A TEI Project

Interview of Lillian Mobley

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1.1. Session 1A
April 4, 2007

STEVENSON
Good morning. I'm interviewing Lillian Mobley on Wednesday, April the 4th.
STEVENSON
First I'd like to ask you when and where you were born; if you can tell me something about your parents, grandparents, and your family, and where you grew up.
MOBLEY
Okay. I'm Lillian Mobley. I grew up in Macon, Georgia. My mother's Corene Harkless, and my father's Charlie Harkless.
STEVENSON
And that's H-a-r--
MOBLEY
--k-l-e-s-s.
STEVENSON
Corene, and your father was--
MOBLEY

Charlie.
STEVENSON
Charlie. Okay.
MOBLEY
I had three sisters, twin sisters, Ruth and Ruby, and my oldest sister, Corronia, C-o-r-r-o-n-i-a.
STEVENSON
C-o-r-r-i-n-a.
MOBLEY
Yes, and two brothers, Robert--Robert Daniel--and Charlie James.
STEVENSON
And your grandparents?
MOBLEY
Yes, my mother's mother died early, at an early age. I think she must have been--I'm not sure how old she was, but she was young when she passed. My grandfather lived quite a while after she had passed.
STEVENSON
Okay. Do you remember their names?
MOBLEY
Yes. My grandmother's name is Ida.
STEVENSON
Ida. And your grandfather?
MOBLEY
Jim, Jimmy.
MOBLEY
So if you could tell me something about your parents' occupations and also about the neighborhood in which you grew up in.
STEVENSON
Your parents' occupations.
MOBLEY
My father worked for the city of Macon, Bibb County, and my mother used to do day work. She worked at Masonic Home for Orphans.
STEVENSON
Masonic?
MOBLEY
Yes, Masonic. She cooked. She was a cook.
STEVENSON
Okay. Do you know much about your grandparents' background, in terms of their occupations or where they lived?
MOBLEY
My grandmother was just a housewife. She raised twelve children, so she was a housewife; she [unclear] get out. But my grandfather used to make furniture and, you know, worked on his farm. He had a farm, and he had a little grocery store that he ran.

STEVENSON
I see. Was that also in Macon?
MOBLEY
No, that was in Twiggs County.
STEVENSON
Twiggs County, okay, and that's also in Georgia.
MOBLEY
Yes, Georgia.
STEVENSON
All right. If you could tell me something about the neighborhood that you grew up in as a child, something about your neighbors, the children that you played with, you know, and that sort of thing.
MOBLEY
Well, I lived on Fort Hill in Macon, Georgia.
STEVENSON
Fort Hill?
MOBLEY
Fort Hill. Just--a black community.
MOBLEY
So it was segregated.
MOBLEY
No, it wasn't segregated when I was there. On the next street going back down to East Macon, it was white people, but not on the street and around where I lived, but just one block away. I lived one block away from Fort Hawkins Elementary School. It's this fort, you know, from during the war, and it was named after Hawkins. But we couldn't go to that school. When I started school, I attend Marilyn Malo Burdell [Elementary School]. It was named after a principal.
STEVENSON
Marilyn?
MOBLEY
Marilyn Malo Burdell.
STEVENSON
Malo.
MOBLEY
Burdell.
STEVENSON
M-a-l-o Berdell, you said?
MOBLEY
Berdell.
STEVENSON
Berdell, B-e-r-d-e-l--one l or two?
MOBLEY
Two.

STEVENSON
Okay. Malo Burdell, okay. That was the elementary school you attended.
MOBLEY
Yes. It was a pretty nice mix, you know, with just professional people, you know, other just ordinary working people in the neighborhood.
STEVENSON
So it was mixed in terms of class.
MOBLEY
Yes.
STEVENSON
Okay, I see. So in terms of the elementary school that you attended, what was your experience like? Were there any teachers that stood out particularly?
MOBLEY
I think from day one, all of my teachers was good teachers, because they cared about you, and they knew your family. You know, they would come by your house and talk to your parents. They didn't wait until your parents visited school. They cared enough that they would come by and let your parents know what was going on with the children.
STEVENSON
Okay. The school was an all-black school?
MOBLEY
All-black school. It was named after a black woman.
STEVENSON
I see. So your teachers and administrators as well were black?
MOBLEY
Yes.
STEVENSON
Teachers and administrators.
MOBLEY
Yes, everybody was black.
STEVENSON
Okay. Tell me something about what role religion played in your upbringing.
MOBLEY
Religion played a major part in my life, growing up.
MOBLEY
Let me close the door.
MOBLEY
I grew up in the church, Mt. Sinai Baptist Church. So I attended Sunday school every Sunday, and we had the Young People Baptist Association, you know, that you belonged to.
STEVENSON

What roles did your parents play in the church, other than going to church? Did they belong to any of the church organizations or play any roles in the church?

MOBLEY

Yes, my mother, she sang in the choir. She was an usher in the church; very active in church, yes. Yes, very active in church.

STEVENSON

Okay. What role would you say that the church played in the larger community in which you grew up?

MOBLEY

I think that the church was really involved. They had activity for the kids; had summer school. Just really involved in the community, you know, with activity outings, you know, for the entire family. They had a family night, you know, where the whole family come and be involved. My mother played a major part in all activity that went on at the church.

STEVENSON

Okay. So in terms of your social activities as a family, were they mostly church-related?

MOBLEY

Yes, because if you didn't go to church, there wasn't too much to do at that time, so your activity was built around school and church, church and school.

STEVENSON

Could you tell me at what age, how young you remember learning about race and the concept of race, discrimination, that sort of thing?

MOBLEY

I think I've always known about race. You just grew up, you know. My mother was strictly--

1.2. Session 1B
April 4, 2007

MOBLEY

Race, you know, you always knew the difference in the segregation, you know, and you knew about the Ku Klux Klan. You just knew. You know, it's one thing about growing up in the South, you know about race, you know. My parents always talked to us about being proud of who you are and, you know, never think less of yourself, because if you don't think less of yourself, then other people have to look at you for who you are. Whether they do or not, you know, you have to always be proud of who you are. So she always instilled that in us, growing up.

STEVENSON

I see. Okay. Several of the people I have interviewed have cited particular incidents in their family, violent incidents or--you mentioned the Ku Klux Klan. Were there any incidents involving any of your family members?

MOBLEY

Not that I know of, growing up. It may have, but nobody that I know. But they was always visible, you know, that they was there.

STEVENSON

Right. Okay. So how young were you when you became aware of them, the Ku Klux Klan, where you grew up?

MOBLEY

I think early on. I would say five or younger, that I was aware of the Ku Klux Klan. Yes, they used to march through the city, so you know that was--they had their special days and things that happened that let you know that they was there, and that they had no respect for black people.

STEVENSON

Okay. A related question, were you aware of any black people or citizens who mounted any resistance?

MOBLEY

No. Not at a early age, I didn't.

STEVENSON

We talked about your elementary school. Did you then go to junior high?

MOBLEY

Hudson High School.

STEVENSON

Hudson High School, okay. If you could talk about your experience there, again, any teachers that stood out. Again, was this a segregated high school?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

It was, okay. So then your administrators and your teachers were black as well.

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Could you tell me a little bit about your experience in high school?

MOBLEY

I would say that I had a really good experience in high school with all the teachers that I come in contact with. I had a home economics class, and it was exciting, because you learn so much. You know, things that you take for granted and what you do every day. But--I was trying to think of the teacher's name. I can't think of her name right now, but maybe I'll think about it. But just about your social skills and just maintaining a house, and

preparation to go out for employment or go further in a career. god, I don't know why I can't think of her name. But those was exciting times.

STEVENSON

What years were you in high school?

MOBLEY

I graduated in '48, so--

STEVENSON

So roughly what, 1944 to '48, or '45 to '48?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay. So you said that they prepared you for a career or how to prepare a home. What were your interests in terms of beyond high school?

MOBLEY

Well, at first I thought I wanted to be a nurse, so I started nursing training when I was out of school. But then I couldn't stand the blood. So my first experience with a patient coming in cut up, I mean cut up, just made me change my mind. Yes.

STEVENSON

So what did you then decide to do, since nursing turned out not to be--

MOBLEY

Well, then I thought I was going to be a social worker.

STEVENSON

Well, let me ask you this. So if the students in the school had aspirations, say, to be a social worker or, say, a doctor or something like that, did they have any kind of preparation like they do now? In other words--

MOBLEY

Then they didn't have preparation. They had some preparation. They had vocational school that you can go to in the afternoon. Then they had another program where you could train, while you was in high school, for careers that you will be thinking about. So they'd release you early to go. Some of the kids wanted to be morticians, so they would go and work in the mortuary. Barbering, beautician. Some of the students went to work at a medical office, worked at the hospital. So as much as they could, they would offer you things.

1.3. Session 1C
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STEVENSON

Okay. We were still talking about high school, and you had thought about being a nurse. That didn't work out. You also thought about being a social worker. You were talking about how students would go to a vocational school, have release time to go attend a vocational school for a certain

career. What about students that had aspirations of, say, going to college at your high school?

MOBLEY

At that time they would really try to work with you to prepare you for going to college. I got married instead. But, you know, within the scope of what they could do at that particular time, they did all they could to encourage you to go to college. Yes.

STEVENSON

Would those have been historically black colleges?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

What were some of those then?

MOBLEY

Morris Brown [College], Spelman [College], and Clark [College]. Fort Valley.

STEVENSON

Fort Valley?

MOBLEY

Yes. At that time those were major schools that, you know, at my school, that they was encouraging you to go to.

STEVENSON

A follow-up question about your family, your sisters and brothers, what did they go into in terms of occupation, or what did they do?

MOBLEY

My oldest sister, when she was out of school, she got married, and so she didn't have a career. Later on she went to work; she worked in a laundry, Independent Laundry. The twins, one married; she never worked until she was older, you know, after she and her husband broke up. Her twin sister worked at Independent Laundry, too. Right out of high school she went to work. No, she didn't finish high school. She went to work at Independent Laundry. That's what they did.

STEVENSON

And your brothers?

MOBLEY

My brother went into the service.

STEVENSON

Did he serve in World War II?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

He did.

MOBLEY

Yes, he did. Yes. My older brother passed. He died.

STEVENSON

Do you know anything about the brother that did serve in World War II? Do you know anything about the unit he served in or anything of that nature? The unit that he served in in World War II?

