift into the ideally competent uses of the whites, and when they're around blacks, they go to the uses of blacks. And sometimes, that was what they were using originally anyway.
**STEVENSON**

Right. Now, it's called something like code switching?

**SMITH**

Code switching. The reason I don't prefer code switching is because it sounds like he's just moving from one dialect to the other, using one dialect of English and going to another dialect, as opposed to, I'm saying that you're actually shifting languages, you're going from one language to the -- you're going from an African language system to a Germanic language system, which is a separate grammar altogether. But the concept of code switching, code being either when you're doing it as a dialect or a language, coding that sense, you're absolutely correct; that's what it would be called in linguistics: code switching. But in one sense, you can shift dialects, and then in another, you're shifting from one language to the other. But each one of them are separate codes, as far as linguistics would be concerned.

**STEVENSON**

OK. So as Minister of Education for the United Front, what was your strategy for dealing with the problems with literacy, and what were the precedents?

**SMITH**

I failed. I had no success at all, and that's why I decided, when I went to Irvine, this was in the same time that I, as a Black Nationalist, was coming to work with Lou Smith at Bootstrap, and he would encourage kids, if you want to learn English, if you're having problems with these, go to Ernie -- I wasn't Dr. Smith then -- go to Ernie Smith there; United Front's having literacy classes. But I didn't have near the success that I wished I had, you see what I'm saying? And I would consider it a failure, because if I didn't get all of them, I failed. Because I knew English, and what I just gave you as a recitation, I had brothers who could do that by memory. They could tell you what a paragraph was; they tell you about sequential, directional; they could tell you the whole composition, how to compose English grammar, they could tell you the rules, but they didn't know how to read and write. They knew English grammar, in terms of the rules of English, but that didn't make them literate. And that's what I was supposed to have been doing; I was supposed to be having these brothers learn how to read and write, and I'm just having them parse by recitation English grammar rules.

**STEVENSON**

OK. So when you got through UC Irvine, and you graduated -- when did you graduate --

**SMITH**

1974, I finished my dissertation. I finished my orals in '72, and I started teaching English composition at Cal State [California State University] Fullerton. The next semester, they wanted me to teach an American dialects class along with English composition. The American dialects class was cross-listed with linguistics, with the department of linguistics. David Feldman was the chairman of linguistics at that time. And that class became very, very popular, in the two semesters that I had that class, the enrollment went

from like 20, 25, to upwards of 75 and 80 students. I mean, students will go and tell other students, "Oh, this is the bomb! This guy, way out." And what they were really enjoying was the information that I was sharing about black language; I used to get Iceberg Slim, Robert Beck, he would come and give lectures in my class. A lot of people that I knew over here in LA would come down and enjoy being considered a visiting professor for a lecture on campus. And so those connections made my class very popular. Minister Louis Farrakhan would come and give lectures to my class at Irvine and at Cal State Fullerton, because --

**STEVENSON**

And how was that received?

**SMITH**

Very well received. Especially, he'd come with an entourage of guards and stuff, you know what I mean? But it was predominantly white universities now; this is not something that only the blacks are coming to. So any time whites are exposed to something that's so different -- "Far out! That's the bomb!" So that was the kind of reception that they were getting, because these were speakers they would never on their own go and see, but someone's bringing it to me, and I'm going to get credit for sitting here and listening to him? And it wasn't hateful stuff; it was stuff about what the Movement was about and how they had been lied to. The way parents would -- people being told that the whole thing in ebonics was they want to teach children ebonics in the schools, and that resolution had nothing to do with teaching ebonics to the children; it had to do with the rights of these parents to identify their child's home language, and be afford English as a second language and bilingual education if that was appropriate as a specially designed alternative method of instruction in the English language. That's what they were asking for; they call it SDAIE, Specially-Designed Alternative Instruction in English [Specially-Designed Instruction in English Language, SIDE].

**STEVENSON**

Specially-Designed -- what was the rest of it?

**SMITH**

Alternative Instruction in English Language.

**STEVENSON**

OK.

**SMITH**

In other words, give these children what's needed to transition them from the home language to English.

**STEVENSON**

So after you've gotten through school and you're teaching these classes, you're still involved in the community and in Bootstrap, and still with the United Front, were you able to apply what you've learned in school, what you've learned about --

**SMITH**
When I went to Irvine, I was no longer involved in the inner city, because I was on campus going to graduate school, I'm a graduate student and I've got two years, at least, of residency I have to do, and then after you finish your qualify exam, what they call your orals, then you have to finish your dissertation. Some people get to the qualifying exam, finish back, and never do their dissertation, and bomb out. So my thing was not to embarrass Joe White and the people who were pushing hard for me to succeed, because two of the people on my committee, one was from Kenya, O L.E. Mbatia -- O-L-E M-B-T-A-I-A, Mbatia [Dr. Oliver L.E. Mbatia]. And George Roberts used the African from Sierra Leone, and Joe White, Joseph White, professor of psychology -- these were the three people who were my dissertation supervisors, and I didn't want to, you know, let these people down, because they had a lot of faith in me.
**STEVENSON**
OK. Did you have -- let me ask you at this point about the Watts Rebellion, and what you can tell me about what you were doing at that time, your perceptions of the root causes, where you were when the rebellion happened...
**SMITH**
The day that the rebellion happened, I can't recall exactly where -- I was here in LA, obviously. But I knew one thing, when they said that they were going to bring the National Guard in, I would be trapped here in LA, so I made sure that I had action on being outside of the curfew zone, and staying in a motel or wherever, because I could easily go downtown, get me some jewelry, and get on out in the field selling my jewelry, because that was all I was doing back then, this was 1965. And so I'm trying to see -- I must have gotten a call from the producers, because my mother left a message for me to call this television station, and that's when they arranged for me to come to the station to be on that show. So I do recall that particular event. Let me get something else, because I -- and today -- [pause] This is a Newsweek magazine, 19- --
**STEVENSON**
[inaudible] '65.
**SMITH**
So if it started in August 14, this is about just two weeks afterwards. This interview had to happen very close to the time that the riot was going on. Even -- from Newsweek magazine, under national affairs -- "Even as the rioting receded, anger bubbled on. These policemen, they've got you t-rolled --" you remember I was telling you about tops, cookie dice? "-- from the start." They were telling that the dice were loaded against black people. "-- Said Ernie Smith, 25, chairman of the Afro-American Citizen's Council, outside the Best Buy Restaurant on Vermont Avenue, as the only botched up a white-lettered sign on the window: 'Negro-owned, blood brother.'" [Read

from Newsweek, August 30, 1965] That was the way blacks who owned businesses were protecting themselves, by identifying their stores as black-owned. But I was using, as you see here, the vernacular of the street life to explain: the deck is stacked against you, the white supremacy is a crooked deck; you're talking about playing the race card, all the cards, deck [inaudible], so there ain't no card that ain't race cards. That was basically -- I was saying the dice are crooked. You got your t-roll; you ain't got a chance in a system like this. And so it's this organization, again, that organization also, we were Black Nationalists, and so being Black Nationalists and believing in self-help, when [Barry Morris] Goldwater ran, Black Nationalists felt that Goldwater was no different from Johnson -- in fact, Goldwater was at least honest. So I'm also known for having been a supporter, Afro-Americans for Goldwater. Now, along with Ernie Smith was Ron [Maulana] Karenga and Tut Hayes and Don Warden -- he's got a Muslim name now, he's an attorney up in the Bay Area. These are all Black Nationalist organizations who took the position that black people ought to go for self, do for self. And again, that's why I really admired CORE. CORE was a do-for-self organization, whereas some of the other civil rights organizations were trying to get government handouts. We saw that as what it turned out to be: generations of people raised on welfare, and [William Jefferson] Clinton had to cut that out.

**STEVENSON**

OK. So in terms of the root causes of the rebellion as you saw them --

**SMITH**

They were identified in the [John Alex] McCone Commission [Report] pretty accurately. The lack of healthcare -- this brother, Leonard Deadwyler, was trying to get his wife to Big General, that's what we call LA County USC [Los Angeles County USC Medical Center] today; it was called Big G. He was going down Avalon, and before he got to Slauson, two LA policemen, one of them, Gerald Ford, because he didn't yield or stop when they were following him with the siren. Deep South, when you had an emergency, you would tie a handkerchief on your antenna; they called it "Air Wire." You'd tie a handkerchief on your air wire, or your antenna, and that would be a sign there was an emergency, and people would kind of pull over, because they knew it was some kind of emergency and you were trying to get to the hospital. That didn't mean nothing to these crackers out here. That cop walked up to that man's car and shot him dead. Just walked up to him and shot him, and got away with it. Coroner's inquest.

**STEVENSON**

So you feel the McCone Commission was pretty accurate.

**SMITH**

It was accurate and they addressed health issues; they addressed educational issues; there were a host of issues that testimony was given to the McCone Commission about the seeds of -- the things that pretty much

kind of like they are now; there's kind of a cauldron boiling. The closure of this hospital and people dying needlessly trying to get to Cedar-Sinai or out to Harbor [General UCLA Medical Center], and out to Big General, the conditions are even more stressful now because the population has quadrupled. There's still no more transportation to Harbor than there was then, if there's as much. There's still no transportation out to Cedar's; there's no transportation here out to Big General. If it is, you can see a car can't hardly get out there, so you imagine what it's going to be like for a bus.

## *1.2. Session 3A*
## *April 2, 2007*

**STEVENSON**
Good morning. I'm continuing an interview with Dr. Ernie Smith on Monday, April 2. First, I'd like you to tell me, how did you decide to become a linguist? What were the series of events that led up to that?
**SMITH**
Now, you remind me next week, if you're going to interview me again, I have a whole book on what made me major in linguistics. I was admitted -- I was at Bootstrap when I got recruited, Operation Bootstrap out here on 42nd and Broadway, I was a member of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] -- in fact, I have an article I just came across; I was putting -- I had this [inaudible] of things, I put all these in sheet protectors, but I came across an article about me that was mentioning that I was a representative of CORE. It wasn't a complimentary article, because I was a Black Nationalist at the time.
**STEVENSON**
OK. The Miracle Worker.
**SMITH**
[inaudible]
**STEVENSON**
OK. "LBJ must be a miracle worker," -- and this article is by Malcolm Schwartz, the College Times, that's Cal --
**SMITH**
Cal State LA.
**STEVENSON**
[Stevenson reads The Miracle Worker from MES Hall column by Malcolm Schwartz in CSCLA College Times, 5/13/65]Cal State LA. "LBJ must be a miracle worker. I never thought I'd see the day when Cal State LA senior Ernie Smith, an avowed Black Nationalist, would be defending someone from the Congress of Racial Equality. But that's just what happened last Saturday evening on KTTV's opinionated but loveable Joe Pyne Show. Don Smith, of LA CORE, was sandwiched between Pyne and that man who's going to save

our country for our children. Yes, I'm talking about our annual commencement speaker at Cal State LA, that defender of freedom, John [Ruselow]. Smith looked like a slice of pumpernickel caught between two pieces of white bread. He was arguing against US citizens in Vietnam and the Dominican Republican, something about how everybody would hate us, when up popped Ernie into that symbol of free speech, the Doc, to defend the other Smith. Not only that, but Pyne and Ruselow were defending Johnson's actions in both countries. I had thought originally our actions in those two countries were another example of creeping Socialism. But naturally, those two defenders of the American way of life told me different. Pyne then asked Smith to comment on what Ernie was saying. 'Ernie can take care of himself,' Smith replied. I just think Ernie was shouting too loud so Smith, or I, couldn't understand him. Perhaps that's why Smith was afraid to comment. Ruselow was right, though. He said Ernie was hysterical. Ernie was, but then I can understand Ernie being that way with his persecution complex. Ernie would only be happy if his father was Negro, his mother Mexican, living in a Jewish-owned tenement house in an Italian neighborhood. Then, as soon as Ernie stepped outside the apartment house, they'd yell, 'Get him! He's all of them!' But Ernie's a good guy in one respect: he doesn't like Ruselow. Too bad I can't publish some of the remarks he originally made in a letter to the College Times about Ruselow's appearance here last week, because then Ruselow could have some real cause to sue the CT. But I can understand Ernie's point of view, despite the fact both he and Ruselow have got to be considered leaning just a little bit to the right, whether they walk or talk. You see, Ernie hates everybody. But I got to admire Ernie; Pyne made some ridiculous remark about Ernie's new suit. 'What do you mean?' Ernie could have responded, and then did say, 'That's rugged individualism.' Guess what happened, folks. Pyne laughed at that. LBJ must be a miracle worker."

**SMITH**

OK. Now, I gave you this article because at this particular time, I was moving more from the Nation. Malcolm X had left, and so I was calling myself a Black Nationalist. In my early years, I was known on campus as a Muslim. And I was considered an orator, because I would get out in front of the library building, between classes sometimes or after my last class, and we would hold long rap sessions or discussions on campus, you know, in the free speech area on campus. And so being an orator, I got a lot of awards because I was taking a lot of speech classes, and that gave me an opportunity. That's what I was doing was practicing my speeches for the debate tournaments and stuff, so I would see how big a crowd I could draw and how I could argue certain points. It wasn't like a formal speech that you had to do at a speech tournament, but the arguments that you need to try and hone, you can do that in the free speech area, and I was preparing myself for scholastic purposes.

Anyway, the [eunis] that I had in speech was the reason why Dr. White -- Joe White was the guy who recruited me; he was the Dean up at San Francisco State and got into it With S.I. [Samuel Ichiye] Hiyakawa, who I think was the President of San Francisco State [University] at that time. And so he left and went to UC [University of California] Irvine in the psychology department, and he was bringing students from UC Irvine down to Operation Bootstrap for integration with dialogue, or encounter group, or whatever you want to call them. But he would bring about 15-20 students, mostly Anglos, to the thing, to the campus, and so would professors from USC [University of Southern California] and UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] bringing them. Lou Smith was the resident regional director of CORE, so I had a lot of admiration for CORE, because there was nothing anti-black in being for equality. You can't -- 50/50 is always fair, even swapping no swindle. So I could identify with CORE just on the grounds that I'm not trying to be superior, but I'm not going to accept inferior.

So CORE was the only civil rights organization that I really felt that I could support. I couldn't with NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] because it had the word Negro in it. At that time, that was the worst thing you could be was a Negro, because everybody was being black. And so the encouragement that Joe White gave me when I got there -- there was no speech department at UC Irvine, but there was a linguistics department. And I really didn't have a clue what linguistics was about, other than I knew it had to deal with language, languages. It wasn't the foreign language department, I learned; linguistics is a science, it's how you study speech, behavior; how you study language. And so thus I got an introduction to linguistics and several other courses that I had to take.

And I'll give you the exact date: I know it had to be 1972, because that was when [Richard Milhous] Nixon expanded the war in Vietnam into Cambodia, and I was invited to give a speech at the free speech rally, or the anti-Vietnam rally, on campus. On campus, I made this speech, and I told you about that, I think, in the last [inaudible]. Two linguistics came to my defense in the court. [Dr.] Mary [Richie] Key and David Sundeneau [phonetic]. These were linguistics who were teaching at Irvine who felt there was legitimate linguistic argument, sort of like the Linguistic Society of America did for the Ebonics did. 6,000 members of that association said that the Oakland School District was right. There is an African base in the African-American speech. Now, whether you believe that today, it is African, is still debatable, because some people say that it broke with the African tradition, that's one theory, and adopted English as the primary language. But they know there's an equally strong argument for the linguistic continuity argument that the Oakland [Unified] School District decided to endorse, which was that there is linguistic continuity in the sub-strata, meaning the patterns of speech are systematic, rule-governed and predictable, and that you can find these patterns in the original African

languages that they were speaking. That was the argument in this case in Orange County, in the free speech area. That had to do with context of the situation, that no word has a meaning if you don't understand the context of the situation. You have to have, what is the intent of the speaker, and the meaning has to be what you say it is according to the law. And since neither of those challenges were met by the District Attorney, the District Attorney lost the case. They argued, and the jury was convinced, that given the situation, he was in the free speech area; he didn't go up to the offices of these nurses and create a disturbance swearing at them or swearing at somebody and disturbing everybody else's peace. That would be unlawful. This guy was in the free speech area, and the microphone was available, and everybody on campus knew that this was going to happen, so if there was particular nurses -- not nurses, secretaries -- didn't want to hear, they were free to move somewhere else, because it was during lunchtime anyway, so it wasn't while they had to work. They must have stayed there because they wanted to hear something. It's free speech. What does free speech mean? And so these linguists really made me decide that -- I should have known all of this a long time ago. Because this is the free speech area, this thing of painting pictures.