MOBLEY

No, I really don't.

STEVENSON

You mentioned, I think at your elementary school, that there was a nice mix of working class and upper class, in terms of the students' families in elementary school. Could you talk a little bit more about what the class dynamics were within the community, in terms of working class and upper class families?

MOBLEY

When I was growing up, there were people that had more than--their lifestyle was different. But I didn't see any--you know, you had kids that live in your block and around that dads was doctors, lawyers, postmen. Any field that you could name was right there. But they all went to church together and went to school together. They owned stores, owned their own business. But it was just, you know, just everybody all working together.

STEVENSON

You mentioned that there were doctors and lawyers, so did you have a black doctor, say, dentist? Did those professionals work in the community?

MOBLEY

Yes, because if you didn't see a black doctor--you know, my doctor's son is out here now, Dr. Frazier. He was my doctor the whole while we was growing up. We didn't have a pediatrician. We just had a family practitioner, you know, and so Dr. Frazier was more like part of your family. So you just grew up, you know, around all classes of people from different walks of life.

STEVENSON

I see. So were there also black businesses such as beauticians, barbers, other black businesses?

MOBLEY

Businessmen; you know, they own their own stores. Right on the corner from my--the Sawyers. Their kids went to school with us. They always owned their own business. When the father passed on, the son took over the grocery store. So around in my neighborhood there was a lot of different little stores that black people owned.

STEVENSON

What would you say were your parents' political views, or did you ever discuss their politics?

MOBLEY

No, not growing up. When we was growing up, we didn't discuss their political affiliation. We didn't talk about that.

STEVENSON

Okay. You know, along with talking about class, another question that I've tried to ask all of my interviewees is what roles gradations of skin color played when you were coming up? I think that's a really important question. Just from your perspective when you were coming up, was there any intraracial discrimination based on skin color?

MOBLEY

As far as--

STEVENSON

Light skin, dark skin.

MOBLEY

Yes, yes. Not in the classes that I was in, but it was always that if you was lighter, you know, a difference was made in how you was treated, whether you was dark or you was fair. Yes, it was different, because when honors always came, it came to the lighter skin, not to the darker.

STEVENSON

In school, you mean?

MOBLEY

Yes. But I was just fortunate that in my classes, the teachers that I had wasn't like that, because I don't think I had but one teacher that was as light as you are. I can think of one, my fifth-grade teacher. But she didn't make any difference in the color, you know, but she was fair, very fair.

STEVENSON

Could you tell me your awareness of the Civil Rights Movement? And I guess maybe a larger question is, when you became aware of it where you grew up. Were you still in Georgia when the Civil Rights Movement took off?

MOBLEY

Yes, I was living in Macon. Yes. I think I must have been about in the tenth grade when they was having a demonstration that made me aware. They had civil rights workers coming from all over to do voters registration, and I think that was my first--

STEVENSON

Awareness?

MOBLEY

--awareness of it, yes.

STEVENSON

Now, would these have been I think what we now call Freedom Riders, students coming from all over the country?

MOBLEY

Yes. Right. Yes.

STEVENSON

What was the local reaction, not just in your community but in the, you know, white community, when that started?

MOBLEY

They didn't take it very well. I was trying to remember; I think one of the ladies that I know, for some reason, she got fired off of her job during that time, I guess for participating in whatever was going on. So there was a lot of fear on black people's part of whether their children and, you know, especially the boys--and girls--would participate in anything that they may get hurt or killed or go to jail or what have you.

STEVENSON

So did members of your family register to vote or become involved in the marches and other activities?

MOBLEY

Well, my older brother was dead, and my next brother wasn't there. He came out of the service, and he went to Camden, New Jersey, to live.

STEVENSON

New Jersey. What was the name of the town again?

MOBLEY

Camden.

STEVENSON

Camden, okay.

MOBLEY

So I guess after going into the service, he probably realized that it was going to be hard for him to stay in Macon.

STEVENSON

Would you elaborate a little bit on that, why he would move north as opposed to coming back to Macon?

MOBLEY

He probably felt that he had more freedom to live the way he wanted to live, or try to live the way he wanted to, than to stay in Macon, where he knew how segregated and the discrimination and everything. So he probably just felt much better going to Camden to live than if he had--

STEVENSON

I see. Okay, so you're out of high school, and you said you got married after high school. How long did you stay in Georgia before coming west?

MOBLEY

About two years. Then I came to Los Angeles.

STEVENSON

Why did you decide to come to Los Angeles, and what year would it have been?

MOBLEY

1950. 1950. My husband came out, and he went to work for the railroad.

STEVENSON

Would that have been the Southern Pacific?

MOBLEY

Santa Fe [Railroad].

STEVENSON

Santa Fe. And your husband's name?
MOBLEY
James Otis.
STEVENSON
Okay, so you came in 1950. How did you come, train?
MOBLEY
On the train. Train, yes.
STEVENSON
Once you arrived, could you say something about the neighborhood that you moved into once you came out here?
MOBLEY
I lived at 103rd [Street] and Zamora [Street].
STEVENSON
103rd?
MOBLEY
In Watts, yes.
STEVENSON
What was the other street?
MOBLEY
Zamora.
STEVENSON
Would you describe your impressions of Los Angeles, as opposed to where you came in Georgia, when you got here?
MOBLEY
Well, when I first got here, it wasn't anything that I really liked. I came because my husband was here, and he sent for me to come. Growing up in Georgia, you know everybody, all the people that you've been knowing all your life, so you have a certain amount of comfort with living around people that you know, that knew you before you got into the world, and was always there to support you and chastise you and to do whatever.
MOBLEY
So it was a different kind of thing, coming to California, you know, that way. I didn't know anybody but my husband when I got here. We stayed with a lady, roomed with a lady, and I needed more room, so we moved to 118th [Street] and Avalon [Boulevard]. I had two kids, so, you know, it was quite a difference, coming from Macon to California, and so I had to really get a feel of what it was like and what it was all about. It took me some time to adjust to be just being away from my family and friends and whatever.
STEVENSON
So the neighborhoods you lived in when you first came here, how were they in terms of the racial makeup, as opposed to where you came from?
MOBLEY
In both places we lived around mostly blacks, mostly blacks and a few Mexicans. So when I moved to 85th [Street], my next-door neighbor was

Mexican, and we became good friends. She had three kids, and I had the two kids. You know, we watched the neighborhood change.

STEVENSON

Can you describe that a little bit more? So you got here in 1950. When did it start--now, you're talking about demographic change, in terms of who lived in the neighborhood? Maybe you could also talk about--we talked a little bit about the Civil Rights Movement before you left Georgia. When you got here, could you talk about what was going on here, in terms of the Civil Rights Movement?

MOBLEY

In the early time, I just spent my time taking care of the babies, until they start to school. That's when I started getting involved in different things, when my kids went to school. I spent a lot of time, because at that time they had a lot of activities for children, you know, the Camp Fire [Girls], Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts. It started off with the Cub Scouts. The Horizon. So my activity was around PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] and those organizations that my kids was involved in.

STEVENSON

Right. So would you say that's how you started getting involved in the community, is really through the school?

MOBLEY

Yes, through the school and the activities that my kids was involved in.

STEVENSON

Okay, and your kids attended what elementary school?

MOBLEY

South Park [Elementary School], [John C.] Fremont [High School], and Bret Harte [Junior High School], and [Mary McLeod] Bethune [Junior High School]. The youngest one went to Bethune.

STEVENSON

That's a junior high, right?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay. Could you talk a little bit more about the changes in the neighborhood that you mentioned earlier? Also, you were working at the school with the PTA and everything, and you've had a long history of involvement in the community. Just if you could lay out for me how that evolved, you know, from the fifties, you know.

MOBLEY

When my kids was older, I think what really happened is when they formed the Black Student Union [BSU] and when they had a demonstration at Fremont High School.

STEVENSON

This would have been what, mid-sixties?

MOBLEY
Yes.
STEVENSON
Mid-sixties.
MOBLEY
I went over to the school to see about my kids, because all the corruption, all the activity that was going on, and I went over to see about them. So I wasn't working anywhere, just taking care of my kids, so I would go back every day to make sure that they was okay and safe. Booker Griffin [of KGFJ]--do you remember Booker Griffin?
STEVENSON
Yes, I do.
MOBLEY
Booker was there. He was working for the radio station at the time.
STEVENSON
Was that KGFJ that he was working for?
MOBLEY
Right. Right. I'll never forget, because he asked me to speak, you know, about it, and I told him I couldn't do it. I said, "I can't do that, because I haven't talked to anybody." I hadn't talked to my neighbors then, but I just came down to see about my kids, and I know I can't be talking to people, and I hadn't talked with somebody about what went on.
MOBLEY
Then he said, "Well, when are you going to talk to your neighbors and friends?"
MOBLEY
So I did that, and I think that was my first involvement in getting involved then, because I had to talk to somebody about what was going on and what we was going to do about it. I will never forget that, Booker Griffin. He's gone. But he kind of prompted me to--
STEVENSON
I know he also was a journalist. He also wrote for the [Los Angeles] Sentinel , didn't he, at one point?
MOBLEY
Yes. Yes.
STEVENSON
Could you tell me a little bit more about his role in relation to what was going on in Fremont High, and maybe also, in terms of the BSU, the forming of the BSU at Fremont High, what were the issues, particular issues that they were trying to address with that demonstration?
MOBLEY
I have to think about that. I haven't thought about that in a long time. I'll come back to that.
STEVENSON

Okay, we'll come back to that? Okay, so you talked with your neighbors, people you knew, about what their concerns were in terms of the community?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay, and what were those?

MOBLEY

You know, at first a lot of them didn't see things. They just wanted to be quiet about a lot of stuff. They feel like as long as the kids was going to school and getting good grades, beyond that they didn't have any when we first started talking about it. But after then they had to talk to the children to find out, you know. I remember Ablyn Winge. You know Ablyn Winge? Ablyn Winge, Kathy Green [phonetic], Nelly Blanding [phonetic].

STEVENSON

Kathy Green and Ablyn Winge.

MOBLEY

Ablyn, yes. Dorothy Rochelle.

STEVENSON

These were all women that became involved in the community and what the community needed.

MOBLEY

Yes. Hazel Green.

STEVENSON

Hazel Green?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay. So at this point, was there any sort of organization that you formed?