These are drawings that I did, and you can see they were highly provocative, because I was anti-Vietnam War, and so obviously, putting a Negro on a leash and saying, "Sic 'em, nigger," would be offensive to a pro-war person, these types. And then being a Black Nationalist, and in the Nation of Islam -- here, I have Sammy Davis, Jr., Harry Belafonte, and [Emilio Griffon], three prize fighters -- no, Belafonte's a singer, Sammy Davis, Jr. was a singer and a comic, and that prize fighter Emilio Griffon was the middle-weight champion I think at the time. And they had their white wives; Ray Charles said, "Georgia's on my mind, but it ain't on there." This is a Klu Klux Klansman, with Elijah Muhammad on trial, and you see who the jury's made up of. The Klansman's got his hood off, it's the DA, and the rest of them sitting there with their hood on is the jury, and they said, "[inaudible], he teaching our Negroes!" They accused Elijah Muhammad of teaching me.

**STEVENSON**

So these are political cartoons.

**SMITH**

[Smith shows political cartoons] These are political cartoons. This is the inside of the store, and you can see how they lined up in the window. This is a picture of me by the pictures inside the store. Not all the pictures were political cartoons. I was taking art classes at Cal State LA, so all of my artwork, the naked pictures, you understand me, were of the nude models that we had in the art classes. This picture is one -- I had one from USC. I think that's -- no, that's not it. I had a picture that I used for my defense showing the same kind of artwork on display at Tam's Bookstore, that was

the bookstore over at USC. Pictures, naked pictures in the thing from art students. So for them to say that I had -- they made me like a porno, the image of Muslims was what I figured it was, 'cause --

**STEVENSON**

Yeah. Interesting there should be such controversy, given the long history of political cartooning in this country, dating back, I don't know, perhaps to the Revolutionary War. Very interesting.

**SMITH**

But this is political cartooning, and this is something that really upset the police department. As you know, the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] got a reversal of the decision -- they won the conviction in trial, but the ACLU defended me at the trial, and took it to the appeal, and won a reversal. I told you, Hugh Manis was the -- and it was that kind of experience also that made me understand what Malcolm X was talking about when he said that black skin ain't no badge of fidelity, and white skin ain't incarnate evil. He had to dissociate from that particular brand of Islam.

**STEVENSON**

Right, and this is after his trip to Mecca.

**SMITH**

Mecca. I imagine he probably met [Osama] bin Laden over there. Bin Laden would have been probably younger than him at the time. But the thing is, the concept of jihad, a holy war, and being a warrior and being a fighter -- some people just -- you know, you going to take that so much, I've had my [inaudible] of this, if you're going to kill me, take me out right now, because if I got to live like this, it ain't worth living no way. So that ideology exists, and brothers get to that point here in America sometimes; [inaudible], 'cause if I got to live like this, life ain't worth living no way. So I can understand the brothers over there who strapped themselves with bombs and go take 15 or whatever amount of them they could take with them. Because there's a high calling that they feel, and it ain't down here at that particular time. If I got to live like this, it ain't worth living.

So going back, you asked me how did I decide to major in linguistics? As I said, I got arrested for using obscene and profane language in the presence of women and children, and I got acquitted, and I showed you the pictures that I gave the judge, the boxes of candies -- how can people sell these kind of candies in novelty stores, with "motherfucker" on it, and then you go and say that I've done something obscene? It's the context of the situation. If no intent of obscenity or profanity was meant, then you can't say that what I did was a crime. But they said I was disturbing the peace doing it, and that made it harder for them, because you can't be disturbing the peace at a public address in a free speech area on a university campus of Los Angeles; that had been decided by Mario Savio and those guys up in [University of California] Berkeley had already won that issue. That's why all of these campuses have to have designated free speech areas. So you can't say that

I'm violating the law in the free speech area of the UC campus: how many times do we got to win that in court? And so having that freedom -- I took mine all the way to the ghetto. [inaudible] Kanye West, and he didn't even curse. George Bush don't like black people.

**STEVENSON**

So tell me more about how you actually trained to be a linguist, maybe something about the professors --

**SMITH**

Meanwhile, I was sharing with you that when I left the Nation of Islam and just became what I call a Black Nationalist, I had this little group called United Front Against Imperialism. And United Front Against Imperialism, I was the Minister of Education, and I felt that one of the reasons that black people was having problems was because we couldn't read, that the white man was taking advantage of our illiteracy. When we was making money, we'd go to a car lot; we couldn't read, they'd take us off. And so I saw literacy as the key to liberation, in a sense, that at least you can play past some of the cheat if you can read. So I'm out here trying to teach young brothers to read, 'cause I had learned how to read, but I come to find out that I didn't learn how to read at [Paul Lawrence] Dunbar Elementary School [Oklahoma City, Oklahoma] here in Los Angeles; I had already learned how to read -- I said Dunbar, at Wadsworth Elementary, that's where I went -- I had learned to read at Dunbar Elementary in Oklahoma up to the fourth grade, because I didn't come to California until 1949, I was in the fourth grade when I came to California, I went to Wadsworth Elementary School, to [George Washington] Carver Junior High [School]; as I said, my parents moved across Slauson, so I had to transfer to [Thomas Alva] Edison. And so that experience of trying to teach literacy, and having failed at my attempts to do so, because I didn't understand the whole psychological, neurolinguistic process of decoding and encoding the graphic representation of speech.

And when I was in these linguistics classes, that became -- when you studied linguistics as a science, you're not trying to apply it, you're studying -- how do people do this? How do people even talk? So you had to take anatomy and physiology of speech, you had to know the Latin words for the vocal apparatus. These are terms -- and I'm learning Latin through the study of anatomy and physiology, because most of the medical terminology is in Latin, and the terms for the body is in Greek, or it may be reversed. But I know that medical terminology is heavily Latin and Greek; that comes from the contribution of those cultures to Germans or Western civilization. The point is that in studying linguistics, I saw how I was not only learning about language, I was learning the sciences that gird this thing. I also learned from Robert Williams that language is a thought process; all language begins as a thought. Vocalizations and gestures are just the way that people transmit thoughts, so I began to view linguistics as really a level of psychology. And

long before it was studied as a discipline of its own, there were people in psychology who were studying its thought process. And so that's why I gravitated more to the works of people like Chomsky, [Avram] Noam Chomsky, who was at MIT, and who studied language of the mind; he had that same kind of bit. He didn't come out of psychology, he was the mathematician and brilliant linguist in his own right. And as you see, he's a very, very progressive, anti-war, anti-imperialism too.

**STEVENSON**

Yes, he is.

**SMITH**

One of my Anglo heroes, he would be. But I had run across his works in my studies, and so I began to really feel that, man, you can do this. You can do this. And when I got the invitation to become a graduate student, it was kind of like a dare. Niggers didn't think I was going to make it. I'm talking inner-city brothers and friends of mine. "No, you can't hang. Them niggers got to be [inaudible] to go out there and mess with that." So it was like, if you go back and couldn't make it, you gonna be ashamed, because all the niggers [inaudible], "He couldn't hang." So I had to hang, I had to stay in there, and I said to myself, I said, "Look at these peckerwood sitting next to me. His mommy and daddy went to bed one night and had buck-naked fun, and one night or one evening or whatever day it was, nine months later, here he come. My mama and daddy went to bed and had some buck-naked fun, and nine months later here I come. How come he can sit up here and get it and I can't?" No, I don't believe it. He ain't got no more than me.

I did learn that he did have some advantages, because the schools that he was coming from sometimes prepared him a little bit better for what he was encountering at this stage of the game than I had been prepared in these inner-city schools of Los Angeles that I went to. I'd have probably been more prepared had I stayed in Oklahoma with the Dunbar in a segregated environment. But albeit I came to California because I was a child and with my parents, and I got what God wanted me to have, and I took what I had and made the most of it. So I went on out to Irvine and I hung. Did a graduate dissertation. My dissertation was entitled, The Evolution and Continuing Presence of the African Oral Tradition in Black America.[BY Dr. Ernie Adolphus Smith, UC Irvine, 1974]

**STEVENSON**

The Evolution and Continuing Presence --

**SMITH**

-- of the African Oral Tradition in Black America. I'm going to bring you a copy of it.

**STEVENSON**

-- African Oral Tradition -- OK.

**SMITH**

OK. Now I wanted to say the Evolution and Continuing Presence of the African Linguistic Tradition, but that would have required a linguist to be on my committee, and the linguist that I had, she didn't want to put her reputation on the line about the word "Ebonics," and I wasn't going to let the word "Ebonics" go, because in 1972, I was at the conference that Robert Williams held where he coined the term Ebonics, and I, as a scrivener, wrote the definition. And as you see in the readings that I gave you, if I couldn't do that, I didn't even need to be graduate student; this was an original study, this was original research. But I'd understood her; she didn't think the term would ever catch on. She lived to see it rock the world. Because when that Oakland School District passed that resolution, after 30 years of my being around here going -- I mean, not only here in America, going into the islands and stuff, giving lectures on this, because there was a brother, Mervyn [C.] Alleyne, whose work, African -- Linguistic Continuity of the African Language in the Caribbean -- there were a lot of scholars who had that same philosophy about black language in the Caribbean, so that encouraged me.

There was a guy, Colston [Richard] Westbrook, the dual linguistic heritage of America, he did a study of the language of the people of the -- Cameroon, Grasslands Bantu. Anyway, he died. Colton Westbrook was at San Francisco State. This is people whose stuff I was reading. Adrian Dove, who's now the California chairman of CORE, California, he had written challenging the civil service exam. He wrote -- created an instruments that was -- he feels, and I agree with him -- the forerunner of the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity, the acronym spells B-I-T-C-H. Robert Williams developed that test to prove the post of linguistic and cultural bias. This was before the term Ebonics was coined, he was studying this kind of language bias.

Well, before Robert Williams, Adrian Dove in the late -- he did his work in the early '60s, but by 1968, he had an article come out in Jet Magazine and Ebony Magazine, the test was called - he called it the Dove Counterbalance Test. But the popular magazines called it the Soul Folks Chitlin Test. This Chitlin Test was the same as the test that Robert Williams had developed with more psychological sophistication. Or Adrian Dove was challenging the civil service exam, because he felt that blacks were being denied employment in the Bay Area because of language and culture bias in the civil service exam, and to prove that the civil services and say I'm biased; Adrian Dove developed this Dove Counterbalance Test to prove that if I give you a test in my language, you gonna fail; if you give me one in your language about things that I don't know, you gonna fail. So these two guys were psycholinguists in their own right, in terms of understanding the bias of certain tests. Again, we're going back to meanings and word meanings.

And so those were things that I was reading as I was doing my study, when I knew that I had to study the African languages, because if I was going to prove that their was linguistic continuity in black America and the African

languages, I had to study at least one that was authentic African. Swahili was my language -- I took Swahili to meet my language requirement, but I had to take some courses in other languages and then Swahili in order to understand this whole phenomenon of their being linguistic continuity, because Swahili, even though it's a Bantu language, covers most of Southern Africa and much of West Africa. The Niger-Congo African languages are historically recorded as the languages that black Americans were primarily brought from, and not over in Southern and East Africa, which is where Swahili is. Swahili is a Bantu with Arabic vocabulary in it, it's a trade lingua franca, similar very much to the language in Niger, Hausa. Which again, it's a tribal language, but it's also a major lingua franca, because it has been relexified. It's that Bantu or Niger-Congo African language, with an Arabic vocabulary, because many of them are Muslims. The study of those languages, though, African languages, gave me sufficient evidence what I needed. But nobody understood what I was talking about on UC Irving's campus. A brother named Arthur Smith, who was at the speech department at UCLA at the time, had to come and do my qualifying exam. Now today his name is Molefi Asante, but he was Arthur Smith at that time. He had to come and join two other professors on my committee, because he's a UC faculty member, full professor, and so that's how I got through, because the Anglos were afraid to touch it, or didn't want to encourage that kind of thinking, but these brothers knew that you got something here; I think you got something here, and all you need to do is be able to understand the methodology of the science of linguistics to pass your oral exam, and then if you're going to do a qualitative study, that's one thing; if you're going to do a quantitative study, that's another.

I chose the quantitative route because one of my professors was also a statistician; his name was Mbatia, M-B-A-T-I-A. O-L-E, Oliver [L.E.] Mbatia. I don't know what his L-E stood for, but his first name was Oliver and his last name was Mbatia. He was from Kenya. And Dr. Mbatia helped me with my analysis of variants, and setting and designing my study. My study basically involved taking a population of in-school African-American children and an out-of-school population, and then giving them a test about words that blacks know a meaning for that is not commonly known in the Anglo community. My hypothesis was that the longer you go to school, the more honkified you get. I had to have males and females in my sub-sample, and I had hypothesized that the females get more honkified than brothers. And the test was made up of words -- and I have to bring you this, because people still ask -- it's being republished; the lexicon that I created for that study is -- book came out last year, and one of the sisters that edited -- not edited, but authored the book -- wrote and asked me for permission to use that entire work that I had did.

Anyway, the study was mostly Southern California, Orange County, San Bernardino County and LA County, and I took junior high and high school

students, in school and out of school, in all three of those counties, and I gave them all these tests. Now, I didn't administer all of the exams; I had graduate students helping me administer the test, because if you administer the test, then what happens is that there's what's called a Hawthorne Effect, you get what you want; you ask them the questions that you want, and so there's a bias that you're introducing to the thing, so you have to get people who don't have any investment other than, go administer this, and see what -- we'll examine what you got when you get back. As the dissertation points out, I had to -- and I designed my study -- and this something that Batia told me -- on what they call a Null Hypothesis, is where you discover something because you said there's gonna be no difference, and if there is a difference, "Wow!" So I worded the hypothesis that the in-school population wouldn't differ from the out-of-school population, but I was hypothesizing that honkification is a process of too much schooling in white institutions, that blacks go to white institutions.

Well, I had to reject the hypothesis that females get more honkified, because the females scored higher on the exam than the brothers. And this is a test about black culture and black language. And so as I addressed that phenomenon in my dissertation, I said maybe because brothers are using this rap and all of this stuff on sisters, that sisters know more about it than brothers. Plus sisters achieve higher in college than brothers, so they're probably better test-takers. I'm rationalizing the fact that sisters scored higher than brothers on something black when they were supposed to be getting more honkified than brothers. And it was inexplicable to me that sisters would score higher on this test of inner-city black male language. Woofin', playin' the dozens, you don't find sisters doing that. If they do, they do it with less -- it's real subtle. Whereas brothers roll right up, "Fuck you, your mama," make it rhyme and all that kind of stuff. But that's not the way it goes with sisters. If sisters signify a high sign or woof on each other, it's not in a ritualized fashion. Brothers actually get into verbal duels; they have to rhyme and they have to take turns. This -- I was studying this because -- they told me that this kind of stuff goes in on Africa, where men engaged -- not young men, old men -- young boys engaged in verbal duels, and this verbal dueling, I said, if it's not something that whitey is doing, this must be something we do. Were we doing this in Africa? And I find out, yeah, people have confirmed that this verbal dueling went on in Africa.

**STEVENSON**

And what would that have been called, in some of those cultures in Africa? Does it have a name?

**SMITH**

Different tribes would call it something different. I did find out that when you were born, you're just a thing until you can talk, a kintu as opposed to a muntu. A kintu is a thing, a muntu is a person.

**STEVENSON**

And that's spelled -- kintu?

**SMITH**

K-I-N-T-U/

**STEVENSON**

And Muntu?