MOBLEY

No, at first we just started getting to know each other and talking to each other in the beginning. Damu, he's with Drew's Counseling Service; I don't know what name he called this organization now. But he came over to meet with us and to share with us. He just felt that the parents wasn't paying any attention to what was going on at Southwest College. He said they was down in those bungalows in the mud, and they wasn't building the school. I think that's what started us coming together, the concern of black women. Yes, Kathy Green.

STEVENSON

Now, are we after the Watts Rebellion?

MOBLEY

No, we're still before.

STEVENSON

This is still before, okay. So, yes, if you could tell me what were the--you were talking to your neighbors and your friends and the women that you've mentioned--what were the major concerns? After you talk about that, maybe we could talk about what you feel led up to the first Watts Rebellion.

MOBLEY

[Sighs] I'm going to have to come back to that.

STEVENSON

About what the concerns were? Okay, we can come back to that.

MOBLEY

Yes. I'm slow today, because of--

STEVENSON

Okay, we can come back to that.

MOBLEY

Okay.

STEVENSON

I'll just make a note of that. Okay, so the Watts Rebellion of '65, were you surprised? Did you see it coming?

MOBLEY

No. No. You know, a lot of things, you become aware of a lot of things, but I can't say--there was a lot of displeasure about a lot of things, but I didn't see the rebellions coming. I really didn't. The more you be involved, the more you see different things happening. But I know it was a lot of discontentment, but not to the point that I thought it would be a rebellion. I really didn't.

STEVENSON

Do you remember where you where when it started?

MOBLEY

In '65 I was working. I was working at North American Rockwell in Canoga Park; I remember that.

STEVENSON

What was your reaction when it happened?

MOBLEY

I worked graveyard, and my reaction was where was my kids, you know, because I had these two older sons that I didn't know where they were, whether they were with the babysitter or what. So my first reaction was getting home to make sure my children was safe.

MOBLEY

When I got home, the streets was blocked off. They had set up a command post at the Security [Pacific] Bank in the parking lot, so you couldn't get into the street. So that was frightening, you know, just to come home and just like a war zone. And get home to find out that my kids was safe and okay.

STEVENSON

So after the rebellion, what sort of efforts did you participate in to deal with some of what led up to the rebellion?

MOBLEY
I participated in a lot of things that I thought would get us through whatever, even though it was just one day at a time, one meeting at a time. All kinds of things was happening. I joined CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] with Celes[tus] King [III].
STEVENSON
What sorts of efforts was CORE making, you know, what types of initiatives, to deal with the rebellion?
MOBLEY
We were trying to come to understanding of why this took place and the needs of the people, education, jobs, recreation, and just lot of activity to try to find out, you know, just what was the root cause of it all and what could we do to make it better.
STEVENSON
And at this point, this would have been before the Black Congress.
MOBLEY
Yes. I remember the Black Congress, too.
STEVENSON
Did you participate in any of their meetings?
MOBLEY
Yes, I did.
STEVENSON
You did. Okay.
MOBLEY
Yes, that first meeting was held down on Broadway on seventy-something; I think it was seventy-something and Broadway.
STEVENSON
Could you recall any of the meetings that might have stood out that you attended? I know the Black Congress only existed maybe a couple of years, very short-lived.
MOBLEY
Right.
STEVENSON
But could you talk a little bit? Because the other people I've interviewed that were involved with the Black Congress did discuss it, and discussed in terms of, I guess, the promise of the Black Congress being able to bring people from different viewpoints, different organizations, different political views, together to try to deal with the community's problems. So could you talk a little--
MOBLEY
But that never happened.
STEVENSON
Yes, could you talk more about that?
MOBLEY

You know, Ruby Bates and I used to always attend the meetings together; it was Ruby Bates. You know, I just felt that there was a lot of lip service given to it but no action. So none of the meetings that I attended that I could say this is something I could put my hat on and follow with and do it. It just didn't happen. It just didn't happen. Maybe I gave up on it too early, but to me it just seemed a waste of time, going to listen to somebody talk and no action came from it, no really substance thing that you could just say this is what it is. I didn't see that.

MOBLEY
I attended some of the meetings in the early meetings when they had Ujima. Do you remember Ujima?

STEVENSON
Yes.

MOBLEY
That's when [Maulana] Ron Karenga was first getting started.

STEVENSON
So I think what I'm hearing is you were looking for a plan for concrete action for dealing with these community needs that led up to the rebellion, and you weren't seeing that.

MOBLEY
No, I didn't see it. No, no, no.

MOBLEY
Okay. So if you could continue talking about maybe some of the--I know you participated in many different organizations, but maybe we could start talking about some of them, you know.

MOBLEY
Well, you know, when I think about organizations that I've been involved in and the substance of what I got out of it--I don't know, sweetheart. You know, you join organizations, and you just hope that they lead you to something that's wholesome and fulfilling, not only for yourself but for your family and your friends. Being a part of NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership [Conference] [SCLC]--

1.4. Session 2A
May 22, 2007

STEVENSON
Good morning. I'm continuing the interview with Lillian Mobley on May the 22nd.

STEVENSON
First I'd like to ask you about your role in the following organizations. Let's start with the King/Drew Hospital. In that connection, if you could tell me what was your first association with the hospital, were you involved when it

was still just an idea, when they were sort of conceptualizing it, and what were some of the reasons that it came into being?

MOBLEY

I was involved with it before it was materialized. I was invited to a meeting by Ablyn Winge. She was a member of Region 9 Medical Program, and they got the first money, for heart, cancer, and stroke, in the beginning days of Martin Luther King, when it was Palm Lane, and watched the development, you know, as it got started. She was really involved in the whole idea, from the petitions that they went out and gathered, you know, for the hospital, the need for the hospital. She invited me to come to a meeting. We was at a meeting at Fremont High School, and when it was over--she had to go there, and she invited me to come along with her.

MOBLEY

Cathy Green [phonetic] chaired the regional medical program, Region 9 Medical Program, and Dr.--I can't think of his name now; it will come back to me--but anyway, in the very beginning when the doctors was working with Supervisor [Kenneth] Hahn to get the hospital started.

STEVENSON

And roughly what year? This was after the Watts Rebellion; so this was maybe the late sixties?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

All right. Who were some of the other I'll call them key players in pushing for the hospital, whether those were community people, residents? Of course, Supervisor Hahn was very instrumental, but were there others, whether they were residents or lawmakers?

MOBLEY

There were some doctors. I have to get the names, because right now it's not on my head. But it's a lot of doctors that was in the beginning of the development. Some of the people that I remember was Birdell Moore, Ablyn Winge, Cathy Green, Ann Fields [phonetic].

STEVENSON

Ann Fields?

MOBLEY

Yes, Ann Fields. Betty Clifford.

STEVENSON

What was the first name again?

MOBLEY

Betty Clifford.

STEVENSON

Betty Clifford.

MOBLEY

Let's see. Nola [Mae] Carter, Mrs. Carter. Martha Matier [phonetic]. Lanetta Wells [phonetic].

STEVENSON

Wells; the first name was--

MOBLEY

Wells, Lanetta.

STEVENSON

Lanetta?

MOBLEY

Lanetta, yes.

STEVENSON

Okay, yes. I can get the names from you later. Okay. Before there was a King Hospital, what were the critical--

MOBLEY

Willa Mae Schaumburger [phonetic], because Willa Mae Schaumburger lived--

STEVENSON

Willa Mae?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Willa Mae.

MOBLEY

Willa Mae Schaumburger.

STEVENSON

Schaumburger?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay. All right. What were the medical needs of the community before there was a King Hospital? And let me just ask you this, if the average person, their children got sick, what did they do before there was a King Hospital?

MOBLEY

They had to ride all day to get to General Hospital, to try to get a way to get to General Hospital.

STEVENSON

Which was quite a distance, especially--

MOBLEY

Quite a distance, yes.

STEVENSON

Especially if you didn't have a car.

MOBLEY

Right.

STEVENSON

Now, were there at that time any community clinics to speak of, at that time? Or did you just have to go to General Hospital for--

MOBLEY

Most of the people that I knew just went to General Hospital, because there wasn't the kind of clinics that was open for them to go. You had the well baby clinics at different spots, but for any illness or accident or whatever like that, you went to Big General. You went to Big General, yes.

STEVENSON

I see. Okay. So you mentioned that there was a petition-writing campaign. Would you call it like a grass-roots campaign to get King Hospital?

MOBLEY

Yes.

STEVENSON

How hard was it to get it started, I mean to actually bring it to fruition?

MOBLEY

Anything we'd do was always a challenge, but there was a need, and people willingly circulated the petitions and got the signatures to bring the hospital into the community, because the need was there. Just getting up early in the morning and packing a lunch to go, you know.

MOBLEY

My neighbor had a daughter. At the time, Martha was fifteen years old, and, you know, they kept trying to find out what was really wrong with her. It took forever to find out that she was a juvenile diabetic. I used to go sometimes and ride with her and her mother and the other two kids, taking her back and forth to Big General. It was an all-day deal, so her mother used to plan it so like it was an outing rather than just a hospital visit--you know, pack lunch and whatever--while we go and take Martha back and forth to the hospital. Yes. It was quite an ordeal, because it was an all-day task to do that.

STEVENSON

Some of the other people I've interviewed for this series talked about how, even before the hospital was in place, even before it opened, that there were forces that wanted to see it fail.

MOBLEY

Right, from the very beginning.

STEVENSON

Could you talk a little bit about that? I would like to hear your viewpoint on that.

MOBLEY

There was a lot of opposition in getting the hospital, and I think that there was other hospitals that was afraid to have a hospital in the area, to develop it, and so there was a lot of opposition in that. So it was a constant battle to keep the interest up and to keep people motivated and to stay on the same path to get the hospital started. So it really was, yes.