**SMITH**

M-U-N-T-U. And I'm sure I have it in the -- what's the name -- I haven't even covered this kind of stuff in so long that for you to bring it to me now -- I'm sure I did have one or two or three words that they had for this, but a particularly African word that was for that doesn't come to me right off. I'll bring you the dissertation and you can find it. So as I was saying, the majoring in linguistics became like an obsession. It was no longer just a thing to get a degree; it became a question for the truth. It became something like, you're a scientist, man. This is science, and you're a scientist. And when you go to [inaudible], you'll see why they was mad, why [Frankenstein] got mad and wanted to kill them all, 'cause they didn't want to accept your theory. I mean, it became that kind of a question, that you felt that there was solid bits of empirical evidence to support what you were saying, and these people who didn't want to accept it because they didn't know what they were talking about, you know what I mean? They didn't know what they were talking about and couldn't challenge you, because you were so far out ahead of them, you know your stuff better than they thought you should, and so they didn't want to acknowledge you. I have every reason to stick with it until somebody came and proved me wrong, and to this day, ain't nobody come and prove me wrong. And in fact, 6,000 members of the Linguistic Society of America were asked by journalists who were making fun of the Oakland School District resolution, told them, "No, we can't support what you're talking about. There is a genetic relationship between the African languages and the language of black people in America."

**STEVENSON**

OK. For the record, can you tell me a little bit about Robert Williams? Now, would he be the father of Ebonics? Or were --

**SMITH**

Yes, in terms of the actual author of the term. And in fact, as I said, the guy who really woke me up to, don't look at linguistics as just studying language; look at it as studying thought. Because what's coming out of somebody else's -- somebody's mouth, no matter what language it is, they're transmitting a thought, and that's psychology, looking at the mind. And so yes, I would say he is definitely the father of Ebonics. My contribution was nothing but wording the definition. The definition of Ebonics is the -- I worded it -- the linguistic and para-linguistic features which on a [concentric continuum] represent the language of the United States descendents of African origin, in the Caribbean and in America. The evolution of -- I'm

getting my dissertation title mixed up with the definition of linguistics -- the linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a linguistic continuum, concentric circles, [inaudible], linguistic continuum -- concentric linguistic continuum -- represent the [inaudible] linguistic continuity of Africa and America. It's -- I don't understand why I don't even understand my own definition -- I didn't create the definition; I worded it. But you get the phrasing. That experience of that conference -- as I said, when I came back to Irvine from that conference in Saint Louis, I knew I had my dissertation topic, and I had the study that I wanted to do. Because I had done enough reading, and I was ready -- I started in '70; my dissertation defense was in '72, and I finished my dissertation in '74. So it took me all told four years.

**STEVENSON**

I see. And do you know, since we're recording this, what was Robert William's background, and how did he start researching or creating the whole concept?

**SMITH**

OK. Robert Williams is from the South, Deep South, Arkansas. And he describes his upbringing as black in the Deep South, and then moving into the academic arena as a kind of -- in fact, I told you he had a new book out; did I show you his book?

**STEVENSON**

I don't think so.

**SMITH**

OK. Cut it off --

**STEVENSON**

OK.

## *1.3. Session 3B*
## *April 2, 2007*

**STEVENSON**

OK. So we were talking about Robert Williams, and you were mentioning his most current book: Racism Learned at an Early Age [Racism Learned at an Early Age Through Racial Scripting]. And --

**SMITH**

Because he had always been concerned about the education of black children and bias, the disproportionate number of black children being placed under special education, and it wasn't for the gifted; it was to demean them, to denigrate them. So his mission, him, Adrian -- not Adrian -- well, Adrian also, but Wade Nobles, Asa [G.] Hilliard [III] -- these are brothers in psychology who -- 30 years ahead of their time, as far as people understanding what their theories, what they were saying back then in the '70s was. Because it's being borne out now. They were the founders of the Association of Black Psychologists. In fact, we've got a sister here coming

today, Sandra Cox, Coalition of Mental Health Professionals, she's coming to talk with us about some problems that she's encountering, that she feels that black people who are advocates for mental help need to be up on, so she's going to make a presentation, and going to do some work with her organization, the Coalition for Mental Health Professionals. But I'm just saying that these people have been on the cutting edge, not just in terms of theory, but actually trying to serve our people. A lot of our people just can't cope. I'm a dead sinner, you know what I mean, but some of my people -- and this whole attitude that mental illness is like cancer; it can't be cured. I don't believe that. I believe that people can get back some vestige of normalcy and cope as well as anybody else. If you don't have a strict definition of what normal is, a wide range of normal, and the wider you make the range, the more normal some people will be, if you understand their situation. You don't walk in their shoes -- the Indians probably, "You don't walk in my moccasins, you can't understand what I'm talking about.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Why don't you tell me a little bit about this conference, where it would have been the first conference where Ebonics was discussed?

**SMITH**

OK. This was a conference that was called in 1972. Robert Williams had been given some funds by the National Institute of Mental Health, and I proposed -- I presumed, I should say -- that the reasons they had granted him funding was because they had already -- they meaning NIMH -- had already issued some RFPs [Request for Proposal] two or three years earlier for some studies on the cognitive and linguistic development of the African-American child, and they were getting results back from these earlier studies. And there was conflicting viewpoints, in terms of what was coming in to NIMH, because they're perceiving this, that some people are coming from an African-centered point of view, and some people are coming from what Robert Williams calls the deficit model, and Robert Williams asked, "Well, let's bring these people together and let's find out what's going on."

It's like the experiment that I'm told -- I don't know that this happened -- that were some people in a mental institution, and both of them -- three of them -- were claiming that they were Jesus Christ. And they figured, what would happen if we put all these three people together that claimed to be Jesus Christ? They put them together, and one of them said the others, "He's a fool, he's crazy, thinking he's Jesus Christ." "You think he's Jesus Christ?" So the other one said, "No. How he gonna be Jesus Christ? I'm Jesus Christ." So one of them know this one here ain't Jesus Christ because he's claiming Jesus Christ. So he goes to the other one and says, you know, "I asked this guy over here was you Jesus Christ, and he says he's Jesus Christ. What you think?" "He crazy. Everybody know I'm Jesus Christ." So now he got two people nullifying each other, he said, "That must be him 'cause these two have nullified each other."

That came to my mind because sometimes people -- as I said awhile ago about Frankenstein, a mad scientist whose research was unacceptable to the scientific community. Black scholarship will never be accepted. And to the extent that you recognize that that's the nature of the institutional racism that we're living in, usually have to go on and prove that they don't know all they need to know. If they were all that and a bag of chips, they wouldn't be in the shape they're in. So we began to understand that they're the ones that got some sicknesses that need to be addressed, because any time somebody's born thinking that because of their skin color or their particular race, which a convenient definition, because they can't even prove what that means -- they got a sickness. Frances [Cress] Welsing would also have to be included in those who have challenged white superiority in a very scholarly way, wasn't allowed to practice her profession, psychiatry, and so you just be prepared to accept that though we look for white acceptance, and you understand why your people can't accept it, because we all suffer from the same sickness. The white man don't say it's all right, the blacks ain't gonna accept it. So just go to do what you know to do scientifically, trying to do the best science as you know, and recognize that even the definition of what is scientific may have some influence or taint of white supremacy in the methods that are supposed to be irrefutable.

This is why they now began to more or less accept qualitative dissertations as opposed to quantitative as just as legitimate, that a case study of one individual or a cohort group, with none of these analysis of variables and mathematical designs to prove predictability and all that, it don't mean nothing, because figures can lie and lies can figure. There are three kinds of lies: a lie, a damn lie, and a statistician. So these people that depend on statistics to try to prove some scientific point -- how far are you going to take that, when you know the limits of that kind of mathematics. I admired him because of his ability; he understood psychometrics, measuring intelligence using their methods. And he would help black students understand the method. OK, if you're going to be into that area of psychology, and you want to know testing and assessment and measurement and all of the language, how to use and discuss this in the metric tongue, that was his forte: he was good at math. You asked me about his upbringing?

**STEVENSON**

Yes.

**SMITH**

OK. And so that background got him through, his ability in mathematics, I believe, is his real forte, because he understand psychometry. And students who were coming along in his generation had to have a strong psychometric Binet [Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test], Wechsler [Intelligence Scale for Children, WISC]-Peabody [Picture Vocabulary Test, PPVT], all of these -- ETS, Educational Testing Institute, that's all they were pushing was these

mathematical models of assessment. And you see, because that's a big industry -- the Mafia, they sell these tests to the school districts, so they're not going to admit this stuff is bunk. You disprove it by not taking the test, or failing the test and achieving anyway. They gonna call everything you do sambo research. OK, I'm doing sambo research. They never want to accept black professionals. Medicine's the same way. You read the book of Carson, Kit Carson, or this brother over at UCLA, the neurosurgeon, what's his name? -- at Cedar-Sinai.

**STEVENSON**

Oh, Keith --

**SMITH**

[Dr.] Keith [L.] Black. Brilliant neurosurgeon. So anything that we do, we got to be better than them. And so we proud to say -- [inaudible]. Because if you made it, it's because they know you good. The only way they keep a lot of the blacks who are good in athletics down is they start using academic scores. Brother -- a lot of times in high school, the fastest man at our school wasn't allowed to run, because he didn't have the grades. So this guy that was winning, he wasn't -- we got to the city finals or the state finals, he proved that he wasn't shit; they wouldn't let the guy that was the best man at our school run, because he didn't have a C average. It had nothing to do with his ability as a track star. But that's to give them honkies a chance to make it to the city finals. I'm just saying that's my view.

It's the same way, if you see a brother in any field that's known, he's there because he don't want his own [inaudible]; he ain't about nothing. [inaudible] what the honkies said; the white boy don't want to recognize you -- he got to have an advantage. He don't want to start even; he got -- you don't give him an advantage, he don't want it. He don't want to even be in it if he can't have an advantage. So once you understand that's the nature of his thinking and his system, then you got to start 10 yards or 15 yards behind him. If you got to start from behind him to even be in the race, all right. You got to -- if you stay the same distance behind him, you as good as him, because you started a certain distance behind him. Now, if you get up with him you already showing you better than him, because you had to come from 10 yards behind just to catch up with him. Now, to get out in front of him, how much better than him do you got to be? If you got to start back here and just stay even, you as good as him, because you at the same distance -- you didn't lose no ground with him running ahead of you. If you get up with him, people know he's faster, because he started from back there, and look at what he did; he caught up. So I know he faster; if he had just had the same start, he'd have been him. People gonna know that, 'cause this is what he did; he caught up with him, just wasn't no more room to run. If he'd had a few more feet to run, he'd have beat him, probably, but we know he did catch up with him. Now, but if you catch up with him and go

past him, you two times better. You ain't just as good, you not just better, you two times better.
So that was the attitude you had to have sitting up in these classes at school. You can't just be as good, meaning, "Oh, I came in behind him, so I've got to accept a C." "I got to get an A; I can't accept no B. I'm not just better than that; I'm superior." So that's the attitude you have to have when you sit up in these classes with these people. And so going back to mathematics, which really wasn't my strong suit, but I had to get enough of it to show that I could do it. But as far as one of the majors in numbers, and teach numbers? No. If -- no, the other Dr. Smith, he made me understand math from a music point of view. Master musician, pianist, and he's talking about the quarter notes and 30 second notes, the timing in music and all that, he made me understand that math is in everything.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Going back to the conference, could you explain the -- in terms of Ebonics, you mentioned the deficit model, and then also the African-centered one. So you talk about both of those, and what were -- at that conference, what were the issues relative to both?

**SMITH**

At this conference, a paper was presented, and the presenter was using the term black English. If you use the term black English, you're already assuming to be fact something that is not proven. So when the paper is presented, saying that this is not black English -- you can't say it's black English and not English at the same time. That's an oxymoron. So the need for a term to define what you're talking about became very apparent, because anytime you used to black dialect, that's still -- you're talking about the dialect of English, of course -- so there was no term that was unique enough to use it so that both of us as scientists can use this term, and I can hold onto my theory and you can hold onto yours, because you're talking about some black sounds, Ebonics, black sounds. Now, you say these black sounds are related to the German language continuum, and you're saying that these black sounds are related to the African language continuum; y'all both agree you're talking about black sounds.
So [if these methodologists] could accept it and not have a hang-up about whether it was the African dialect or the English dialect, because they were concerned with trying to assist people in gaining some fluency where they had lost it or never had it because of birth defects, congenital or -- I learned this -- if it's present at birth, it's congenital. If it's caused by something in the bloodline or the genes, it's endogenous; if it's caused by something that was an assault on the fetus during embryonic development, it's exogenous. Congenital only means present at birth; I learned that in linguistics, because we would use the term congenital, not knowing that there's an etiology for congenital differences.

Hesitation phenomena is a better term than stuttering, because people have a way of learning how to control their stammers and speech stutters by using lexical fill-ins, and you don't know that they're really masking a stuttering problem. And so they give a long pause, and they actually -- "Well, and so..." and so these hesitation phenomena, there's nothing being said, but it's a way of filling in that space; they don't want you to interrupt as they're talking, and so they say something to continue the dialogue without an interruption. There's other kinds of hesitations where a person is saying -- "Uh -- ah -- he -- he -- he hit me." That kind of stuttering, these speech pathologists and speech therapists deal with, whether they're biophysical in terms of their vocal apparatus or something not making a synapse in the axons and the dendrites in the brain. There are all kinds of etiologies for speech differences.

And so we learn in linguistics not to immediately go to go to pathology as the cause of this speech difference. Look at this as a difference and not a defect or deficiency. So the whole science of speech pathology is based on pathology, because they're trained to look for etiologies that are biophysical in nature. A linguist would see the speech behavior and have to come up with terminology to describe what's there without assuming to be fact something that hasn't been proved. And so using the term "Ebonics" gave at least a way to describe something that I was calling an African phenomenon, because I could trace the word "Ebonics" all the way back to ancient Kenya. It's in this book at least four times. Even Webster's Dictionary will tell you the origin of this word, "ebony," is ancient Egypt. But I knew that this word, "ebony," was an Egyptian word that really, really could have been the use of the word "Ebonics," because I knew that I was using a word that was not of the Latin language or the Greek language family. This goes all the way back to my mother tongue. Had some problems with the word "phonics," but I was able to write a paper on the origin of the word "phonics," because you know all these words that began with "ph" had an "f" sound, and so "f" in the Greek language, low labiodental fricative, that's the lip against the teeth.

**STEVENSON**

Labial -- dental --

**SMITH**

-- dental fricative.

**STEVENSON**

F-R- -- fricative?

**SMITH**

Fricative. That means friction is made. Now, the "f" sound, a labiodental, is similar to a lenguadental, a lengua-interdental. A lengua-interdental is the tongue between the teeth; dentals refer to the teeth. So you have a labiodental, that's lip against the teeth. F and v are labiodentals. One is voiced, meaning the vocal cords vibrate -- "v v v v v" -- and on f -- "f f f f" -- there's no vibration of the vocal folds. The air comes through the glottis --

that's the space between the vocal cords -- unobstructed, so you get that f-f-f. The "th" sound is also voiced and voiceless, and it's an interdental. "This," "that," "these," "those." Some languages just don't have interdentals; they have labiodentals. So they pronounce the f for the th sound. So like "Smif," like on my license plate, "Smif." "Baf," "breaf." And that's because the language that they speak has no labiodentals, and so they're using the closest approximation to a labiodental, to an interdental; if they don't have an interdental, they use a labiodental. The -- you asked me about --

**STEVENSON**

Well, the deficit model versus the --

**SMITH**

Deficit versus [inaudible] model.

**STEVENSON**

Right.

**SMITH**

A difference, as I say, is -- you see a difference, and acknowledge the difference, but you don't have to assume a deficiency. And so that was the debate in psychology at the time, that black people, black children, were different, but the challenge was, are they deficient? And when Robert Williams and the Association of Black Psychology first challenged it in the courts, the Larry P. versus Wilson Riles.