STEVENSON
Who were some of those people that didn't want to see it happen?
MOBLEY
Well, I still believe UCLA played a major part in not wanting the hospital to be, unless it was part of their off-campus--unless they controlled what was going on in the community. You know, it seemed as though they had finally got what they wanted, but it just always seemed that the opposition was there to see that the hospital wouldn't go forward.
STEVENSON
All right. So once the hospital opened, that was what, in the very early seventies maybe?
MOBLEY
Yes.
STEVENSON
How soon was it before you started to see a difference in terms of, I don't know, mortality? I mean, what were the immediate results of having the hospital open in the community?
MOBLEY
Well, gradually it grew into what we--it never reached the full potential of what we thought it could be, but it was the beginning of people having a place to go where they was treated with dignity and respect. You know, just to see it grow and develop. On the day that the hospital opened, we had heard that it wouldn't open, and so at five o'clock in the morning Cathy Green, myself, and a lot of other people gathered there to make sure that the doors was open that morning.
MOBLEY
It was an uphill battle from the beginning until where it is now, just a big convalescent home; it's not a hospital anymore. But it was always a struggle, always a struggle. And so there was never a day that you could let your guard down and say, "Everything is going to be okay. It's running smooth," you know. It was one of the ten top teaching hospitals anywhere, and we was never recognized for all the good things that that hospital brought. But the battle was always on. It was just a constant battle to just make sure everything stayed on track. There was never a time that you could just rest and say, "It's going to be okay." It's never been like that. Never been like that.
STEVENSON
In connection with that, a couple of the other interviewees mentioned the fact that they thought the term "Killer King" was put out there even as the hospital opened, even before it opened.
MOBLEY
It was, in the beginning. In the beginning, the "Killer King Hospital." Even in the emergency room some of the people that was working there wore T-shirts with "Killer King" on it, in the emergency room. People would come,

and their cars would have the leaflets on the cars, "Don't take them to Killer King."

MOBLEY

My son used to drive for Goodhew Ambulance [Service], and he said they would pick up patients, half their life was shot away, and they'd be saying, "Don't take me to Killer King." But once they get there, they was saved, you know, but it was in their mind, you know, that it was "Killer King." So the message was out there even before the hospital got operating well. But they found out that it was one of the best places that they could be, that they could go for service.

STEVENSON

So it never really reached its potential before--

MOBLEY

Never.

STEVENSON

--the decline really started.

MOBLEY

Right.

STEVENSON

Would you elaborate a little on that? I mean, some of the other interviewees have said it was a combination of things, including resources, support for the doctors, the nurses, the staff. Could you tell me your viewpoint on that?

MOBLEY

I felt that they never had the resources or the support, not from the Department of Healthcare Services, to make sure that that hospital ran. Everything was controlled from day one from downtown. The only time that I felt that it wasn't controlled was when John O'Connor [phonetic] was there. But from the time that the other hospital administrators in medical administration came, it was always controlled from downtown. The--

STEVENSON

County of Los Angeles?

MOBLEY

County of Los Angeles, Department of Healthcare Services, always had, under Liston Weatherall [phonetic] when he was downtown--

STEVENSON

Weatherall?

MOBLEY

Yes, Liston Weatherall. He gave more flexibility and leeway to the growth and development of the hospital than the new people. When [Robert] Gates came on and all the rest of them, they controlled everything. Martin Luther King administration, medical and hospital administration, never had the say-so, the control, on how this hospital should be run. They was never given that kind of--

STEVENSON

They were hamstrung?

MOBLEY

From the beginning, yes. Yes.

STEVENSON

I see. Speaking of the L.A. County, the Board of Supervisors, I assume certainly during these many years the character, or the supervisors, had changed many times. What role did that play from the beginning? With the exception, of course, of Kenny Hahn.

MOBLEY

When Kenny Hahn was living, against all odds, he maintained his control. He was in a constant battle with other supervisors to make sure that they understood the hospital was in his district, and he had something to say about how it was run. He maintained that up until the time that he was no longer supervisor. But he kept constant--

STEVENSON

He was vigilant.

MOBLEY

Yes. Yes, he was. I think that Yvonne [Braithwaite Burke] relied on her staff telling her the truth about what was really going on at the hospital. When Mike Davis was acting as deputy, I think he told her the truth about what was going on, and I don't know whether people really understood, after he left, the real hard fight that people was doing every day. You know, it wasn't an eight-to-five thing that you dealt with just whenever you could. It was twenty-four hours. It was always something that you had to watch over and make sure that it happened. So it takes a toll on you after a while, you know, trying to make sure that what has began as a dream is a reality, and you're trying to hold onto it and work on it. So it's really been a struggle.

STEVENSON

Yes. I've had a couple of the other interviewees, in speaking about King Hospital, talk about the role of Yvonne Burke. Would you say that it's not her lack of commitment? It almost sounds like a difference in style.

MOBLEY

Yes, a difference in style.

STEVENSON

From Kenny Hahn.

MOBLEY

Yes, very different. Like I say, if you're relying on someone to give you the right information, you want to make sure that it's the right information on what's happening. Then I know if somebody is working for me, it's hard for somebody to come and tell you that they're not really giving you truth, because you're trusting the people that you work with. So sometimes when you wake up and find out that they haven't been giving you truth, it's already too late.

MOBLEY

So maybe that's what happened, because, you know, her style was her style. Yes. And I'm sure she wanted to be as honest and fair as whatever, but it was serious that anybody could believe, because unless you were watching every day and dealing with it, you'd think, "How could it be this bad? It can't be that way." Then one day you find out that's the way it is. That's the way it is.

STEVENSON

Right. I'd like to maybe talk about Kenny Hahn at this point, before we move on talking about some of the other organizations, including King/Drew University. Could you talk about Kenny Hahn's legacy in this community, and maybe tell me when was the first time you met him and worked with him? But I'd like to get your viewpoint on what his legacy is for our community.

MOBLEY

I met Kenneth Hahn through Dan and Marion Rendell [phonetic]. I was a commissioner for Kenny Hahn for a while, for a period of time. He left a tremendous legacy for this community. You know, there's a lot of things that you may not dislike about him, but there is other things that you like, and being who he is and--but all the things that I was involved in with him, I can say that he didn't mind talking to you. He may disagree with you, but not to the point of being disagreeable. But you could talk to him about the way you see it, and left it up to him whether he was going to do something reasonable about that.

MOBLEY

I know with the seniors, when we was up on Broadway, there was a group of senior citizens that believed that he could do no wrong. Everything good that happened. I always remember Mr. Pratt think that everything good in his life happened because of Kenny Hahn, from his job to his Social Security to whatever.

MOBLEY

So he left a tremendous legacy in people. You know, I felt that at the time. He encouraged people that wanted to get involved in whatever he was doing, whether it was welfare or whatever, but they wanted to be a part of whatever Kenneth Hahn was doing. So I think he left an imprint on this community; not the new-coming generation, because they don't know Kenny Hahn the way the older people knew him from a period of time.

MOBLEY

You know, we had hoped that that hospital would be one of the legacies that he would leave, that it would stand; because I remember when they wanted to change the name of the hospital, and he said as long as he lived, that it would never be changed. He passed a motion--[telephone rings]--could you get that, because I'll never make it.

STEVENSON

Oh, sure.

1.5. Session 2B
May 22, 2007

STEVENSON
Okay. So we were talking about Kenny Hahn. Why do you think he was so committed to our community, I mean, in some ways, more so than some of us even? I mean, I don't really think that's a stretch. But why do you think?
MOBLEY
I really can't say why that he was so committed. You know, it could be a whole lot of things, so I'm not going to try to guess, you know, why that he was committed. But I know how I feel about, you know, once you get involved in something and you see the potential, and maybe he felt that whatever he did before he went on, that would leave an imprint for his children and his grandchildren and whatever, to see, you know, if you really care about what your life work is about, that it's worth the energy and effort that you put in. Beyond that, I just can't say.
STEVENSON
Right. So it may be a generational thing in terms of being committed.
MOBLEY
Right.
STEVENSON
Right. I see. Okay. going back to King Hospital, when was the start of the real decline that we're seeing now? When did that start? I mean, what were the factors that really pushed it over the edge, whether that be the L.A. County Board of Supervisors or other factors, even the series of L.A. Times articles? I mean, what were the factors that really--
MOBLEY
It was a combination of stuff that finally pushed it over the edge, and certainly the L.A. Times played a major part in it, you know, with [Charles] Ornstein. When Claire Spiegel--I forgot what year it was. Claire Spiegel started the decline.
STEVENSON
2003 maybe? It's been within the last few years.
MOBLEY
I think it was before. I think Claire Spiegel was before then, in the late nineties, Claire Spiegel with her article. So I think that the b--

1.6. Session 2C
May 22, 2007

STEVENSON

Okay, we were talking about the combination of factors leading to the decline of King Hospital and the L.A. Times articles by Claire Spiegel and Ornstein. Go ahead.

MOBLEY

Ornstein took up where Spiegel had tried to get the Pulitzer Prize, and so Ornstein was dead set on just taking it as far as he could to make sure that they did. So it was a combination of things that happened that led to it. You know, when people don't believe the truth about what's happening, and then they finally see. You know, because as those of us that have hung in and tried to work with it and just kept on [unclear due to static] until people were beginning to look, "Oh yes, oh yes." It's just bound to happen if you didn't pay attention to what was going on. There was a lot of people that tried very hard to make sure that it's kept to the standard of where it should, where we had hoped that it would go, you know. But it was a combination of stuff [unclear].

MOBLEY

I know a couple of the other interviewees have talked about the current composition of the L.A. County Board of Supervisors and particularly cited Zev Yaroslavsky and Gloria Molina. Could you speak a little bit about how the current composition of the L.A. County Board affects this whole decline, what we're seeing now?

MOBLEY

Well, you know, the responsibility of the decline lies deadly [phonetic] on all five of the supervisors' shoulders, because even though they may not be the supervisor for the district, they owe the people something. If you're sitting there and you're voting, you vote on everything in all districts. You either vote against it or you vote for it.

MOBLEY

So we have met with all five, and constantly, whenever they would give us a meeting, we did, and we tried to sit with them and tell them the truth about what was really going on. So it's not that they was in the dark and that they wasn't talking to people in this district about what's happening.

MOBLEY

A lot of people that was against the decline of Martin--was for the decline of it--now see that they made a mistake, whether it was trauma or whatever. They see now that they made a mistake, because you never know how things are going to affect you until something in your life touch. There are people that spoke out at the Board of Supervisors against the trauma center and against the growth and development of the hospital, now realize, because things have happened in their life that have brought it full force on what it is to be without a trauma center and what it is to be without a lack of healthcare.

MOBLEY

When they closed the center for the elders, they said it would only be temporary for about six months. They haven't opened it yet, and that was a paying part of the hospital, you know. They knew they was going to get the money when they take care of older people. But they closed it down and haven't opened it up yet.