**STEVENSON**

Larry P. versus --

**SMITH**

Yeah, the case Larry P. v. Wilson Riles, the Association of Black Psychologists challenged the San Francisco Unified School District using IQ test scores to place back children in classes for the mentally retarded. They had three categories of mental retardation at that time: educable mentally retarded, trainable mentally retarded, and profoundly mentally retarded. So EMR, TMR, and PMR were categories based on how low you scored or how high you scored on this test. If you scored reasonably high, but [inaudible] normal, then you were educable. If you scored 15 deviations from the norm, 15 points, then you were trainable. If you scored beyond that, you were profoundly mentally retarded. Now, the test doesn't measure what you know; it measures what the person that put the items on the test think you ought to know, and it's in the language of the test makeup.

So the test's already biased, and this is what the Association of Black Psychologists show Judge Robert Peckham in the San Francisco -- well, he was actually United States District Court. That judge ruled that they couldn't use these tests in the state of California, because the tests were culturally and linguistically biased. Their derivatives are still being used; just give them a different name. STAT 9, [inaudible]. Let the issue die down for 10, 20 years and they pop up again. The Bell Curve; they have to argue against

the Bell, beyond the Bell. White supremacy. They're in Iraq what they were doing in Vietnam. They don't learn from their mistakes; the world sees that they were wrong, but they don't care. We'll be over there; they've got at least a third of white America going with them, and some Negro fools. A brother told me yesterday there was a black man down in the South, and he worked for a white man that he thought was all that and a bag of chips. And a hurricane come through there and destroy that man's property, the white man's property. He said, the Negro said, "He done messed up now. He messed up Mr. [Charlie]'s property now; he done messed up." In other words, he thought so much of Mr. Charlie that God done messed up. [laughter] Sycophants and Uncle Tommies some niggers is. This white man's property got destroyed by a hurricane, and God done messed up. You done messed up now; [inaudible]. You messed up Mr. Bubba's property. I'm just saying, that mentality. So some of them, they're supporting this mess in Vietnam, in Iraq.

But most people -- how you gonna tell me you got some national interest in another man's house? You gonna try to justify bombing and killing up all of these people, talking about your interest in defending your homeland? You start out way up here in Afghanistan; now you over here in Iraq. "Well, he was brutal to his people -- kill that man's sons, and then kill him." That ain't right. That is not right. But you got these old Republicans, and as I said, you got a lot of Negro fools that's going with this mess, but that ain't right.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Again talking about the conference, so you've talked about the deficit model. That's one camp of scholars that were at that conference. And you've talked a little bit, but if you could just, for the record, the African-centered model.

**SMITH**

Well, the African-centered model is that any Africans are human, because the deficit models implies that we had no language; all we had was distress signals, mating calls, and some grunts that we would use to stake out our turf. We were comparable to the chimpanzee and the gorillas. That's the deficit model, that Africans didn't have languages until they came into contact with Europeans, and Europeans had to talk baby talk to them, and this is when they began to develop the capacity for communicating with humans. That is inherent in that whole pathology model, no matter what cover they put on it, in terms of, "Oh, it's just different." OK, no. They don't even want to acknowledge Africans as humans. Now, once you start from the premise that we had language, gave human civilization literacy, then you don't even want to engage in a debate about whether or not you human; you want to find the empirical evidence to prove your particular subject is valid; your particular theory has some validity. So the African-centered model is, you start from Africa. The definition, as I said, was the linguistic and para-linguistic features which on the concentric continuum represent the

speech and communicative components on United State slave descendents of African origin. OK, the premise that you're arguing from is that Africans had languages, and if you go in concentric circles -- you know what a concentric is? A circle within a circle?

**STEVENSON**

Yes.

**SMITH**

You go from a point, go from Africa, anywhere you go, Africa is the origin; this is the point that you start from. And you find going back towards that center circle, you find a continuum of linguistic behavior that is related. So this is what the premise of Ebonics is, is that these features that we see have undergone some changes, so they don't look like the original African languages because of the influence of cultures and the languages that they've come into contact with. So when they had contact with the French, then those Africans relexified their language with a French vocabulary; when they had encounters with the Portuguese, they relexified their language with Portuguese. With the Germans, with the English; wherever they had contact with these Europeans, one of the ways that they adapted was to borrow the language of those people, in terms of its vocabulary. But not familiar with the thought process of these languages -- they did know the verb system; they didn't understand the syntax. Sometimes they didn't even understand the meanings of the words that some of them had, because the concepts that they were bringing to the African people were foreign to them.

**STEVENSON**

OK. And you mentioned something about scholars in the Caribbean who were doing similar work. Who were a couple of the major ones doing similar work?

**SMITH**

As I said, Mervyn Alleyne. There was a sister -- Dalby -- no, Dalby I think was a white -- what was that sister's name? I'm taking my time. It wasn't Geneva Spiderman, she was from north Detroit. I can see her face just as plain, but I can't put a name -- it'll come to me.

**STEVENSON**

OK. We can go back to it. So -- and just for the record, as far as -- were there leading proponents at that conference of the individuals of that deficit model at that conference?

**SMITH**

All of the ones who were from education and speech pathology were from the deficit model, because they hadn't bothered to consider that there was an African language system that they should be looking to for these speech differences. They were arguing that it was different because of economics, socio-economics and poverty. Well, clearly, if I don't pronounce an "r" in the word "for" because I'm poor, that means everybody that's poor ought not to be able to pronounce an "r." You can't tell me that it's economics and that

somehow economics makes for the linguistic difference; you can't make that kind of a leap. If I don't say "running" and I say "runnin'," if I'm not pronouncing a dorsal velar sound -- dorsal meaning the back of the tongue against the soft palate --

**STEVENSON**

Dorsal velar?

**SMITH**

Dorsal velar. Ing. The n with the little g-hook on it, that's the dorsal velar. The n without the hook is the apico alveolar, the apex of the tongue, the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge, the gums.

**STEVENSON**

Alveolar --

**SMITH**

Alveolar is a d or t sound. D-d-d-dah, t-t-t. This is apico alveolar. A dorsal velar sound is the back of the tongue against the velum or soft palate. Ing, ing, ing. That's a nasal sound.

**STEVENSON**

And you're spelling velar V-E- --

**SMITH**

-- L-A-R.

**STEVENSON**

All right. And let's see, al- --

**SMITH**

Alveolar is A-L-V-E-O-L-A-R.

**STEVENSON**

OK. And the first part of that was --

**SMITH**

Apico. Apex of the tongue. A-P-I-C-O. Apico alveolar.

**STEVENSON**

Oh, A-P-I-C-O.

**SMITH**

Apico alveolar. Apex of the tongue. Apico is just --

**STEVENSON**

OK, right. So after this conference came, can you tell me what kind of repercussions there were, not only in linguistic circles but beyond that?

**SMITH**

The first tactic that the white supremacists used was not to recognize the term, and they wouldn't even put it in their dictionaries. It wasn't considered scholarly; it wasn't considered anything, until 1996. For 30 years, there was never the term Ebonics in the American-English dictionary, even though the lexicographers of Webster; the lexicographers of Random House, Funk & Wagnall's, Oxford -- all of these dictionaries knew of the term, because it was presented at conferences. I presented it at the linguistic conferences; the American Dialect Society -- they were all familiar with it. So any of them

who were working as consultants or involved in annual revisions or updates of the [Heinle's Newbury House] Dictionary of American English, [The] American Heritage [Dictionary of the English Language] included, were familiar with the term. But they had a tactic, because see, to encourage the notion of black people having a language that is not English was also a way of supporting Black Nationalism. A nation has its own language. A nation is a historically-evolved, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, a common territory, and a common psychological makeup, manifested in the common culture and a common economic life. That is by definition language other than English, that immediately supports the notion of non-self-governing nationhood, which the United States ain't about to recognize and give no credence to. (phone ringing) Let me answer the phone.

## *1.4. Session 3C*
## *April 2, 2007*

**STEVENSON**
OK. So you were talking about the tactics of whites after this conference.
**SMITH**
Yeah. It was not until the Oakland School Board's resolution that they were compelled to enter it into the dictionary. But they entered it without even giving acknowledgement as to the origin of the term, and we use it as a synonym for black English, and it is in fact an antonym. The definition itself says it's the linguistic and para-linguistic features which on the concentric continuum represent the speech and linguistic competence of United States slave descendents of African origin.
**STEVENSON**
OK. Tell me -- lay out of me the events that led up to the Oakland School District decision. Who were the key players there?
**SMITH**
I have been doing some consulting for the Oakland Unified School District, so I can only talk about my part in it. I did a workshop up there, the school district superintendent was at the time a sister by the name of Carolyn Gethridge.
**STEVENSON**
Gethridge?
**SMITH**
Carolyn Gethridge. She was the school superintendent in Oakland. The people who had invited me up were Yvonne Strozier, from the State Department [Division] of Compensatory Education [California Department of Education]. They had every year an annual SEP conference. So I was like a standard presenter at the SEP [Standard English Proficiency] conference.
**STEVENSON**

That's SE --

**SMITH**

SEP, Standard English Proficiency. In LA Unified, it was called LEP -- no... SEP, LEP -- PEP, PEP program.

**STEVENSON**

PEP [Proficiency in English Program].

**SMITH**

PEP program. That was headed by one of the sisters -- Toni Humberg [phonetic] -- she was tired, what was her name? All these names getting away from me.

**STEVENSON**

Right. And that was Yvonne, last name was...?

**SMITH**

Strozier.

**STEVENSON**

Strozier. Strozier.

**SMITH**

Yeah, the PEP program was in LA and the SEP program was a state-funded program, but it was all about trying to do something about the English language proficiency of African-American children. They were not given any assistance federally, because to be given federal assistance, you had to have as your home language a language other than English. The problem was that people were putting -- meaning black people -- were putting Ebonics on their home language identification forms; some of them were putting Nigritia on their home language identification forms; others were putting Pan-African language.

In other words, children -- take Afro-American Studies classes, and they are child-bearing at the time, some of them, because of their Afro-centric idealism, they began to name their children African names, and identified themselves, defending on how staunch Afro-centrics they are, when they began to identify with certain philosophies. And claiming a language other than English, it was part of that thing. These young parents were demanding that the school district give their children the same advantages or treatment that they were giving anyone else who's identified a language other than English as their primary language.

In the state of California, when you identify a language other than English as your home language, that identification of a home language other than English as your primary language triggers an assessment. You don't wait until the child's in third or fourth grade to give them an assessment; that immediately triggers an assessment, and it depends on how that child scores on that assessment whether or not that child is placed in the core curriculum of the school district, which by law is in English, that's the official language of instruction in California, or an alternatively designed special instruction in English, which can be ESL [English as a Second Language], bilingual

education. If the route is bilingual education, then they have to apply for federal supplements, because these are children whose district doesn't have funds to address their needs, so they ask for a federal supplement. Not supplanting, supplement, meaning: we need some help.
We got a sizeable population of students here, and we're applying for some federal assistance, because these children are Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hispanic; they speak a language other than English as their primary language, we've given them assessments, and we feel that they're not going to be able to succeed in the language of the classroom in English. So we need federal funds to give them some special help, hire teachers, so whatever's necessary to address their needs. If there's only one blind child in the district, the district has the obligation to education that child and get that child the necessary support. So if there's only one parent in the district putting Ebonics down, the district has an obligation to treat that child fairly, meaning equal opportunity. This is the African descendent who says that my primary language is an African language, and I want my child to be given English as a second language, or a specially-designed alternative instruction, other than what you're offering the mainstream, English-speaking population.
So 99% of the black population in Oakland was not even included in this resolution; this was a dozen or so parents who had identified themselves and their child, and themselves as parents, as speakers of a language other than English in the home, and were demanding of their school district a vindication of their rights. They had rights in equal educational opportunity in a language that they could understand. And the school district was by law obligated to address their unmet needs. And the school district didn't just pass a resolution saying we're going to adopt this position. They created a task force on the education of black children. They had NAACP and all the nice creatures and everybody in the district that they knew was going to tell the parents that, "Y'all are crazy." But they couldn't do that, because the way they set it up, they asked the people who were pushing the Afro-centric view to come and make presentations, and they asked the people who didn't accept the Afro-centric view to come and make presentations.
As it turned out, nobody on the non-Afro-centric view could tell where the term came from, but they had to admit, "Yeah, that's the guy that invented the term." They had to all admit that; he invented the term. They said, "Well, what do he say it be?" And he said it refers to an African language system; it was a rejection of the deficit model inherit in the use of the term black English. When you say we speak black English and that our differences are related to pathology, we reject that model. We don't leave that black people speak the way they speak because they have thick tongues, big lips, and trapezoid nostrils and [inaudible] of the nasal cavity. We reject that whole biophysical pathology model, and we definitely rejected the notion that it's cognitive. Because they're going to say, if it's not biophysical, in

terms of your anatomy, your apparatus for speaking good English, then there's something wrong with your brain. So whether it's psychopathology or biophysical pathology, it was all pathology, black English is based on white folks having to talk in an infantile language to black slaves in order for them to grasp European concepts and thoughts. So in the audience and the school district, some of the school district board members came to the great collegial debate, they called it -- and remind me to bring the documentation on all of that, too.

**STEVENSON**

This would have been the debate --

**SMITH**

The great collegial debate in Oakland. That's what they dubbed it.

**STEVENSON**

Debate in Oakland.

**SMITH**

So the school board came to the discussion, and the school board -- they didn't have a vote or anything, they just heard the presentations. And the school board -- I have to also give Toni Cook -- 'cause she was a black board member that accepted the premise also, because she was the one that had to frame the resolution for the school district. They had an attorney that wrote the definition for the school district, and he used the word "genetic." I wouldn't have written the definition the way he wrote it, but you can defend it, because the way it read, it sounded as if he was saying that the black people acquired their language genetically, from -- like it was DNA [Deoxyribonucleic acid] transmitted.

But in the science of linguistics, the word "genetics" applies, or is applied, in reference to a common genesis. We're not talking about DNA. Language is about genetic-related, have an origin that is the same, a common genesis. And they were using genetic in a purely biological sense, and not a linguistic sense, and that's what the Linguistic Society of America defended, was the use of the term genetics in linguistics, and telling the press that in the science of linguistics, the word genetic refers to languages that have a common genesis or origin, and that school district resolution was perfectly acceptable for what they were defining. They were defining a language other than English that is spoken in the homes of these black parents. So the school board passed a resolution, and I imagine if [Albert Arnold] Gore [Jr.] had won, Gethridge would have became Secretary of Education, because she was very popular. Across the country, she got on a speaking tour of her town, explaining what her resolution was about. She was not a linguist.

**STEVENSON**

Now how does she spell her name, do you --

**SMITH**

Gethridge. G-E-T-H-R-I-D-G-E.

**STEVENSON**

G-E-T-H-R- --
**SMITH**
Gethridge.
**STEVENSON**
-- ridge. OK. And Strozier?
**SMITH**
Strozier. S-T-R-O-Z-I-E-R. Strozier.
**STEVENSON**
Strozier. OK, great.
**SMITH**
Yvonne Strozier. [inaudible] Nabihah Shakir, because she was in charge of the SEP program in Oakland.
**STEVENSON**
Shakir? Like -- and the first name?
**SMITH**
Nabihah. N-A-B-A-H-A-H. N-A-B-I-H-A-H. Nabihah.
**STEVENSON**
N-A-B-I. OK.
**SMITH**
Nabihah. Shakir is S-H-A-K-I-R, Shakir. Nabihah Shakir.
**STEVENSON**
And she was --
**SMITH**
She's the director of the SEP program in Oakland. Yvonne Strozier from the State Department of Compensatory Education in California, State Department of Education.
**STEVENSON**
OK. So another term that came up in a couple of the articles that you gave me is, African-American Vernacular English. Now, distinguish that -- you've already talked about black English as opposed to Ebonics. Now, where does African-American Vernacular English, as a term...?
**SMITH**
Two things about it. Any term that has the word English in it implies that the language that you're talking about is genetically related to English and to the German language from which English is derived. Inherent in any term that has the word English in it is the assumption of a kinship, genetically, with the English language continuum, with the German language thought process. That's the first thing about that. The second thing: a vernacular -- vernacular is a language of a slave. If you read the dictionary definition of vernacular itself, it's the language of slaves taught by the master. This is the master's baby-talk. This is the master's baby-talk that you have adopted as your mother tongue. That's what's inherent in the term vernacular. The master created these vernaculars of English to communicate with his black vassals.