MOBLEY

Then they brought new people in that didn't have the feeling of the care, of the understanding of what it was all about; that just bought into it. You know, I think the new hospital administrator that came in, she came in glowing and that she was going to do so much, and she found out that she controlled nothing. She's just there to babysit the hospital until they could finally get it closed down.

STEVENSON

Who was that?

MOBLEY

[Antoinette] Epps. Not to be an administrator, but just to be a caretaker until it's closed down.

STEVENSON

Her name is Antoinette?

MOBLEY

Antoinette Epps, yes.

STEVENSON

So the L.A. County Board is like at one level of oversight. What support, or shall I say lack of support, has happened on the state level, whether that's assembly or state senators, or even the federal level, and particularly as it relates to this decline?

MOBLEY

At the state level, I don't know whether--sometimes I think they listened to what the Board of Supervisors is saying rather than what the community is really feeling and what they are saying, the real thing that's happening, because they have the money to lobby and do whatever and travel and do whatever.

MOBLEY

On the congressional level, Congresswoman Maxine Waters have been there with us every step of the way, every step of the way, because she realized that a lot of her constituency used that hospital, and so she listened to what they say, and, you know, she'd been involved every step of the way. And Congresswoman Juanita [Millender-]McDonald, in her own way, because, you know, she have a different style, did what she could, and Diane Watson.

STEVENSON

Okay, and currently--well, you've talked a little bit about this already, but currently what do you see the prognosis being, if you'll excuse the term, for the long term for what's going to happen to the hospital? And what will it take to turn it around?

MOBLEY
It's going to take a lot to turn it around, because it continued to decline. You know, if you knew what the hospital was in the beginning--500 beds, and they're down to less than 40, I think, now--it's going to take a lot to turn it around. It was one of the best teaching hospitals, like I said, on the list of ten.
MOBLEY
All the good, seasoned doctors have gone. I just went to a retirement party, a retirement dinner, for Dr. [Thomas] Yoshikawa. He left. He's going back to the Veterans Hospital. So you can't continue to lose the best. He was there for twelve years. You can't continue to lose the best and think you can continue to pull out of the slump that you're in, because we're losing quality, people that can go and teach anywhere's, you know, on and on. So that's the reason I'm saying, for them at this point, to recruit and bring in new, qualified doctors with high standards again, it's going to take a lot. It's going to take a lot to do that.
STEVENSON
Is it also going to take more of a commitment from African Americans in Los Angeles, even those that don't necessarily live in the community, per se, people who have moved to other neighborhoods? Is it going to take an even bigger commitment than just, you know, the community, per se?
MOBLEY
Well, you know, the people that was there had a big commitment. They gave their life in service and commitment, and they did it with integrity and meaning to whatever. So to find those kinds of people, you know, I don't know who's going to be there to watch it, to interview, to bring them in. But it has to be a level of people that understand what they're looking for to do it, because you just bring people in, and they say, "Oh yes, I'm committed." Because they'll tell you all kinds of things until they get where they are, and then you find out that they had no commitment.
MOBLEY
People came in, and they said they was committed, but some of their commitment destroyed us, because they really was a self-serving kind of thing. It wasn't for the good of the institution. It wasn't to help the community. It was just their thing that they had to do at the moment, and so I would hope that whoever come in, that they'd have real commitment. Yes, because you had people there with a level of commitment and whatever before, and stay even until they was walked out, accused of something that they knew wasn't true, you know.
MOBLEY
Careers got messed up in this, and a lot of people just retired early, because they know that they was giving their all. You had some of the best doctors in the world that you could find anywhere, anywhere. You know, we met with

them right here in this room. We would invite them over to talk about what they was doing.

MOBLEY

When Brotherhood Crusade did Take Back the Community, and every evening we would walk the street and talk to the community; try to get them interested in what was going on, the crime and whatever. We had doctors from Martin Luther King Hospital came out and walked with us. You know, we had Dr. Arthur Fleming, when Derrick Gordon needed a heart, he committed his time to helping Derrick Gordon find a heart; you know, worked with Roland Betts and raised money so that Derrick would get a heart.

MOBLEY

Gus Gill that worked with us. Anything you was doing in the community, a health fair, Take Back the Community project with Brotherhood Crusade, whatever, they donated their time. Real committed people, you know. [Dr.] Casper Glen, Wilbur Jordan, Dr. [Susan] Kelly. So you have so many people that have given so much. [Dr.] George Locke. So you have all these doctors that have given their lifeblood, you know.

MOBLEY

I'll never forget Dr. Harry [Haragopal] Thadepalli.

STEVENSON

Harry--

MOBLEY

Thadepalli.

STEVENSON

Okay, I know who that is. Dr. [Ernest] Smith talked about him, right.

MOBLEY

Right. Yes.

STEVENSON

Okay. Could you talk about the Charles Drew University and how the idea for that or the concept for having that university started, and what was your first association with that?

MOBLEY

Like I say, my first association with the Charles Drew was with Ablyn Winge and Willa Mae Schaumburger. They served on the first board, you know, the board. That's how I got involved, and got involved because the mission was something that you felt you could be a part of, you know. You know, that it was worthwhile to be associated with Drew. The whole meaning of it and the community involvement just made you want to do whatever you could to make sure that this become a reality.

MOBLEY

Our hope and dream was that the hospital and Drew would be able to work together, that it would be like hand in glove, you know; even with whatever happened, that it could be worked out, and that they would just be able to

complement each other and just grow and develop and just make it something worthwhile.

MOBLEY

The way they started it, you know, you felt that the chairs of the departments was committed to making sure that this was okay, but it never happened. I think on the Drew side, they never understood their relationship to King Hospital.

STEVENSON

Why was that, do you think?

MOBLEY

Well, it all depends on how the leadership look at it, and so I felt that the Drew board at the time never understood the real commitment. Sometimes you have to know what people are doing and hear it, you know, and feel it. If you don't feel it, you can't understand it, you know. You've got to want to feel it and understand what it was all about. So I think that they never learned enough about what was going on on the hospital side, how it worked, the good and bad and indifferent. I just felt that they just never learned.

MOBLEY

The board needs to know. It just can't come and meet in a community and not understand the community, the kind of people that use the hospital, and how the departments are run. You don't have to know everything, but you've got to try to see it in the light of day of what it is. If you don't get that, then, you know, what are you chairing? What are you overseeing? If you're overseeing something, you have to have some understanding of what life is all about.

STEVENSON

So were these people that did not live in the community, or were they people from in the community that comprised the board?

MOBLEY

No, most of them didn't live in the community.

STEVENSON

Okay, so it sounds like they were sort of disconnected because they weren't a part of the community, perhaps.

MOBLEY

Yes, right. To learn about it, because, you know, you could walk into something and you can get a feel whether you can [unclear] it or you can't, and if you don't, you just walk away from it. I think that the last members of the board had less care of and understanding or the feeling about what's going on than the previous one. So, you know, that was part of our demise, because in the crucial time, if you can understand, they believe. There are people on the board, because, you know, they kicked me off the board.

STEVENSON

Right. I want to talk about that, yes.

MOBLEY
But there are people on the board that they just come to board meetings and just read what--with never any understanding about what was really going on. At the crucial time, when we was fighting to maintain, it had to be somebody there with the understanding of what is the fighting all about. What are you fighting for? You have to understand. You know, you don't want to be in a fight just to be in a fight to be where your nose be bloody and whatever. You'd be all, "Why am I in this fight? Why? Why do we need to be doing this at this time? What is the relevancy of what we're doing?"
MOBLEY
If you don't have that feeling, you're just attending board meetings. But the struggle to keep the programs going, you know, when we was losing the residency program, you know, we was fighting hard. While I was there, they never understood what it was all about, never understood.
STEVENSON
I see. So it sounds like, just like King Hospital, Charles Drew University never reached its potential.
MOBLEY
It hasn't. It hasn't, no, because it could have been a good match. With a sense of understanding and a sense of commitment, it could have been. It really could.
STEVENSON
I see. What is the status of it today?
MOBLEY
I don't know, because Drew is closed to the community. You know, nobody know. You know, they are almost like a secret society, so they have their board meetings closed, no community involvement. It's hard to fight for Drew now, because unless you know what you're fighting for, what could you say? You don't know what's going on.
STEVENSON
Right. How long were you on the board?
MOBLEY
I was on the board about four years.
STEVENSON
Why were you kicked off?
MOBLEY
They never told me. They never told me why they voted me off the board. Five people voted me off the board, and they never told me.
STEVENSON
You could probably speculate on why you were kicked off.
MOBLEY
Well, I know that the board chairman never wanted me on the board, because he just said that I wasn't the type of person that he wanted on his board, and so, you know, and whatever went on from there. That wasn't

hearsay; he said that where I could hear it, that "Ms. Mobley is not the kind of person that I want on my board." So I guess whatever reason that he could trump up to get me off, he ended up doing that.

MOBLEY

At one point he asked me why don't I just resign and be an emeritus member.

MOBLEY

And I told him, I said, "If you want me off, you'll find a way to get me off," and he did. So I have no regret. Sometimes you outlive your usefulness for it, and so, you know, my health is declining. So I feel good about it. It always makes me good when somebody tell me the truth to my face. I can't change who I am, and you know, I've been blessed to be who I am. Only God knows I could be a better person. So it's okay.

STEVENSON

Okay. I know there are some efforts going on to revive the hospital. I know Dr. Ernie Smith, Dr. Ernest Smith and Sylvia Drew Ivie are involved in some efforts. Are you a part of any of the current efforts to revive the hospital?

MOBLEY

I haven't left. I have not left, not one moment. The only time I'm out is when I'm out in the hospital, but if I'm home, I continue to do whatever I can. So I haven't left. It's nothing new with me. I haven't had a stopping period in my life where King Hospital is concerned; I have not.

STEVENSON

How successful do you think the various efforts will be in reviving it?

MOBLEY

Well, I believe that everything will happen in God's divine order; that if we stay long enough, someone else would pick it up and carry it on. That's my only desire, that it's younger people that can come on with a sense of understanding that can carry it forth and make it happen. So that's my energy. If there's anything that I could share with someone, if there's any day that I could talk to someone--I believe it will happen. I really believe it will happen. But it's a constant vigil. You just have to every day be on it to make sure that it happens and make sure that you're talking to the right people about it. It's worth saving.