The point about that is, the same people in Haiti talk the same way as the people in Martinique. So how is it that people was using the same ersatz deviations from French in places 2-3,000 miles away from each other? How is it that the English in America has the same thing as the English in Jamaica? Differences. So if you say that this is vernacular created by Ole Master to talk to his vassals, how is that making the same ersatz deviations? How are they mutilating the English language in the exact same rule-governed ways? Because even the people who claim it's a vernacular acknowledge systematicity. So if it's a systematic, rule-governed and predictably-patterned vernacular, they can't explain how it is that all of the salve masters made the same mutilations of their language. So rather than accept the African systematicity as the sub-stratum with their words borrowed in, which makes more sense, they're doing the same thing because they came from the same language base. They're trying to claim that this is German mutilated. Now, how did you make the same mutilations as this man made? They can't explain it.

**STEVENSON**

So essentially, African-American Vernacular English, just as black English is an antonym, for Ebonics.

**SMITH**

Yeah

**STEVENSON**

OK. All right. So what year was the Oakland decision?

**SMITH**

'96. December 16.

**STEVENSON**

'96. OK. Also, could you talk a little bit about the treatment of Ebonics, or how Ebonics could be treated in the context of bilingualism, and why it was not, why it's still not, treated the same way as bilingualism and bilingual education, which is something we in California -- it's very large, huge.

**SMITH**

One, because most black people are not putting Ebonics on their home language. The district has no affirmative action to force black parents to put a language other than English as their primary language so that the district can offer them bilingual education. In fact, there's been such a backlash against the Hispanics in the bilingual education that Negroes are going to have a hell of a time getting anything similar to what they get. Because they wiped that out in their backlash against illegal immigration. The validity of teaching a child in a language that he can understand is internationally recognized.

The United Nations, in 1955, passed a resolution on teaching children in their mother tongue. It's axiomatic, that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. And they cite three reasons: psychologically, it's the system for meaning for signs in his mind work automatically for

expression and understanding; sociologically, it's the language of the group, to which members of the group that he belongs; and educationally, he learns more quickly through a familiar linguistic medium than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. So teaching a child in a language that he can understand, it's just common sense. So the anti-bilingual education pushed Ebonics and its quest for equal treatment -- yeah, we'll give you equal treatment we giving them; we ain't giving nobody no bilingual education. How do you like that?

**STEVENSON**

So there really was no groundswell in the black community to --

**SMITH**

Oh, there was a groundswell. But white supremacy, you understand -- I mean, it's scripted. And the implications of Black Nationalism is that if we acknowledge these people got a language, we acknowledge they got thought. [inaudible] having a language, they ain't got to thoughts that we don't give them. Humans have thoughts; dogs don't have thoughts, [inaudible] and baboons don't have thoughts. If you got a language, you got a thought. Carter G. Woodson said they didn't want to acknowledge us as even having a thought. In his book, The Miseducation of the Negro, he talked to this issue on page 19.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Also, I'd like to know about any adverse reaction to Ebonics within our community, within the black community.

**SMITH**

I haven't had the hostility from just lay people in the community that you get from educators, because educator's a job skill.

**STEVENSON**

Well, speak about there.

**SMITH**

There are people in the mental health community who are much more accepting of it; there are brothers who go down to the Department of Social Services, and they put Ebonics down as their primary language, and they demand social workers who can communicate with them in their language. And if it's a bourgeois nigger, "You don't speak my dialect. Give me somebody --" Did you put Ebonics down on your job application? They're [inaudible] Negroes, they come out trying to front as, "I can talk to him." So there are people who are waking up every day, and I go to the House of Uhuru, this is a drug/alcohol recovery center, every year. And a lot of these people who are having mental health challenges are redesignating and are putting Ebonics down as their primary language, and demanding assistance from mental health professionals, because when you go and talk to some Arab, [Scaldean] up here, they gonna want to just give you some Thorazene, Mellaril, and Haladol, and think that that's the way to treat you. No, give me somebody who understands, because -- so you got people in

other professions that are much more receptive than blacks in education, which is why I made a decision in 1992 to make a career shift into Health and Human Services. Went to UCLA, got a post-graduate diploma in gerontology through the [Seed] Program that Dale [Lya] Pierson created over at the UCLA Extension. This is a thing that the UCLA Extension paid 90% and you paid 10%, and you could take UCLA Extension courses. That was a big help to the community; a lot of people benefit from that. We had ten slots, and we filled them. I'd certainly gladly pay the 10% to help some people get college credit, because you could take classes in the core curriculum -- not only extension, because a lot of the little classes were cross-listed, so a lot of times, students saw a chance to take some of their GE requirements, sociology and some of those history classes that are offered through Extension that are cross-listed with the regular courses? -- there's somebody at the door.

**STEVENSON**

We can wait --

## *1.5. Session 4A*
## *May 14, 2007*

**STEVENSON**

Good morning. I'm interviewing Dr. Ernie Smith on Monday, May 14th. I have a couple of follow-up questions on Ebonics. Could you tell me, today in 2007, who are some of these scholars studying Ebonics today? What is the state of Ebonics? Who's studying it, researching it, et cetera?

**SMITH**

The scholars that I know, in LA Unified School District, there's Dr. Noma LeMoine; there's a program called AEMP, that's Academic English Mastery Program in LA Unified School District. She has a doctorate in education, I believe, from USC.

**STEVENSON**

You said that's LeMoine?

**SMITH**

Noma, N-O-M-A, LeMoine, L-E-M-O-I-N-E.

**STEVENSON**

Noma. OK.

**SMITH**

That would be someone locally. There's a young lady by the name of Karen Crozier; she has her doctorate from Claremont, she's out in San Bernardino County. She's still doing some work on transitioning kids from their home language to English, and recognizing Ebonics as a language that's a primary language, and teaching English as a second language to African-American children. Robert Williams is still doing some work, although he's a psychologist, and right now his most recent book has to do with racial

scripting. Let me see, who else? Garrett Duncan, Garrett Duncan's at the University -- Washington University in Saint Louis. He also has a PhD; he comes out of Claremont. He's in African-American Studies. Molefi [Kete] Asante [born Arthur Lee Smith, Jr.] at Temple University. Up north, I would include Nathan Hare and Wade Nobles, two psychologists who have been involved in the issue of assessment of African-American children, racial bias or cultural bias in these standardized tests; they would still be pretty much involved in that issue. There's also, locally, the guy who is presently chairman of the County Human Relations Commission, Adrian Dove. He did the similar work in early 1970s, late 1960s, early 1970s. He developed a test called the Dove Counterbalance Intelligence Test; it was a challenge to the Civil Service Exam of language and cultural bias against African-Americans. And he still kind of pushes that issue; he doesn't push it in a way of Ebonics as such, but he understands the premise of there being tests that are biased towards one moment or standard of what is considered to be intelligence, and then claiming if you don't know these things, you're not intelligent. And then using a particular language to assess that information in, and then claiming that people who don't know this language are unintelligent. So he still -- I would have to include him. There's some students who came out of Temple University; there's a sister up at Sonoma State [University] now, Aisha Blackshire-Belay, she's up at Sonoma State.

**STEVENSON**

Blackshire-Belay?

**SMITH**

Belay, B-E-L-A-Y. Aisha Blackshire-Belay.

**STEVENSON**

OK.

**SMITH**

Then, of course, there's Mervyn [C.] Alleyne; he's in the Caribbean, he's at Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico. He's still around, and I correspond with him. Aisha -- Mervyn Alleyne is his name. That's about the extent of the people that I'm familiar with; I haven't kept abreast of a lot of the literature, but I know that these people are currently involved. The Black Child -- the NBCDI, the National Black Child Development Institute, has asked me to present a paper this year, so I'll probably run up on quite a few people who are doing some work in this area when I go there.

**STEVENSON**

Right. That's the National Black Child --

**SMITH**

Development Institute, the NBCDI. Go off.

## *1.6. Session 4B*
## *May 14, 2007*

**STEVENSON**
OK. Why don't you continue?
**SMITH**
NAIOSH is the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.
**STEVENSON**
National Institute --
**SMITH**
-- Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. NAIOSH. I presented a paper there telling them that the methods that they were using to inform African-Americans should not be heavily in written materials; they should use audiovisual because of the culture, of oral culture; people who are not lettered tend to rely heavily on the visual and auditory methods of getting information. And the method that they depend on to get it is usually the method that helps them retrieve it. Not that they're totally illiterate, but there's what we call LMP, Learning Modal Preference.
**STEVENSON**
Learning Modal?
**SMITH**
Uh-huh. LPM. Learning Modal Preference. This is a theory that people learn through visual channels, and people who have strong abilities to use the visual channel will primarily be dependent on that as the modal preference for acquiring information and retrieving information. Those memory, the areas of the brain, and the synapses that occur, get triggered and work better for visual learners. There's some people who I was mentioning who are primarily auditory learners, and so their auditory memory and all the synapses in the brain for auditory memory and acquisition and more in-tune for information. Obviously, visual information is received and retrieved faster than auditory, because the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. So if you're a visual learner, and you're trying to force this person to learn through phonics, you're slowing them down, because they don't need phonics; they already have the ability to perceive the configuration, and they recognize the word and retrieve it as the whole configuration. Whereas the phonic learner has to learn how to put sounds together and then have a configuration and then know the word.
So some people who are auditory learners do learn better through phonics, because they depend on the auditory channel. You go too fast for them, you try to give them a whole configuration, because they depend on the sound, word, sound and letter correspondence, and then putting the whole configuration together as a word. And so this is just some of the stuff that we know from studies in psycholinguistics of how people learn to read. Therefore, when you come from a culture that's a primarily auditory culture. These rap singers, some of them didn't even finish fifth, sixth, seventh grade; their level of reading is still at the third, fourth grade level, yet they can remember whole, tons of material, auditory, that they've acquired

through the auditory channel; they can't even read their own lyrics sometimes, someone has to put it down on the paper, but they know their songs, by heart. And so to whatever extent there's some validity in this notion of learning modal preference, and you see it actualized through examples such as rap singers being able to remember dozens and dozens of songs that they can't even read, that tells me there may be something to that premise, that theory.
And so I wrote in this article -- you see at the end of it, I tell them that -- "Since 90% of the vocabulary of English consists predominantly of configurational words, or words that are not spelled phonically, i.e. words such as bouquet, business, laugh, banquet, vision, creation, pneumonia, know, officiate, opaque, written materials targeted for African-American blue-collar, no-collar workers, may prove ineffective if written at about the fourth or fifth grade level. Further, it would probably prove even more effective if [inaudible] communication and notification for blue-collar and no-collar African-American workers, were developed within the medium other than standard, written standard English. The use of video, film, and pictograms are perhaps even more effective. These, combined with more reliance on the auditory channel, cannot be overly emphasized. The contemporary rap music phenomena serves as an excellent example of how auditory oral communication process can be put to use. So what I was encouraging him to do is use advertisements that have a beat to it; you have to come at them from their own cultural perspective. Now, obviously, rap doesn't appeal to older black Americans; you wouldn't come to an older person who you're trying to get at for asbestos in the foundry from the 1940s. But the same thing applies to -- they're churchgoing people, so you would come at them through religious tunes, themes that you would get in the church music. But you would have to plug into that audio/oral process that they use in the church. And don't rely on the standard English visual communication, written communication, to try to reach them.

**STEVENSON**

Right. So on some of the television commercials that I've seen, like the fairly recently -- some of these advertisers have put that into practice with some of your major companies using our music to market to us.

**SMITH**

To market --

**STEVENSON**

-- to us, right. That's very interesting.

**SMITH**

And this came out of the Journal of American Medicine that I did in 19- -- I think this was in 1992.

**STEVENSON**

That's very interesting. Let me ask you this, then. Some of the educators who are advocating for African-American children and for the need for

assessing their different language skills, to what extent are they fighting an uphill battle, because so much of the resources and attention is going towards bilingual as it relates to Hispanic children? And especially because of the demographics have changed so much, are they really fighting a battle there?

**SMITH**

Yeah, a two-pronged struggle. One is, many African-Americans are not comfortable with their African heritage. So when you tell an African-American that is uncomfortable with their African heritage that Ebonics is related to the African language system, that doesn't come off as anything to be proud of to them, because in their mind, they ought to get rid of the jungle stuff, they got to stay real Americans. So when they are told that Ebonics is an African language system that has its roots in the differences that remain, the evidence that the language is not English, and that they're not the same, then this person doesn't look at it as, "Oh, this is an African language? We spoke languages in Africa, and I ought to be --?" See, they don't see it as an Afro-centric person would see it, one who's trying to recapture their culture and heritage that they lost in the [inaudible], they see it as, "No, get me out of those jungle [inaudible], they run around goin' ooh-ooh-oon-gawa." So they put Africa down as much as the European. 99% of the African-American parents are not putting Ebonics or an African language system on their home language survey. What triggered the open school, unified school district resolution, were that there were parents in the district who were putting Ebonics down as their home language, and were demanding that just as you give Vietnamese, Cambodian, [Hmong], Chinese, Hispanic, and everybody else whose home language is not English, English as a second language, or you give them an assessment to determine whether or not they need English as a Second Language. At the time that I put English down as my -- I mean, Ebonics as my home language, or my child's home language, my child should have been assessed. You don't wait until the child gets into the second or third grade to find out that my child is lagging behind. If you had assessed the child from the beginning, you would have given them an alternatively designed instruction in a language in his home language to transition him to English. That's all.

It's a question of vindicating the rights of parents who identify the home language as an African language. They were not even doing it for the Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Somalians who are not African descendents of West Africa. These are recent arrivals from Africa, and many of their children are limited English proficient. They're not giving English as a second language to contemporary continentals, Africans from Africa. So not only were the blacks in the Oakland School District denied equal educational access, in terms of that, the other thing is that those people who had a backlash against English as a -- a bilingual education, they can't even get it for Hispanics like they use to give it. The teachers used to be giving -- I'm

not sure what's going on now -- a salary differential by $5,000 more a year for bilingual proficiency because of that skill. I think they tried to cut all that kind of stuff out.
They do have ESL, but as far as bilingual education, teaching in both English and Spanish, there was a law passed against bilingual education in that sense, and so trying to get Ebonics as a bilingual education is not going to go -- they can't even give it to languages that they recognize as languages; they don't even want to recognize Ebonics as an African language, that was what the issue was in Oakland. It's the school districts that makes the decision on what population needs what. It's not a federal decision. Federal money is to supplement the needs of the district. The district makes an application to the federal government, saying, "We have this unique population that needs these services; our general funds will not handle this problem; we need some federal assistance to address this problem.
That's the whole basis for bilingual education; those are not general education funds, those come from the federal government to supplement the needs of the district. If the school district identifies a population of Ebonics speakers and makes an application to the federal government, the federal government has no real right basis, other than like this Secretary [Richard W.] Riley did, to deny federal funds for bilingual education to African descendents. When the Oakland Unified School District passed its resolution, that racist who was the Secretary of Education under [William Jefferson] Clinton, Riley, declared that he wasn't going to give any federal funds for Ebonics. They didn't push the issue, because there wasn't that large a population for them to push that particular issue, and then the backlash of the press and the media. They were able to get some state funds from compensatory education, because the office of compensatory education in the state felt that there was a legitimate need to address the needs of this population; that was what was called SEP, the Standard English Proficiency Program. The woman who was heading it at that time was Yvonne Strozier, and she agreed to just bifurcate the subfunds, give half of it -- not half, give what was needed for those who put English on the home language survey, and give some to those that put an African language system. Now, all of the money was targeted for African-Americans. The way the SEP program came into existence was Wilson Riles, who was the Superintendent of Public Instruction in the 1970s, when he went out of office, he created the Standard English Proficiency Program in the State Department of California and the State Department of Education to address the language needs of African-American children, and it has survived even to this day, I think. In LA Unified School District, it was called PEP, the Proficiency in English Program. Thelma Duncan, Toni Humber, and [Seba] Subira Kifano --

**STEVENSON**

How do you spell that?