STEVENSON

Okay. If you were asked for maybe a ten-point program, something that would get the hospital back up to the level, and say you had funding--there were no funding problems--I mean, what would it take in the short term to get it up to speed?

MOBLEY

I think that it would take the right kind of people, and, you know, not just people that just say, "I want to come in and save King Hospital," but with a strong commitment to themselves, first, that "I'm willing to give all I can to make sure that this hospital is saved"; that have the skills and the

knowledge and the understanding about what it is to build. Unless they have that, and surround themselves with the right kind of people that's committed to doing it, people come in, and they think about how great they are, and they're not willing to work with all factions to do it. So you have to work with the good, the bad, and the indifferent to make sure that what you're building is worthwhile.

STEVENSON

Okay. I'd like to move on maybe to talking about some of the other organizations with which you were involved. You mentioned the Brotherhood Crusade. Could you talk about your involvement with the Brotherhood Crusade over the years, and any particular programs?

MOBLEY

My first involvement with the Brotherhood Crusade was when it first started with Opal Jones, social worker. She was the executive director of Neighborhood Adult Participation Project [NAPP], one of the best social workers, in a way, in the world. When Brotherhood Crusade started, she told us that it would be to our advantage to be involved with the beginning of Brotherhood Crusade, and I believed it. She never lied. Because it's been a joy working with the Brotherhood Crusade, from the very beginning when we was trying to get started.

MOBLEY

So my commitment to her that I would, and I have up until today. I serve on the board of directors now, and I never thought that I would get that involved. But it was just my enjoyment in the programs that they provide, from finding jobs for the youth and adults to feeding the homeless-- [End of file 2C. Begin file 2D.]

1.7. Session 2D
May 22, 2007

STEVENSON

You were talking about Opal Jones and the Neighborhood Adult Participation Project and the Brotherhood Crusade.

MOBLEY

Yes. It's been a joy, because of the kinds of things they do, the programs that they involve the total family in, that I enjoy. You know, this building here, when we moved from Broadway, Danny [Bakewell] told Brenda Marsh-Mitchell to bring the old woman and let me see this building. So we moved over here to the eighties, and have been here ever since. So it's been a joy being affiliated with the Brotherhood Crusade. They reach out and try to do whatever they can in the community.

MOBLEY

It's kind of hard to voice my thinking--I don't know how other people feel--of United Way. They try to do as much as they can with the funds that they

receive and put it back in the community, where the community can get some benefit from it. So, you know, it's been my pleasure to work with Brotherhood Crusade.

STEVENSON

Okay. You mentioned the--was it called Take Back the Night?

MOBLEY

Take Back the Community.

STEVENSON

Take Back the Community. Could you talk a little bit about that?

MOBLEY

Take Back the Community was trying to bring the level of care into the community, where people would be concerned and care about their community, care about the lifestyle. So what they would do is go around and talk to the neighbors about their cares and their concerns and what can they do to help them make their life better; you know, to do a partnership with the community and just change it. The only way the community changes is that we participate in the change. So that was a program they had for a long time to bring that level of care into the community, the care and concern about what life is all about, you know, to live a better life, to change the lifestyle.

STEVENSON

I see. So that would have to do with--

MOBLEY

The quality of life.

STEVENSON

So that would have to do with health, whatever--

MOBLEY

With health, education, economic development, the whole [unclear]. Total involvement.

STEVENSON

Some of the other groups that you've been involved with, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference].

MOBLEY

Yes, Southern Christian Leadership.

STEVENSON

Could you talk a little bit about that, and CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], also?

MOBLEY

Southern Christian Leadership has been a good learning experience for me about what life is all about. I've gone through the changes with them, you know, from Jim [James] Lawson chairing the board. I felt that under his leadership, he was a good leader. He left for a period of time, and then he came back, and then he left again. But it was really good, because Jim Lawson is really a teacher, you know, and he shared a lot with us about

what it is to run an organization and the importance of your commitment to that organization. So I can really appreciate the time that he was with Southern Christian--well, he's always going to be with them, but I mean as the chair of southern Christian Leadership.

MOBLEY

We've gone through some challenging times, you know. In fact, we're going through a period of adjustment now. We seem to be getting better, but it's a struggle, and I think most organizations now, especially if they are black, basic black, it's going through those challenges now to survive, because [unclear] come on you, so you got to be 99, 100 percent pure in everything you do.

MOBLEY

But it's a good place to be at a good time, and I think that, you know, everything happens right in God's divine order. But it's just that you just can't walk away from it when times get tough. You have to just see how much strength you can muster to just hang in and see if it's going to get right. But don't do anything to try to destroy it, but to just stay in, and when you feel that you can't do any more, it's time to go, but as long as God give you the strength, you just stay in and work with it and just give it the best you have, until you'll know when it's time to walk away from it. You just don't run away from it because you're in trouble.

MOBLEY

It's been a learning experience. It's really been challenging. You just hope that what you learn, that you could share it with the young kids. I hope my kids will understand. I try to talk to them and share with them about being committed to something, because if we don't do it right, and do it the best we can, we don't have nothing to leave our kids and tell them. I hope our kids just don't sit on the side of the road and watch the world go by, that they be part of whatever. So it's just being able to share it with somebody so they can carry on.

MOBLEY

And CORE is a joy. It makes you appreciate Celes King more each day, because things he shared with us, it's coming to pass right now. You know, he originally had this building.

STEVENSON

No, I didn't know that.

MOBLEY

Yes, CORE. Yes, this was part of Rumor Control. I think Danny, Danny Bakewell, and Celes, you know, had an understanding of what Rumor Control was all about, and they always wanted this building to be here for the use of the community. So, you know, we hang in here with love and understanding of what the legacy is to this community. Celes left a lot of legacies.

STEVENSON

Yes. Talk a little bit about that, because we have an interview with him, but I'd like to hear what you think Celes' legacy is to our community.

MOBLEY

His legacy was that we have the best health; you know, that we had jobs and careers; and all those things that he talked about. When you walked into the bail bondsman's over on King Boulevard, and you'd go over there, and he'd be sitting in the room, and he'll call you in and hold court and talk about all these things, talk about the things that he wanted to happen.

MOBLEY

He was a staunch Republican, but he always had something encouraging to say to you, whether you was a Democrat, Peace and Freedom, or whatever. He always had something encouraging to say to you about life itself. He had a way, like Opal Jones, of making you feel that you could turn the world upside down, if you'd just try; that your life was worth something; that you could do something. I think that's the legacy he left, the community involvement. Be doing something, you know; that you could be going somewhere, doing something, being something, a part of something.

MOBLEY

I will always remember the encouragement that he'd give you about being involved and helping yourself. Just don't sit around and wait for someone to come give you something, but if you do something, something is going to come to you. So, you know, he left a great commitment of what he was involved in every day and the people that he believed in.

STEVENSON

Right. You talked about the fact that some of the things that he talked about are coming to pass now. What are some of those things?

MOBLEY

The way you see the school district is not living up to its full commitment, you know. He talked about that. He talked about that, and he just felt that every parent should be involved, because if we didn't watch it and didn't do something about it, our kids wasn't going to learn; you know, that you had to hang in there. The stuff that he talked about, you know, the control; that someone else always wants to control you. But you can let it happen or you can do something about it. Yes.

MOBLEY

He talked about law enforcement, you know, because he ran a bail bondsman's, so he could see it from both sides, you know. So unless we had the commitment to make the change--you have to do something to make the change--that we was going to be on the wrong side of whatever. But he didn't mind sharing with you that, "Get up in the morning and have something to do, and do something about it."

STEVENSON

Okay. I want to go back quickly to the SCLC. Over the years of your involvement, are there any of their programs, initiatives, that they pioneered that really had an impact on the community, or continue to have an impact?

MOBLEY

I can't think of the name--Genethia [Hudley Hayes] ran it for a long time. I have to think about it. But I felt that it had an impact on the young people. I don't know whether it's still funded anymore, because, you know, we went through a period where we had a director that just let everything go, and so we're trying to come out of that now. So let me find out more about that, and then I'll--

STEVENSON

Okay, I'll make a note to myself.

MOBLEY

Yes, we'll come back to that.

STEVENSON

Okay. Could you tell me about the genesis of Mothers in Action, where the idea for that came from, who was involved, and could you talk about that?

MOBLEY

Well, Mothers in Action started under the leadership of Brenda Marsh-Mitchell, and it's still going strong. One of the latest things that they're doing is Respect Me, and it started behind the guy calling the girls--

STEVENSON

[Don] Imus.

MOBLEY

Yes. I'm really proud of what they're doing, in their own way, you know. Rather than just talk about somebody else, what do you care about yourself? Taking a look at yourself, you know, the kind of language you use, the kind of things that you do, the kind of respect that you have for yourself and for others, because if you don't respect yourself, you don't respect others. So Bobbie Parks, Bernard [phonetic] Parks' wife, is a part of it; Jackie Dupont-Walker.

STEVENSON

Jackie--

MOBLEY

Dupont.

STEVENSON

Dupont--

MOBLEY

Walker. [Judge] Mablean Ephraim, you know, a judge.

STEVENSON

Right.

MOBLEY

And just a lot of other people that I'll have to get the names of. But it started in the right direction, where people are trying to work together to

take a look at what your lifestyle is and how you put it up for anybody else to look at; you know, how you live and how you respect other people, but first, how you respect yourself. Not name-calling; you know, to try to teach young kids don't take it when you're talking to each other and calling each other's name. You know, that if you have a name that your parents has given you, beyond a nickname, just don't do that. So they're getting ready for a series of things that are going to take place. But it's a cross-section of all different kinds of people that's a part of this Respect Me.

MOBLEY

Mothers in Action have done a lot of things. They do help theirs. They participate in the Back to School Program area at Exposition Park, and they do tutoring. The whole year around they try to do job finding for young people that's trying. They've sent a lot of kids off to college, you know, tried to provide whatever they can to help them go to college.

STEVENSON

Was there an event or a reason why it got started in, was it, the early nineties, Mother in Action?

MOBLEY

Yes. I think it was more or less a need for mothers to come together and to be involved and to take a look at all aspects of life. It may have been around the time when the young girl was killed over on Westland [phonetic] by the Korean; was shot.

STEVENSON

Oh. Latasha Harlins?

MOBLEY

Yes, right. It was either before that or after that that it started. I don't remember whether it was before or after, but I know they took an active part in that, and a lot of events since then, but that was one of the things.

STEVENSON

So Brenda Marsh-Mitchell was sort of a pivotal person, but there were others?

MOBLEY

Yes, Mary Henry. Mary Henry.

STEVENSON

Okay. Could you talk about how the senior center here, South Central Multipurpose Senior Center, how the idea for creating this came about, who were the key players, etc.?

MOBLEY

Well, we was part of Neighborhood Adult Participation Project under Opal Jones, and when Cliff Jones was the executive director, he felt no need to have community-based centers. Under Opal, it started out with I think about thirty-two or thirty-five centers, and in the later years they had about twelve left. Cliff felt no need; that they could just have their headquarters and no tentacles out in the community. We wanted to keep going, so we did all the

paperwork and whatever, things that we needed to have a community-based center. So it was South Central Multipurpose Senior--it was over on Broadway then.

MOBLEY

We started from there, and that's when Danny invited us to come over here on Central Avenue, and we did. Dr. Smith was chairman of the board. We got started from there and just kept going on.

STEVENSON

Which Smith was that?

MOBLEY

P-H-C [phonetic].

STEVENSON

Which Dr. Smith?

MOBLEY

Ernie. Ernie Smith.

STEVENSON

Oh, Ernie, okay. All right.

MOBLEY

So we started from there, doing the same thing that we did for Neighborhood Adult Participation Project. We just continued the programs. At first we had funding from the city and from Brotherhood Crusade, and that's how we got started.

MOBLEY

I'll never forget, to write the first proposal for us to get the money to get started--oh, what's her name? Brenda Schockley. Brenda Schockley wrote the first proposal and got us funded, so our heart will always go out for her, you know, because when they rejected us, she went down to defend, writing her proposal. We got funded, and we've been going ever since. We've had some hard days, some challenging days, but it's been worth it. It just lets you know what life is all about, that you do with what you have, and if you work at it long enough and hard enough and believe in it strong enough, it will happen. So that's where we are. But I've always loved Brenda Schockley for getting us started.

STEVENSON

So the original location was on Broadway.

MOBLEY

Well, the original location has been all over, but when we was with Neighborhood Adult Participation. At one time we was over on Main Street, and once we was at the Five Four Ballroom, on 54th Street and Broadway, and then the last one was down the street on Broadway, at 45th and Broadway.

STEVENSON

You said it was a community center. Was it always a senior center, or did it start out as a community center?

MOBLEY
When Brenda wrote the proposal, we changed from just a community center to a multipurpose center, and we've been a multipurpose center all along. But when it was a community center, we was dealing with education, health--because health has been always one of--a primary focus in health. Health and education and doing the counseling and acting as the liaison with the people that had trouble with getting their welfare, their Social Security.
MOBLEY
We used to have a rep that would do the fair hearings for us, you know, when they need someone to go with them for their fair hearings for their Social Security or welfare. So those are the kinds of things that we continued. Mrs. Carter, Nola Carter. Do you know Nola Carter? Nola Carter was the social worker for us, he and Mr. Mason [phonetic], for us.
STEVENSON
You've mentioned Neighborhood Adult Participation Project, NAPP. Could you talk a little bit about how NAPP got started? Danny Bakewell, when I interviewed him, talked about it, because that was one of the first community organizations he worked for. But could you talk a little bit about it, what its role was in the community?
MOBLEY
Neighborhood Adult Participation Project came around at a good time where people could start where they was in the community, go back to school if they wanted to, but bring them up at a level of caring about themselves and caring about somebody else. Opal always had this saying about, "If you teach a person how to go to the Laundromat, you don't have to--they learn to do the laundry on their own." But you just need to show them where it is and how to do it. Once you teach them, they can carry it forward.
MOBLEY
I think that's what Neighborhood Adult Participation Project did for a lot of people. It took them where they was, and made people look at themselves and say, "Do I want to do better? Do I believe I can do better?" and get them started on the way to doing. To take a look at the environment where you live and see, "Can I lend anything to this? Can I help this be a better place?"
MOBLEY
So it made you conscious of who you are and what you was all about and the surroundings that you live in and the people that help the surrounding be better. So I believe that the Neighborhood Adult Participation Project brought a lot of people out, just made them look within themselves on what life is all about.
MOBLEY
They had a New Careers Program, where people could go in and go back to school. A lot of people ended up being teachers and just went on with whatever field they chose to do, you know. When I see different people, and

they say, "Oh, I work at such and such place now. Remember when I worked for Neighborhood Adult Participation Project?" And they have gone back to school to be engineers and all walks of life. They've moved forward in their life.

MOBLEY

It helped people to bring the families together to look at, you know--because a lot of times struggle goes in family when you don't have enough money to do all the kinds of things that you need to sustain yourself. It made you look at how you raise your kids and whatever. So I think that for a lot of us, it gave us a good foundation on what to do and what to share with other people and what to go on. It made you more caring.

MOBLEY

Like I say, Opal Jones was one of the best social workers anywhere in the world, and that's the kind of training. Every Friday we had in-service training, and people would come. Some people was placed in schools, at the [Los Angeles County] Department of [Public] Social Services, at the police department, at different places they went there to learn and to earn while they was learning. They would come back on Friday to share with people, you know, what did you find in the environment that you were working in.

MOBLEY

I remember one Friday this young lady, when Mr. Jones went around the room and asked everybody, "Share with me what you learned this week on the job," the young lady said, "Well, I enjoyed mingling and tingling with important people." [Laughs] I never will forget that, because it was more than just mingling and tingling with important people. It was to try to help you grow and develop and to share what you learned with someone else. So when we come back on Friday, it was everybody share what they learned so you can be stronger when you go back the next week wherever you are.

MOBLEY

The rest of us worked in the centers, you know, and you had to go out and knock on doors and learn the neighborhood. So the Neighborhood Adult Participation Project was really a wonderful program. It's a shame that we don't have it now, you know, because we're missing something. We're really missing something.

STEVENSON

Was NAPP part of, or was it funded by, the War on Poverty funds?

MOBLEY

Yes, it was.

STEVENSON

It was.

MOBLEY

Yes. There was always a fight about that, too. You know, it was always a constant struggle to keep the money coming in to do the kinds of things that you know needed to be done. Yes.

STEVENSON
So speaking of the War on Poverty and the money that that brought in the community, looking back, because there were many programs and initiatives funded by the War on Poverty, what was the overall effect of the money when it came, in terms of the programs, on the community, and also when that money dried up after the [Lyndon Baines] Johnson administration?
MOBLEY
It really had an effect, because like I say, it gave people a chance to try to earn while they learned, to try to better themselves, to better the surroundings, your involvement, you know. It helped with the school. The schools didn't have all the kinds of gang violence stuff, and it gave kids activities, you know. There was more baseball and different activity for youth to be involved in. So it really came about at a level where it just lifted people up and got them involved and got them motivated to help themselves.
MOBLEY
When it dried up, that's when you see all the different kinds of things that's happening now, because kids don't have that activity; because in most of the neighborhoods you don't have skating rinks and different places for kids to go for after--you know, they had Teen Post and the activity and stuff that kept kids learning about what life is all about. It's not there. The challenge to be the best you could be is not there.
MOBLEY
When the money was coming through, you had that kind of activity and that kind of motivation, that kind of teaching and training that kept them active in something when they got out of school, you know. The best thing they have in the neighborhood now is the Boys Club, the Boys and Girls Clubs [of America] on Vermont, you know. Against all odds, you know, it keeps going.
MOBLEY
Hi baby, how you doing?
MOBLEY
So it was really a good thing to keep people motivated and keep them going, because kids had jobs at all different kinds of places. I know my friend, her kids, both of the girls live in Atlanta now, but at the time they needed a summer job. I called down to the city, and they went to work for Maxine Waters and David Cunningham. When people report back to you the kind of kids that you send to work for them, you know, I was really pleased, because I'm the type of people don't like to refer people for fear of how they'll turn out.
MOBLEY
But when they said how wonderful that they worked, and the next year they got a job in a lawyer's office, Tony Nicholas. When she told me how wonderful they was, it just made me feel good, you know, that you referred these people, and these young people have done well, and just go on to do

much better in life. So when kids have the opportunity to show that they have good skills and good background, it just makes you feel good when they go on to just show the world that, you know, "I'm one of the best people that God can offer."

1.8. Session 3A
June 28, 2007

STEVENSON
Good morning. I'm completing an interview with Lillian Mobley on June the 28th.
STEVENSON
I wanted to ask you some final questions and also some follow-ups for our last session. Could you tell me about your involvement with the Birthing Project? I actually went to the Internet and found the website for that project, because I knew you were involved with it. Could you tell me something about it, your involvement, and how did that project start?
MOBLEY
Kathryn Hall [Hall-Trujillo] started that project. She saw a need to work with teenage pregnant mothers and fathers; to see the young ladies through their pregnancy; to see them through their pregnancy and to give them support for the nine months and a year after the baby came. She kind of pioneered that project to just nurture and just see them through, to give them counsel and support to become good mothers and fathers. I think for the young men it was the barbershop they did on Saturday; but to work with the mother, you know, to give her the kind of support she need to go through the nine months of pregnancy and then to help them through their first year.
MOBLEY
I think last year they--close that door.
MOBLEY
So she had the vision of what it could be. I think it was last year or the year before they saw the first baby through into college, and I thought that was really tremendous, the celebration that this child had gone through, had finished high school and college, gone to college, and you know, to follow them from birth to where they are now.
MOBLEY
So one of the things that Kathryn wanted to do at this point is to start tracking the babies, you know, to see how well and how long they could stay with it; could they get enough support to just see them through to completion, which education is never completed; it's lifelong. But just to stay with them as long as you possibly can to give them that kind of support they need to come back and help somebody else go through. So I'm pretty proud

of what Kathryn and the young people that's with her have done with that project, because, you know, it's really encouraging. It's really encouraging.

STEVENSON

Okay. Was that a national or a local project?

MOBLEY

It's national. I forgot how many states that they have. I have the picture [unclear due to static] celebration.

1.9. Session 3B
June 28, 2007

STEVENSON

How is the Birthing Project funded?