**SMITH**

Her name is on [inaudible], Subira Kifano. S-U-B-I-R-A, Subira, Kifano, K-I-F-A-N-O.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Thank you.

**SMITH**

She's in Wisconsin now. She left LA Unified School District with Mr. Kifano, but put her name on that list also.

**STEVENSON**

OK. So it sounds like it's as much a battle of educating parents, and that battle must be conquered first before the larger issue.

**SMITH**

Because the school district has no affirmative responsibility to tell the parents what their child speaks at home. The school district gives a primary language form for the parents to fill out when the children are first enrolled in school, and whatever the parents put down is considered the primary language. Most African-Americans put English as the primary language, so the issue of bilingual education or ESL never arises, because they're placed in the core curriculum, which is by law, the language of English is the official language of instruction in the state of California. The issue was that there were parents who were putting an African language down who were not being given their rights as primary African language speakers.

**STEVENSON**

OK. I would like to switch gears here; I would like to spend most of the day talking about [Martin Luther] King [Jr./Drew Medical Center] Hospital. Before I do that, I wanted to talk a little bit about the '92 rebellion. Could you talk about that in the context of the '65 rebellion, were there any links there, in terms of community issues, community needs not met, and how did the -- the key players, the participants in the two rebellions, how did they differ? Just your opinion on that.

**SMITH**

The needs of the community had not changed, in the sense of we built a hospital to address some of the things that were recommended by the McCone Commission. But they strangled the hospital for resources over 25 years, and strangling the hospital for resources meant that they were not being adequately served, even though the hospital physically was there, the budget of the hospital was controlled from the Department of Health Services downtown. The administrators who were there at the hospital, any time they began to speak up for more resources, that administrator was either terminator or demoted and they put a Negro that would play ball in his place.

So that was a struggle for 25 years; the hospital never got adequate funding. The head of finance for most of the years at the hospital, and he's still in charge of -- the chief financial officer [CFO] downtown is Gary Wells. And even though they'd had several directors of health services, going all

the way back to Robert Gates and then Mark Fanucken and then Thomas Garthwaite. Between Fanucken and Garthwaite, Fred Leaf served for about a year and a half or better as the director of health services, so you might want to add Fred Leaf between Garthwaite and Fanucken.

**STEVENSON**

Fred Leaf?

**SMITH**

Uh-huh. But these people were not sensitive to the needs of South Central. Kenneth Hahn was the supervisor right before Yvonne Burke, and he had a stroke, and he did stay in office about seven, eight years, even after his stroke, but he lost a lot of his clout, political influence. And if there was anything that kind of saved the hospital from the more ravishing kind of things that happened after he left office was the political power than Kenneth Hahn had. Yvonne didn't have that kind of power; didn't have that ability, apparently, because we lost everything on her watch. She's only got one vote; Kenneth Hahn didn't have but one vote. So it must have been something that Kenneth Hahn knew about the political game that she didn't. As I say, this strangling of the hospital for resources was always attempted, but Hahn managed, in some ways, especially 'cause he was not -- the Democrats were not always the majority on the board of supervisors; it's only since [Zev] Yaroslavsky, [Gloria] Molina, and Burke, that's three Democrats. In the past, you had a majority of the board of supervisors were Republicans. And so that's what made it difficult for Hahn to get a lot of things that he wanted to accomplish; he had to always -- he put it through the door, the mailman -- to get what we wanted, in terms of those kinds of what was needed at the hospital. I'm talking about basic equipment, stationery, didn't matter -- it just -- we had to do a thing -- "Let me have a ream of paper 'til my order comes in," that kind of sharing was the way the hospital survived. People did this for so many years that that became the custom in the hospital; that became then what they would call a culture, where when people are having to operate in spite of the system, not because of the system, then everything looks to be going contrary to rules and regulations. So a lot of things that were gong on out there was because that was the way that the hospital survived.

Dr. [Ernest] Smith couldn't get help for his community health program, because the hospital administrators would tell him that a community program, this is hospital training, and we don't have funds for community programs. Well, the whole idea was prevention, that if you arrest any kind of things before they need it, if you get certain chronical illnesses or things that can become chronical illness in children at an early age, you don't have to address it in the hospital. They didn't have that attitude. We only get funding for hospital services; if it's not in the hospital, we don't fund it. If you go to public health, Caswell [A.] Evans is one of the directors of -- right now, it's Jonathan Fielding, but before Jonathan Fielding was Caswell [A.]

Evans -- he'd go to Public Health and say, "We need some funds for community programs to prevent childhood diseases, infectious diseases, epidemics," -- "That's a program in the hospital, we don't fund hospitals." Now here's a community program, doing work in the community, in the schools, Public Health won't fund it because the person who's providing it is based in the hospital. Because this person in the hospital is doing it in the community, the hospital won't fund it. So the children suffer because of arbitrary decisions that's been made as to where the fund is going to come from. Public Health had the money to do it, but Public Health won't do it, because that's in the schools, and we do it at our clinics. They don't come to our clinics, we don't go into the schools to give immunizations and CHDPS, Child Health and Disability Prevention Screening. We don't do that kind of stuff.

So that's then the attitude of the Department of Health Services. Now, recently, the Department of Health Services has been separated from the Department of Public Health, and this new director of Public Health -- not new, but the Director of Public Health, Jonathan Fielding, is much more sensitive to the community's needs and concerns as an independent director of his own department than he could be under the director of the Department of Health Services director that had no commitment to public health at all. So I do see some things positive going on in the Department of Public Health. But the Department of Health Services, totally Nazi, racist agenda. Destruction of blacks is all I see them bent on.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Continue to talk about King Hospital. Let me go back -- could you tell me about your association -- the beginnings of your association with the hospital? Were you involved even before it was conceptualized and built?

**SMITH**

To the extent that you saw the big pictures that I had up in there about the Deadwyler shooting, so I was always an advocate for the needs, in terms of health care, and the needs for a hospital in the community, because Leonard Deadwyler was shot trying to get his pregnant wife down to Big G [Los Angeles County USC Medical Center], that's Big General Hospital, LA County USC now. The only way you get out there from this end of town, there was the bus that run out Florence [Avenue] over to Soto [Street] and then it was actually Seville, and Seville turned into Soto, and you would take that Florence bus all the way up -- you had to come down out of Watts on the Red Car, the Gardena bus, some line that came down out of Watts; there was no MTA at that time. And so you -- it was two-hours one way sometimes on the bus, because they didn't have any express buses taking you straight to the hospital.

As I said, this man, Leonard Deadwyler, was trying to get his wife to LA County USC and was shot by a cop by the name of Gerald Bova for failing to yield or failing to pull over at the sirens. He had a rag or handkerchief on his

antenna, which in the Deep South is the way that you signal someone that there's an emergency. And he thought that they were giving him an escort, I guess; he never had a chance to tell his side of the story, because the cop walked up to the car and shot him.
So I'm saying that to that extent, I was an advocate. I showed you articles from Jet Magazine where I was involved with the Economic and Youth Opportunities Program [Agency, EYOA], trying to get funds for our area. Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson [LBJ] was the President, and he started the War on Poverty program. EYOA eventually became the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Council, GLACA [Greater Los Angeles Caregivers Alliance]. Those kinds of funds I allocated for it, again it was to make sure that we got our share of the federal, state, and local county funds to provide services in the community. So the three issues that I've always kind of been involved in is health, education, and welfare. In fact, the federal agency that was responsible for the problems of poor people was called HEW [United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare], H-E-W, Health, Education, and Welfare. And so Health, Education, and Welfare had always been the issues that I focused on.
Mrs. [Lillian] Mobley was more directly involved, because she was on the site committee that went around the regional planning, people looking for a location. And they selected the Palm Lanes Housing Project as the place they were going to put the hospital. From the inception, though, in 1972, when Dr. Ernie Smith, MD, came out here from Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. I was involved with community health because he was the director of community pediatrics, and in 1972, I was teaching linguistics at Cal State Fullerton. And having background in audiometry, I assisted them by doing a hearing test in his school health program. So to that extent, I was involved in one of the departments. I did put the doctor at work in gerontology, Dr. [Haragopal] Thadepalli, who's deceased now, was trying to get a residency program in geriatrics started.

**STEVENSON**

Mm-hmm. And the last name goes --?

**SMITH**

Thadepalli. T-H-A-D-E-P-A-L-L-I. Thadepalli. Haragopal Thadepalli. And he had heard that I was involved with Mrs. Mobley's senior citizen center, and he knew that he needed community support. He approached me, one day -- it was graduation at Drew that he and Dr. Smith, MD, came over, and he said [inaudible] talk, and he told me what he wanted to do in terms of providing services. And I knew that Mrs. Mobley had been advocating for a geriatric service at the hospital for years, and that created a relationship that lasted 'til he died. He started the geriatrics fellowship, and was moving towards a full residency program at the hospital. But [inaudible], what I was about to get at -- by me having that background again in audiometry,

hearing tests. I also did it for seniors. So doing it for schoolchildren and doing it for seniors, that was my contribution to the health community.
I'm not a health person in the sense of providing medical care, but the skill that I did have that was useful for physicians was the technical stuff of doing pure-town audiometry for children and pediatrics, and hearing tests for seniors. Dr. Thadepalli had been given funds by the City of Los Angeles to do health screenings, the City of Los Angeles funded senior citizen center. So Theresa Lindsay, the Bradley Center, [inaudible] Senior Citizen Center, all out in the Valley; there were a lot of city-funded senior citizens centers. The City of Los Angeles purchased a van, it's called the Rosa Parks van, and this van went to the senior citizens centers to give screenings. Diabetes, blood pressure, sugar. Eye exams, teeth exams. Podiatry, foot exams. They would even go in and cut the nails; some of these old people can't reach down to cut their nails, so they had a podiatrist that would go out and cut these claws off the seniors' feet.
But when Faye Washington and Ann Smith left the city and retired, that fund to that program went away, because, again, you have to be politically connected. Politics is who gets what, how much, and when. It's the study of it in school, political science. But politicians make decisions on how the public pie is going to be sliced. Every day, people sit downtown and make decisions on how the money that comes in as tax money to the city is going to be divvied up against -- back to the citizens for services. So the decision on who's going to get what, how much, and when, depends on if you supported me in my campaigns, I'm going to see that my people who supported my campaign get a fair shake. People who didn't support me, don't come to my office looking for nothing; go help the guy that you was backing for office. That's kind of the attitude. It's a spoiled system. But I've seen that's how it works.
People who remember you in their campaign office, and seeing you run to the post office with great big sacks of mailings, going out and tacking up signs during the campaign, or sitting at the phone bank, or licking stamps on envelopes -- people who help people get elected have access, and people who didn't help: "Don't come down to my office for nothing." Now, sometimes they can get somebody that is an ally to come with them, and they could advocate for you, you know what I mean? If I supported Yvonne, and Yvonne knows that she -- and everybody kind of attested, "Yeah, Ernie's all right, he helped us." Somebody come to Mrs. Mobley's center needing some services that wasn't particularly for her, but she wants something from her, if Mrs. Mobley calls down there or goes down their with them, and Mrs. Mobley's advocating for them, Miss Yvonne would do it because I'm doing this for Mrs. Mobley and Mrs. Mobley can help this person, but if this person tried to get down there themselves, it's very likely to be very, very difficult; she'd probably shunt it off to a deputy, and that deputy would be just stalling and not delivering anything.

So I'm just saying that when people retire after 25, 30 years, a lot of things that you were taking for granted go away. And if you're not -- now, we supported Bernie [Bernard] Parks, but Bernie Parks is actually way over on the 10th; he's out -- this is Jan Perry's district. Mrs. Mobley supported Jan Perry. But the access to Jan Perry is only as powerful as we can get Jan Perry some help, meaning, if Bernie supports her, we can get Janice Hahn to support her, she needs votes. So we have to have good relations with three or four or five city councilors to get something going. Just for our area, we have to have good relations and be supportive of other people down there. So that's kind of how it works. If you don't have that kind of maneuvering -- we got a meeting coming up with Marguerite [Pointdexter] LaMotte. This [inaudible] here is actually -- what's his name? -- Mike Lansing, who's kind of a lame duck now, because he didn't run again.

So we had turned to Marguerite to get what we want our of LA Unified, and we supported Marguerite, and Marguerite knows this because Maxine [Waters] endorsed her, and Maxine had all of us over in her office doing what I'd tell you. Campaigns are run on the work of the gruntworkers in the campaign office; it's not just advertisements on radio and television; it's who's going to do the work. And those people are the people who have something coming. They can't give it to you under the table, this is public money, so everything has to be done through a legitimate process, but the people who get it through the legitimate process, the first dibs are going to be the people who supported me. A guy who wins office and gives the money to everybody but the people that supported him ain't going to get [inaudible]. So that's kind of how I see support for the Center, and this same kind of thing for Martin Luther King. You have to be on the advisory boards of Martin Luther King Hospital, which I was, so you can get real time information and feedback to the hospital administrator, and then be able to be willing to go down to the board of supervisors and make noise down there; that squeaky wheel gets the grease.

And so being involved in Drew University and on their advisory council, the hospital and the university were like Siamese twins. Most people didn't -- Drew University, King/Drew, they're all one and the same to them. They didn't understand that the county owns the hospital and Drew University is a private, post-secondary university like USC. As far as they were concerned, it was King/Drew, and they're all the same; the doctors at Drew were also professors in medicine at the University. So that marriage -- I don't know if you read about it recently, but the university is suing the county for causing the loss of all of its residency programs, and now hopefully they win, because with the help of the state, I think they ought to just go ahead and turn the hospital over to the university and run it as a university hospital.

**STEVENSON**

I know that Kenneth Hahn, as one of the lawmakers that supported the hospital from the very early days when there's still just a concept -- who

were the other lawmakers, officeholders? I know Mervyn Dymally had a major role.

**SMITH**

Yeah, because Mervyn Dymally is always a representative in the Assembly, in the State Senate, and as Lieutenant Governor and as the Congressperson. In fact, somebody said they're even running for -- the girl that just passed away --

**STEVENSON**

Juanita.

**SMITH**

Juanita McDonald.

**STEVENSON**

Millender-McDonald.

**SMITH**

[inaudible] McDonald's seat, which is his old seat. Tucker had the seat after Mervyn retired, and I don't know -- that's very strange that a person would retire from Congress and then decide to run for the same seat again. But anyway, her daughter's supposed to be running for the seat. But back to what you were talking about: yeah, Dymally has been supportive of the hospital. I can't say that Willard [H.] Murray [Jr.] was that supportive, even though his constituents depend on the hospital, because that's all Compton again. They're kind of a new people, going back to Kenneth Hahn, Baxter Ward was supportive back in those days. A lot of the names don't come to me right away, but I do remember he was kind of always supportive of -- Kenneth Hahn, he was a Democrat too. But as I say, they were always outnumbered. Schabarum was a Republican, and he was very anti -- Pete [F.] Schabarum. Deane Dana was right before the guy who's there now, [Don] Knabe, but those are Republicans.

**STEVENSON**

You've talked about 25 years of strangling the resources at King, and I think the larger issue of neglect -- now, Dr. Ernest Smith talked at length about the fact that almost as soon as the hospital opened, that this --

**SMITH**

This "Killer King" image, that was even before it opened; they were circulating fliers, putting them on cars: "Don't use that nigger hospital; the doctors ain't gonna do but kill you."

**STEVENSON**

Right. Could you discuss that a little bit? I've heard Dr. Ernest Smith, of course, talk about it, but if you could discuss this a little bit --

**SMITH**

He actually saw the fliers, but I knew of the existence of the fliers because it was verified by a lot of people in the community, they saw the fliers; I never had one right in my hand, but a lot of people verified that these fliers were circulated and put on the cars, even in the parking lot, telling people not to

use the hospital. But even the paramedics and people like that used to talk about taking people to the hospital as a threat. You don't want to be taken there attitude. For years, the image of Martin Luther King as "Killer King" didn't matter to the community, because there were too many people who could attest to their life being saved, or the life of some of their loved ones being saved, or the people would come there DOA, dead on arrival, and a doctor had to certify the death, and because the doctor had to certify the death, and so it was attributed to a death at King when the person was actually dead on arrival, dead when they brought him in on the gurney. And that's violence in the community; that's not Martin Luther King Hospital. So the number of deaths at Martin Luther King is more attributed to the violence that is prevalent in the community. And it wasn't just gang violence. Saturday night drunks getting killed, drunk drivers, it was all kinds of blunt force trauma other than gang violence. Gang violence kind of came along with the cocaine epidemic. Before that, there was not a lot of gangs, in the sense of shooting and cutting gangs; there was always these car clubs, the Slausons and the Bounty Hunters and all those kinds of clubs -- those were car clubs, mostly. They had plaques in their windows, these little plaques, not quite as big as a license plate, but they would either hang them on chains off their bumper or stick them up in the back window of their cars, a lot of these were considered by the police ratpacks or gangs. But I remember those days as being basically you belong to a car club, and because a lot of drag racing went on and a lot of stuff like that went on, the worst thing that you'd find somebody doing was stealing hubcaps; that was supposed to be a big thing. You see how popular these rims are now, these silver -- for some reason, there's a big attraction to wheels on cars, but back then, it was the hubcaps, they didn't have these chrome wheels as they have them now, but it's something that does something to the eyes, I guess, about those spinning wheels. There was no gang violence as it turned out to be that was not associated with the cocaine, the contras thing that Ollie North and Reagan were involved in, selling drugs in the community to get money to buy guns, and taking the guns over to fight in Iran.

**STEVENSON**

Yeah. Maybe you could talk a little bit more about how -- continue what you were talking about in terms of the evolution of gangs in our community from the '60s, and maybe in more detail about what caused that shift into what gangs are today.

**SMITH**

The youngsters who you see in gangs -- many of them come out of juvenile camps and YA, Youth Authority. And if they're there a number of years, these are not kids who were reared in the black community; they're reared by the police, reared by corrections officers and people like that. Them state-raised niggers. Those are the white man's kids. Their values and everything are what they got not from the inner-city that they were born

into and the families that they were nurtured and born into as preschoolers; they were in juvenile camps and adopting the values of whoever was supervising and parenting them -- and I use the word "parenting" in the sense of any adult who's impacting on the child in a nurturing way is a parent, even though the kind of nurturing they were given was not the same as the nurturing they would have gotten in the community. They got put in camp because they were just not functioning; they had conduct disorders or whatever they want to label the juvenile offenses that they were convicted of.

The thing is that these recidivist youngsters who were in juvenile camp more than they were on the streets, from fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade on -- those are not what we consider our kids. They were born of women and fathers in the community, but they were not raised by them; they were raised by the state. These state-raised niggers became what you would see now as your gang-bangers; their value systems are not those of the church and the community that they mothers and fathers and grandmothers belong to. So when we say that the police organize the gangs, we're saying that the design and intent of taking kids out of their homes and putting them in institutions and programming them with values and ideas that are foreign to the community, that's all a part of a conspiracy on the part of the government of the United States. This whole thing of foster care, and taking children from their parents, not willing to give the mothers of the children $250 a month, but taking them out of the home and giving some congregate care facility $15,000 a month, because of all the special needs that the child has. So when you see group homes, which is not a family setting -- all boys in one thing, no nurturing going on then. You're housed in the community, but you're not in a family. All of that is the system doing this.

**STEVENSON**

It's by design.

**SMITH**

By design. And many of these kids, the trauma of being just snatched from the home -- sometimes it's not anything that the children did. The parents were deemed to be a danger to the children, because of their drug and alcohol use or going to prison, and the best that the sister could do was put them in a congregate care facility. They shut -- not Las Padrinos [Juvenile Court], that's --

**STEVENSON**

Los Amigos? Rancho Los Amigos?

**SMITH**

The one that was out in El Monte. Rancho Los Amigos is a hospital. Los Padrinos is the one over there, but I'm thinking about -- it'll probably come to me. Baldwin Park. It was usually where they placed foster children. This is not a probation camp; this is for foster care. But the kids were put in there as if they had done something wrong. And they shut it down. But that was

the kind of the policy of the county, to take kids from their parents and give foster parents, as I say, thousands of dollars a month, where they wouldn't even give the mother of the child, when the needs were there; you knew that this child needed all of this, why didn't you give that kind of funding to the parents so the child's needs could be addressed? Let alone when the child is taken out of the home, no mental health assessments are done to see what the child's reaction to this experience. So many of these children are having mental health needs, based on just separation anxieties.
If you're in a foster home with people only interested in you because they're getting some money for you, and they tell you just as much: "If I wasn't getting paid for it, you wouldn't be up in here." Some of these foster parents can be very verbally abusive. And so they put this image forth that they're so loving and devoted and caring, but that's not what always goes on. So these kids come up knowing that nobody cares, or appearing that nobody cares. And so that would be [inaudible] anti-social attitude against -- you know, "Black don't mean shit to me," meaning that, "Black people treated me bad; I ain't see no white man do nothing to me. Niggers are what mistreated me." So a lot of the boys come up with an anti-black, anti-community; they don't have no family. Their gangs are their family; their friends and homeboys, that's their family.

**STEVENSON**

Could you talk about the -- how the infusion of drugs into the community plays into all this historically?

**SMITH**

Most of the people who used to just use drugs was your entertainers; we didn't see a whole lot of people -- now, you could say, heroin -- that was very expensive. You had to have access to money to be a heroin user. If you just going to drink some [white port] and lemon juice, you could be a wino. So most of the alcoholics and stuff like that were not people who had a whole lot of money; it was people who could get -- and it took 15, 20 years to become a full-fledged drunk and down and out. With the cocaine, you could using it this week, and less than two or three weeks, a crackhead and [scandalous]. I'm just saying, you fall like [moon for a day] with cocaine as a drug of choice. Heroin addiction, as I say, was very expensive, and the only people that I knew that was into heroin was the entertainers. Now, marijuana was cheap, but those -- marijuana was like, you a pothead, that was the name that you'd go, pothead. And it smelled, and so everybody would know what you're smoking, because it had a distinctive odor.
And some of these people had access to pills that were prescription drugs. I remember Red Devils, Seconal, Truanols, stuff like that, that some kids had access to. How they were getting them -- I know that these were used as medicines, so they had to be given by prescription, and then somebody was abusing their prescription drugs by peddling it off. The same with Ritalin. Ritalin is a prescription drug; supposed to be given to arrest high -- what

they call Attention-Deficit Disorder [ADD], Hyperactive -- ADHD, Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. But for some kids, when you mix Ritalin and Codeine, that's like mixing cocaine and heroin. And so these drugs that come into the community, we don't have any airplanes, we don't have any plantations, all of these drugs that are in South Central come from somewhere. They're not grown in South Central; they're brought into South Central. And the people who are bringing them are not black people. They bring them to the blacks, then the blacks become the distributors.

**STEVENSON**

Right. Middle man.

**SMITH**

OK. But the people who were actually getting wealthy bringing it in by the boatloads are white. When I say white, they're either white with a Latino surname -- and I'm using the term "Latino" meaning to include Italians, as opposed to Hispanic, which would be your Colombians and your Mexicans and all of those people. The Latinos run the drug market. And people who had connections would be able to get it from the Latinos and then bring it to the blacks. But as far as a black owning a big plantation in Mexico, and having airplanes and boats and what have you to get the drugs here: never saw it. So all of this, again, is something that is coming from the white community, meaning that the Latinos or Hispanics or Caucasians with Spanish surnames, they're Caucasian with Latino surnames. French is a Latino language, so the French connections. So whether they're bringing it in through Canada or through Mexico, these are white people bringing drugs into the black community. So the drug business is a white business. That's not to excuse the peddlers and distributors down at the black level. These are niggers that -- I told you where they coming from; they're state-raised niggers anyway, they don't have any [inaudible] into the community.

**STEVENSON**

OK. Could you talk a little bit about Drew University? Your association with it over the years?

**SMITH**

OK. My first association was with no academic appointment; I was just giving assistance to Dr. Ernie Smith, MD, because I was a professor of linguistics at Cal State Fullerton. I left Fullerton in 1982, and continued to work with Ernie, MD, in pediatrics. It was in 1992 that Dr. Thadepalli asked me to assist him. He was the one that assisted me in getting appointed on the faculty in internal medicine as a professor of medicine in geriatrics. And that's kind of the appointment that I still have to this day at Drew University. Primarily I'm dealing with seniors; Ernie has retired, so I have no involvement. A friend of mine, Dr. Samuel [J.] Shacks -- we were roommates at US Irvine. He's retired, but he still works there, and so we collaborate together. He comes to the Black Health Task Force meetings every Monday at 1:00, at least every Monday that he's available.

But other than that, there's not a lot that we have to do with Martin Luther King, other than trying to expose, through demonstrating against the LA Times, which is what we did on the 16th of last month, and going on cable television and doing talk shows to expose the destruction and privatization of King/Drew Medical Center. Just advocating for whatever can be done to recapture and rebuild. I see this as a temporary phase, because these people were down there -- they can't last forever. We'll be here after they're long gone. And so we get the right people in office, we can rebuild. It's gone down as far as I think it can go, except to close the building altogether, but I don't think they're gonna let that happen. It looks as if there's enough political will in the Assembly and in the state for legislation to be passed for the hospital to be taken over by the state and then run as a university hospital affiliated with the UC regions, with Drew University as the affiliate hospital. That's what the president at Drew has on her blueprint as the solution, that the university can run the hospital with state support. The model for what she's trying to do is Hastings Law School. Hastings Law School at [UC] Berkeley is a private post-secondary law school, but it's run with state support.

And so we're trying to get that same model applied to Drew University as a state hospital run with university support, or a university hospital run with state support. They don't have the resources to run it fully as a private post-secondary hospital. The county cannot run it. They've already proven that. And the responsibility for health care in the state of California is the state's responsibility. The county is just a local administrative agency for state funds, just like when you're on AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children], or the Department of Public Social Services, the welfare in this state is actually the state's responsibility. The local Department of Public Social Services is just a local administrative state welfare funds. So all of these agencies that we see locally are primarily funded by the state with the counties being the administrative agency of state funds. So we're saying that you kick the county aside where King is concerned. They want to run them other hospitals, fine. But for Martin Luther King/Drew Medical Center, we want the state to take it over and run it as a state hospital with Drew University as the primary provider.

**STEVENSON**

Right. Compared to when King Hospital opened, how much of the demographics changed?

**SMITH**

Oh, the demographics has changed tremendously. At least the reverse now, where it was 80/20, I would say right now it's about 70/30, with the Hispanics outnumbering blacks. Blacks couldn't be much more than 30% of the total population now, with the Hispanics -- but these Hispanics, most of them are not legal. And they come to South Central because black people won't tell on them; black people have no vested interest in trying to run

Hispanics out. People who push the Hispanic agenda to try to create a wedge, and play wedge politics with that particular population: these are people, many of them are sophisticated enough to know -- I mean, they ran through cars going 75 miles an hour down the freeway coming from countries where the governor, the president, the mayor, the police, everybody was Hispanic. So they shouldn't want a Hispanic to run nothing up here. They just left the country where they were being mistreated by Hispanics, everybody was Hispanic, and they got nothing; that's why they left. Now, why would you come up here and want to create the very same thing you just ran away from?

So many of them are just coming here trying to eke out a living. They're very poor; they're willing to work for less wages, and even that is better than what they left, otherwise they would have stayed way there are, or go back where they were. So it must be something that they see here that they didn't see down there, in terms of (a) being left alone, they don't face death squads, the whole lot of things that they were confronting down there; they're not under that kind of pressure here. And then many of the blacks who have left this area have sold their property to these Hispanics, because they're living large out in Moreno Valley or Alta Loma and Fontana and everything. And the money that they got from the lending institution that bought the house for the Hispanics, that's how they were able to afford to live where they're living. Many of them retired from the county, from the post office and everything, so they're living comfortably out in the suburbs now, and getting -- some of them carried second trust deeds on the houses that they sold, because the banks didn't want to absorb all the loss, so they made the owners carry some of the paper. Well, with the income that they got to move, and the income they're getting from second-trust deed, they're not bad off. I'm talking about the blacks who used to have these houses.

**STEVENSON**

So with the demographics having changed that much, and with who this population is, in terms of being mostly undocumented workers and families, does that in any way help the cause of revitalizing King Hospital in any way?

**SMITH**

Yeshiva University is in a predominantly black neighborhood. That don't change the mission of Yeshiva University. Brandeis University is in a predominantly black neighborhood; that doesn't change the mission of Brandeis. The county -- USC is right over here on Jefferson [Boulevard] and Figueroa [Street]. The mission of USC didn't change because of 75, 80% of the community being Hispanic. So I'm not threatened by the demographics of the neighborhood, in terms of the skills that you need to run a hospital, they can be a part of the workforce as much as anybody else. And they need health care as human begins; they have human rights. And that hospital is there to serve human beings, not a particular population.

If that's a hospital that primarily focuses on, in terms of the research that goes on, or the interest of the physicians in addressing certain kind of illnesses, people from all over the world will come to certain universities because of the reputation of that university treating those kind of diseases. I mean, when you talk about transplanting hearts, you talk about Loma Linda [University Medical Center]. There are certain places that have become renowned because of their focus and interest in treating certain illnesses. Children's Hospital, St. Jude's [Children's Research Hospital], has a reputation, and people go from one state to another or from all over the country to St. Jude's because certain illnesses will be treated there.

So if Drew is a university that has researchers that are dealing with crack addict children, and you have a population of crack addict children who need service, then everybody all over the world that needs services for crack addict children are going to come to there, because that's where the work on those particular kinds of illnesses are being addressed. Or if you say sickle sell, and you got researchers who've dealt with sickle cell, and that's commonly known to be an ailment among African-Americans and Mediterranean people, people will come from all over the world, because that's where the chronic illness sickle-cell anemia is being addressed.

So it's being a stellar institution in what you can provide, and preferring to focus in that area of medicine, having your niche. Not trying to compete with SC or Cedar-Sinai. And even in terms of eye diseases; if you're addressing eye diseases because you have a population that has a lot of high diabetes, the eye diseases or people with diabetes may not be the same as the eye diseases of people at the Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA, because they're not coming -- they're dealing with macular degeneration, which is unheard of out here; incidents of macular degeneration would be not that common out here, would be very common over there, even though you're dealing with the eye diseases; there are causes of eye diseases that would give you a niche, if your eye diseases are related to diabetes and the problems of attendant to diabetes in the eyes, the eye -- diabetes affecting the eyesight. And the same with orthopedics. People have circular problems, and they're losing legs, losing a toe, losing all that. That's both diabetes and orthopedics, because the people who are going to have to make these surgeries are orthopedists, yet it's caused by failing kidneys; renal disease and poor circulation.

So, no, I don't see the population -- because their mission is to serve underserved populations, and this population is poor and is not being served; that's not inconsistent with their mission. The fact that blacks move away and for protection, some of them, you're trying to work and feed your kids, they were getting shot walking to school -- yeah, get out of this neighborhood. But if your child's got a chronic illness, you're going to have to bring him back here for the treatment. But you've got him in a safe environment for child rearing. So we can serve the needs of black people,

bringing them all the way here from Africa, if need be. I know that there's the wife of the president, I think, of -- not Uganda -- Tanzania, she came here and wanted treatment and King Hospital. They had a whole thing of international health, Dr. Eric Bean and Dr. Gus Gill, have a program for dealing with HIV and AIDS as well as -- what's the other guy's name? -- [inaudible] -- it'll come to me later on. Anyway, I'm just saying, there are people out at kind who are addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS. The sister out there, Davis, Cynthia Davis, there are people who have found their niche and who are working to address the illnesses of black people. And so no, I don't see where that does anything but give you a population to better address the needs of underserved populations.

**STEVENSON**

Well, what do you think about some of African-Americans locally that have aligned themselves, shall I say, with the anti-immigrant -- I'm thinking about somebody like Ted Hayes. There's also a gentleman, an African-American, who sits on the board of the Minutemen. And I've -- like I said, just in conversations with friends, I've been seeing a little bit of this anti-immigrant. I mean, it sounds the same as the right-wing rhetoric. What do you think about that>

**SMITH**

I'm a Black Nationalist, and as a Black Nationalist, I believe that black people should do as much as possible for themselves. I don't think it's the white man's responsibility to address the needs of my people. It's his responsibility to not interfere with my constitutional right to equal treatment and equal access to the tax dollars to address my needs, he has a responsibility to not do certain things that deny me my human rights. But as far as he has the responsibility to come over here and see to my education and see to my health and all of that, black people should be doing that for black people. They should be getting trained to do that for themselves, and training other blacks to do that for the race.

As a Black Nationalist, I may say or do something that coincides with a white supremacist that don't believe in integration, or believe in black people doing their own self thing. He's doing it with his motive, "I don't want to do nothing for them niggers. They ought to all go back to Africa," that's maybe his attitude. But he's talking about black people ought to help their own self, but he's saying it from a perspective of, "Ain't my responsibility; I ain't gonna do nothin' for no nigger." What his motivation is and what mine is is not the same. I'm talking from a positive, black people need to do for self. He's talking from a white supremacist, that all the niggers ought to go back to Africa.

Malcolm X said about Lyndon Johnson and [Barry Morris] Goldwater that Goldwater was like a wolf and Lyndon Johnson was like a fox. He was likening them both to being white supremacist who wanted to have you eaten up before you know what's going on. At least the wolf is growling, and

you see a wolf coming at you with his teeth and his fangs and everything. This fox just slips up on you, then caught you and before you even know what was going on you in his stomach. The point is that the agenda of white supremacists can be overt and covert. What Ted Hayes' agenda is, I've never known Ted to be a Black Nationalist, so he's probably just a lackey and a running dog for white supremacists.

But there are certain things that are consistent in the beliefs of Black Nationalists and the beliefs of white conservatives that makes them -- not necessarily allies, but I'm going to believe what I believe, whether he believes it or not. I mean, if I'm raised, and I believe, that homosexuality is bad, because that's my Church of God in Christ upbringing or my Nation of Islam upbringing, and this white conservative is against homosexuality, don't accuse me of being a white supremacist or supporting the white supremacists; I'm saying this because of what I believe, regardless of what the white supremacists believe. If I don't believe in same-sex marriage, I believe this because of my own beliefs, not because the white conservatives don't believe in same-sex marriage. So we're going to vote the same way on the issue of same-sex marriage, because I don't believe in it. Well, you got that the Koran. Where did you get yours? You got that out the Bible, the white man's Bible. No, I got this out of the book of Imhotep. In other words, I can cite instances where conservatives will say some things that Black Nationalists believe, and we may appear to be somehow of the same ilk. Well, if I got to be the ilk of [inaudible] homosexuals, I'd rather be heterosexual than homo. Now, if that puts me in league with white supremacists by being a heterosexual as opposed to a homo, I'm with the white supremacists, because I'm not going to be no homo to prove that I'm not no white supremacist.

I'm just sharing with you, I don't know enough about Ted Hayes, other than I don't see him at any Black Nationalist gatherings. People who are Afro-centric, who are Black Nationalists, have a fundamental understanding about what Black Nationalism is, in terms of the rights of the citizens of enslaved Africans, to self-government and self-determination -- I think I've given you that whole story. I'm just saying, there are certain things that are Black Nationalist, the rights, and because some of those things may coincide -- I remember during the period, as I've mentioned, Goldwater -- I had an organization, Afro-Americans for Goldwater. When I gave speeches, I was basically talking about Black Nationalism. Which candidate is going to support Black Nationalism? The right of black people to English as a Second Language. We had languages in Africa, and we have a right to be taught English as a second language, because our primary languages are African languages. Hear this guy over here telling me, "Y'all didn't have no languages in Africa; y'all come from a language called pidgin that the white man taught your slave master," -- that's white supremacist. That's the line of the left, that's the line of the liberals, that's the line of the progressive. I

never hear white people who are conservatives -- they against bilingual education, period, whether it's French, Spanish -- these are European languages, and they don't even want people to speak European languages to have bilingual education. At least I'm for bilingual education; does that make me a left-wing progressive?

I'm coming from a Black Nationalist point of view, that Africans had languages in Africa before white people came out of the caves in Europe. We gave literacy to the world; it's written right there on the sphinxes and tombs of ancient Kemet. Reducing human speech to graphic representations. I'm just saying, certain things that I say going to look left-wing and certain things that I say gonna look right-wing. I'm coming from Black Nationalism. It may fall on the left sometimes, it may fall on the right sometimes, in terms of the ideology that happened to support that particular view.

So yes, the anti-immigration thing is not anything that I get into, because I see this as a part of the conservatives agenda, corporate agenda, [inaudible] poor white trash, but definitely their cheap labor has benefit American corporate interests. It's busted up the unions, because the unions won't do much labor, and when they couldn't bring the labor here, they took all the factories and things over there. So this anti-immigration thing of trying to build a fence and passing laws against people, busting up the families -- they have what they call "anchor babies." These are babies who are born in the United States. The Constitution says that all persons born and naturalized in the United States are citizens of the United States, and of the state wherein they reside. So these children who are born in the United States of parents who are here illegally are citizens. Some people try to claim that because their parents are here illegally, that's against the law. But the children are born here, so you can't send these parents back, because you're going to separate them from their children. [Michael] Chernoff says, listen, people commit crimes in this country every day and they go to prison, regardless of whether or not they got children. So talking about their children haven't done anything is no reasons for thinking that the parents can't be punished for the crimes. The parents committed a crime; they came here unlawfully. Now, if they want to take their children with them, fine. If they don't want to take their children with them, we have places to put their children, in foster care, and other means of taking care of their children if they don't want to take their children back to where they come from, because they're going out of here.

Now, that's the ultra-right conservative attitude. Being born here don't make it acceptable for your parents to commit crimes, because we put people in jail every day who have children. So you can't talk about these are anchor babies then, because their babies are citizens you can't send the parents back, sending parents to prison for breaking the law. And that's the arguments that the conservatives had, and we got people going to jail every day who are black, and they got children who are shoplifting or any other

kind of crime, the fact that you got children don't mean nothing. You going to jail if you're caught. If you go in there and pass a bad check, or do some identity theft, you're going to prison; I don't care how many children you got. So 'cause you got an anchor baby who's born here don't mean you can break the law and stay in this country.
So that's a legal issue; that's not anti-Hispanic or anti-nothing, but, how'd you come here? If you came here illegally, you can leave, and you take your baby with you. If you want to leave your baby here because the baby's a citizen, fine, but you committed a crime. That's for the white man to deal with, because he brought them in here. If he wants to stop it, get the employers who are hiring them. Because that's why they're coming here; somebody's paying them to come up here. Right? If they wasn't being paid, they wouldn't be coming here. Somebody's benefiting from that cheap labor. That's the American businessman. So now I think that opportunism is what Ted Hayes is up to. I don't see him as a Black Nationalist; I've never seen, as I say, him -- any publications of anything that comes off as Black Nationalist.

**STEVENSON**

Right. So would you not see any correlation between the right-wing conservative anti-immigration rhetoric and some of the attacks on our people? You wouldn't see any correlation there?

**SMITH**

The right-wing conservatives have a way of veiling any overt messages that are anti-black, because they come off as Christians. And you see them on television, Paul and Jan Crouch, and all of them on television with all the -- if it wasn't for black music, Christian television wouldn't be listened to. People watching Christian television for the songs and the music. If people had to watch one Episcopalian service, they wouldn't nobody watch that stuff. It's the soulfulness of the Gospel that keeps Christian television going. Plus the whole style of preaching. The only thing white preachers don't do is get a lot of Call and Response; that's the big difference. Usually when black church is going on, when the preacher's talking you get a lot of, "Yeah. Mm-hmm, yeah." But white people just sit there, and the preacher looks like he's just ranting and raving. Whereas in the black church, there's a play, a by-play, between the sermon and the audience.

**STEVENSON**

Right, a Call and Response.

**SMITH**

A Call and Response. But other than the lack of Call and Response, your conservative churches postured themselves as Christian. But as I said, that's the conservatives trying to play the role of the fox, coming off as a Christian when they got a white supremacist agenda. But as I just shared with you, poor people who are Indians who are confused as to their own identity -- I'm talking about the Hispanics now who are actually descendants of Native

Americans, who because of their light complexion and have Spanish surnames, some of them think of themselves as like Europeans; they want to treat us like they're superior because they're light, almost white.
But that's -- we have people coming out of Louisiana and down South who -- they call them Creoles -- who had to get over that hump. Some of them ain't got over it. Black people live in certain parts of town that felt threatened when other blacks moved in. These are black people now. [laughter] So trying to fault a Hispanic for thinking he's better than a dark-skinned black -- I do notice that the Peles [Edson Arantes do Nascimento] and the Sammy Sosas [Smauel Sosa Peralta], they're just as much Hispanic. So I have no opposition to helping people who have Spanish, Hispanic culture, and Hispanic language, Spanish language, as their primary language, as long as the Peles and the Sammy Sosas are using that as -- somebody's got to address the needs of Africans Hispanics, because white supremacists seem to cut right on through this whole thing on helping Hispanics. Now, who gonna help the Sammy Sosas?

**STEVENSON**
That's a very big issue on an international basis now, just getting some --

**SMITH**
I'm just saying that I -- if they tell me "Hispanic," I say, which one? The African Hispanics or the white Hispanics? I don't have no problem helping Hispanics, as long as they Sammy Sosas and Peles. Pele's a Puerto Rican, because -- Brazilian, because he spoke Portuguese. But I'm just saying, there are huge populations of Hispanics or Latinos who are African descendents, who happen to have been captured by the Spanish, who are being just as denied by white supremacists as blacks who were captured by the English and the French and the Dutch.

**STEVENSON**
Right, that's absolutely right, because in Brazil today, Brazil today has the largest black population outside of Nigeria.

**SMITH**
That's right. [laughter] So -- and I will fight for the rights of the Brazilian Latinos as much as any other blacks, because I know their suffering; I can see it.

**STEVENSON**
OK. Before we wind up, are there any other community organizations or movements that you'd like to discuss that you haven't discussed in our three or four sessions, that you would like to --

**SMITH**
Well, right now there's this -- the Mental Health Services Act [MHSA] has brought a lot of funding for the issues of community services for people who are suffering the ravages of white -- (phone rings)

## *1.7. Session 4C*
## *May 14, 2007*

**SMITH**
—organization called the [The National] Coalition of Mental Health Professionals. Dr. Sandra Cox is the psychologist. They'll be on 79th [Street] and Broadway. And there's the Tessie Cleveland Community Services Corporation over on 80th and Compton Avenue.
**STEVENSON:**
Tessie Cleveland?
**SMITH**
Tessie Cleveland, she's actually a doctor of social work. She died. She was the director of Hospital Social Services for thirty years at Martin Luther King. This agency is named after her. It's headed by a brother by the name of Moses Chadwick. I've seen some very positive things coming out of those two agencies in addressing a lot of the unmet needs of blacks who are having mental health challenges. Tessie Cleveland primarily deals with children who have been snatched from the homes because of the parents being denied parenting privileges for drug abuse or [unclear], whatever the parents were deemed to have done that was so severe that the child needed to be taken out of the home. But, let's say, in addressing the mental problems, the mental illness that many of these children may be having as a reaction for [unclear] to separation from their parents. This agency, the Community Coalition of Mental Health Professionals on 79th and Broadway, deals with adults and seniors. Those are some positive things that I see going on in the community, because Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome [PTSS] has never really been addressed. There's a sister by the name of Joy [Degruy-]Leary, who spoke at the mental health conference this year, at the conference that African American Mental Health Workers for the county of Los Angeles put on every year, and the whole history of slavery and the mental illnesses that may exist and have been existing in the community, the self-hatred, a lot of other issues that we have not really cared to address or looked at for whatever reasons because sometimes a sickness becomes so accepted that how can you name it a sickness when everybody's doing it, so to speak. So what is mental illness? It skews the whole notion of mental illness when certain things are going on for so long to where how can you claim this is sickness, you know. But to whatever extent you asked about agencies, WLCAC is another agency that has tried very positive ways. That's Watts Labor Community Action Council. Within the system, I would say that the Maxine Waters Employment Preparation Center in training black women in LVNs and CNAs, which you don't really have to have a lot of academic skills, but they can lead to an improvement in the academic skills and into high-paying occupations with those levels of nurses, and then you can go right on into an LVN, once you gain some confidence and the necessary skills

to supplement that training that you already have and go into some very good lucrative-paying occupations in the healthcare nursing professions. She's going to be—"she" meaning Dr. Janet Clark, is going to be introducing psych tech training as an area of nursing, a supplement to the nursing training that already goes on there, and training them in childcare. There's already childcare being delivered at Southwest College, I mean childcare degree, but now many of them are requiring B.A.'s instead of associate in arts. So a lot of these people will only be able to be aides instead of teachers unless they go on to get their bachelor's. It forces them to educate themselves, so if they have an A.A. and become complacent, you know, they have an opportunity to go on and get another two years' education for a B.A. and hold onto the job they have or move on up into doing public-school teaching in a regular K through 12. So they don't realize their potential until they sometimes get goosed. Okay? So I see those kinds of things. I use the expression "Every knock ain't nothing but a boost." They do this to try to keep people out, but it don't do but force you to become that much better, make you improve yourself or you became complacent. Before you was just sitting around watching All My Children or Days of our Lives, General Hospital. [laughs] I mean, that was the life for the welfare mother, you know, and she's not able to do that anymore with Welfare to Work programs. I'm just saying that I see a lot of things positive coming out of these institutions in the community. We lost the Watts Health Foundation at Compton [Avenue] and 103rd Street. I think CareOne bought that, and so that's not really a community-based agency anymore. Westminster Neighborhood Association went down. A lot of things that came out of the 1965 rebellion, very few of them have remained. This is one of the few surviving War on Poverty senior citizen centers. That side used to be all Teen Posts and this side was senior citizens, and we lost the Teen Post funding. We just made it all South Central Multipurpose Senior Citizen Center. But we get assistance from those two agencies that I mentioned, the Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and the Tessie Cleveland [Community Service Corporation]. They both support us.

**STEVENSON**

What was the long name of the Tessie Cleveland?

**SMITH**

Tessie Cleveland, TCCSC, Tessie Cleveland Community Service Corporation or Center.

**STEVENSON**

What do you see in the future for the community? I've had several interviewees for this series express some concern, from mild to very strong concern, about the possibility of yet another rebellion. What do you think about that?

**SMITH**

If it hadn’t been for the Hispanics, wouldn’t nothing have come out of the Rodney King thing. The Hispanics did most of the work in that one, if you ask me. Blacks got in on it, but blacks didn’t start it. Okay. That’s what really surprised the police department, was the Hispanics bum-rushed them. They were focusing, thinking that the blacks were going to act out. The next thing they know, the Hispanics were leading the charge. Now, that’s what I witnessed. Now, we had Damion [Williams] and those kids that dragged the truck driver out and beat him up, that was made the big news, the most bizarre thing that went on. But when I saw people coming out of the drugstores and all these places that got burned down, looting and going on, I saw way more Mexicans than I saw blacks.

**STEVENSON**

There was definitely the different participants than from the ’65 rebellion.

**SMITH**

Right. And with the treatment that the police gave them for the little rally that they were having on May 1st, there’s a potential for more of that than there is from the blacks. Yes, I see the potential for a lot more encounters with the Hispanics than I see with blacks.

**STEVENSON**

I see. Okay. Well, thank you very much.



*Date: 2014-04-28*