MOBLEY

I really don't know what kind of funding they have now. I have to talk to Kathryn about it. We was working on it, and I got ill, but we was trying to get one started at Maxine Waters Job Preparation Center [Maxine Waters Employment Preparation Center]. The Black Women's Forum supported it when they first got started.

STEVENSON

If you were to guess, how many young men and young women have gone through it over the years?

MOBLEY

I really couldn't tell you, you know, at this point, how many have gone through. They usually have a national conference in San Diego or someplace every year--Sacramento--where all the Birthing Projects come together to talk about what they've done and what they continue to do; where the strength is needed; where the support is needed. I should know more about the funding, but I don't at this time. I can't tell you.

STEVENSON

Okay. Can you tell me about your involvement with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles?

MOBLEY

I joined Legal Aid Advisory Council quite some time ago. That's been one of my joys, working with them, because they work with projects that you have going on in the community, whether it's legal or they just need to do research or do some support for you. The Pro Bono work that they do is just tremendous in housing and that. So I feel good about the Legal Aid Foundation. You know, they've been stripped of a lot of things that they was able to do, you know, like class action suits and stuff like that.

MOBLEY

But we're doing the cultural--Crescent [phonetic], the building of the cultural center in Watts, and trying to hold onto real estate and whatever you have for the low-income and no-income families in there and the senior citizens

and whatever. They've been right there with us and working real hard to make sure that they have given you all the legal support that they possibly can for it.

MOBLEY

So part of what they do is a kind of educating, because usually when we talk about it, we never know what the law is until you need a lawyer, you know, and it's a lot of times late when you do it; not too late, but late, to try to find out. So what they do is kind of educating the community about what the legal system is all about; that it may not be as bad as we think it is if we'd learn what it is early. So I feel really good about Legal Aid and the support and the education and the understanding that they try to give. Whether it's to help housing or economic development or what, they try to educate the community about what legal service is all about.

MOBLEY

You know, I try to, in my old age, to look at the organizations that have really contributed to the community, and tried to educate us about what the system is all about, and those are the ones that I try to stay with until I'm gone on, to try to give it that support and strength to go on. Legal Aid is one of the organizations that I'm proud to be a part of, because of the way that they try to work with the community, and support and try to have an understanding of what it is and what it is to understand what the law is, what it's all about.

STEVENSON

Do you recall when the Legal Aid Foundation started?

MOBLEY

Not right now. I can't say when it started. I should have that information, but right now off the top of my head, I can't give you that.

STEVENSON

Okay. Who were the key people in the Legal Aid Foundation that you've worked with?

MOBLEY

Well, I've served on the board for quite some years, so Dr. [Dorothy] Herrerra. One of the attorneys, Mayer Lee; Paul Lee. Those were people that--and the young man that invited me; I can't think of his name now that invited me to become part of his Advisory Council in, I think, in the early days of the organization. I'll get that name for him; right now I don't know why it's going out of my head.

STEVENSON

So that was Paul Lee and Mayer Lee.

MOBLEY

Mayer Lee, yes.

STEVENSON

And the first one was Dr.--what was that first one you mentioned?

MOBLEY

Dorothy.
STEVENSON
Dorothy. And her last name was--
MOBLEY
I think it's Herrerra.
STEVENSON
Okay. Could you tell me about your involvement with the Black American Political Association of California, or BAPAC; I think that's what they call it.
MOBLEY
Yes. I remember in the early days I was invited to attend the organizing conference in Sacramento. Congresswoman Maxine Waters was part of that organization, the beginning days of it. A lot of the people that was part of that is gone on now.
MOBLEY
But at that point it was an exciting thing to do, that we was going to take a look at the political system and see, you know how we could support it, how we could strengthen and be educated about what the political process is all about. So that was the beginning of BAPAC.
STEVENSON
Was that in the sixties? Was that the mid-late sixties, that early?
MOBLEY
I really can't say now. I'm not good at years.
STEVENSON
So there were black government officials involved with that organization.
MOBLEY
Yes. Willie [Lewis] Brown [Jr.].
STEVENSON
Any others that you recall, in the early days, rather?
MOBLEY
Yes, Gwen Moore. I can't think of all of them right now.
STEVENSON
Does that still exist as an organization right now?
MOBLEY
Yes. Percy Pinckney is working with that, and I don't know what role he plays in it now.
STEVENSON
Pinckney, you said?
MOBLEY
Yes. Barbara Boudreaux.
STEVENSON
I was speaking with somebody yesterday and they were a little discouraged that we don't have as many statewide elected officials now as we did, say, even a few years ago. What effect do you think that has on our community

or on issues facing our community, the fact that we have a smaller black political base in Sacramento?

MOBLEY

It does have an effect on the vision of where you want to go when you don't have black elected officials there. You know, you have to give the young people something to look forward to to become involved. You can't wait until they're grown to do it. You have to start early on. The black organizations like BAPAC and the rest of them, New Frontiers and all of them, should be able to work together to bring that leadership to the forefront to make sure that our people are encouraged to join the political process; to learn what it is to be a legislative representative; to give that kind of leadership and guidance. So all areas need to be covered, and so the political arena have to be covered, too.

MOBLEY

We have to have black elected officials to give that guidance to where we need to go. We just can't wait till the last minute to say, "We're going to save the babies. We're going to save the kids." They have to learn that everything plays a very important part in our life, whether it's politics, education, economic development. All of it is important to the growth and development for all of us.

MOBLEY

So we need it now more than ever. We have to find a way to strengthen that, bring more black people into the--or African American or whatever we call ourself these days--into the forefront of that kind of leadership; you know, to leave a legacy for our kids, something to hang onto, something to be proud of; to encourage them to want to know more about what life is all about and all the important components that make it. It's not just one piece; it's all of it working together to make it happen. And to educate our kids about what it is to become involved and to do something; not just talk, but do something about it. So, yes, right now we need to do something about their political understanding.

STEVENSON

Then by the same token, also here in Los Angeles we have also a smaller number of black elected officials, whether that's city council or whatever. Would you think similarly that that does have an effect, and especially since the numbers of African Americans is less in Los Angeles now?

MOBLEY

You know, if we could learn to trust each other and work with each other and understand. You know, we hand off to everybody. We support everybody. But when it comes to blacks, we don't get that support. Unless we support each other, we don't get it. And we have to come to a sense of understanding that first, we have to look at home first. How do you stabilize where you are and gain ground? It's important, because we keep dwindling

away. While we run out and do something for somebody else, no one is doing for us.

MOBLEY

So we have to be able to stand our ground first. We stand on our feet, clear in our understanding, and have the vision of where we want to work with each other and take it further. If we could do that and we could just do that, we would have a legacy to leave our children. We can't be ashamed or afraid to say that we're raising the best population of people that we possibly can to be strong, because if we survive, other people is going to survive, too.

MOBLEY

Because we just have that nurturing, loving, kind, understanding way that we need to help other people, which is okay. But first we have to understand what it means for us to go beyond survival. We survived all these years, so now it's time that we go beyond survival, that we leave a legacy, that we hold onto what we have and be able to pass the baton to the coming generation. We have to have that clear understanding of what it is we're fighting for or understanding of what it is to just do the best you can and want to, because if the world is going to be saved, it's going to be saved with all of us. It's not going to be just one group of people that says, "We're going to survive and nobody else is going to survive."

MOBLEY

But we have to come together as a people to share with each other, to have the kinds of conversations that say, "How do we unite in our effort to strengthen where we are, to move forward?" We have to do that. It's important now. I think we're down to the wire now where we have to, we have to do more than we're doing, have to give more than we have in the past, with the clear understanding of why we're doing it and what we're doing it for and who we're doing it for. We have to do that.

STEVENSON

Okay. Could you tell me about the Lillian Mobley Family Housing Center?

MOBLEY

Family Housing?

STEVENSON

Yes, I was looking up, and I ran across that in 2000.

MOBLEY

In 2000.

STEVENSON

Yes. I've got some other questions; I can come back to it.

MOBLEY

Okay, come back to it.

STEVENSON

Yes, I've got some other questions. Could you tell me about your role in the passing of Proposition A, and I think that was to repair, rehabilitate, and modernize the Los Angeles Community Colleges?

MOBLEY
All I remember, that that was a struggle. It really was. I feel that at this time it haven't been completed, but, you know, you can't spread yourself so thin. See, one of the things that we have to learn, that we have to have somebody to, if we move on to something else, to be able to come along and watch it and help it grow and develop. You know, the colleges, the junior colleges, need so much. I believe that was with Marguerite Archie-Hudson. Yes. I think she was our state legislator at the time. It was just the need to just work through that and to try to get the junior college to be what we believed that it can be.
MOBLEY
You know, if you just look at all the things that was happening, and part of that was looking at the leadership that we had, the chancellor and the instructors and everything. So it was a whole big fight during that time. But I haven't stayed close with it. I've continued to try to work with Southwest College. But that was really a bell [phonetic].
STEVENSON
Maybe you could tell me a little bit about Southwest College and how the concept for having a community college in our community, how that came about, because I know before Southwest College, there really wasn't a community college in our area.
MOBLEY
No. No, it wasn't. You know, when I started working with it, and Dr. [Odessa] Cox, Odessa Cox, was there, and--I can't think of the young man's name. I need to find his name. I remember, I was at [John C.] Fremont High School one day to a meeting. Kathy Green, myself, Marian Grendell, Nola Carter, Nellie Blanding.
STEVENSON
Nellie Brant?
MOBLEY
Blanding.
STEVENSON
Blanding. Okay, Nellie Blanding. Okay.
MOBLEY
We was there, and this young man--I can't think of his name now--Damu. Damu. Damu came over, and he was in tears, and he was just saying that as far as the junior college was concerned and the support they needed, that the community had just abandoned them; that nobody was giving the kind of support they need to make sure that the development of the junior college would just take place and grow. He talked about the bungalows that was on the ground, and when it rained, it was muddy, and it just wasn't the kind of atmosphere for growth and learning. It really wasn't set for an education institution.
MOBLEY

He challenged us to do something about it, and so that was my first beginning to work with them, because of the passion that Damu had. He asked us to take a look at the other junior colleges and look at what they was planning for us and to watch it grow and whatever. He gave us that challenge that day of really taking a look at it, and I did and tried to work with it.

MOBLEY

But in the beginning, I remember when I started working for Neighborhood Adult Participation Project [NAPP], Opal Jones would always invite conversation with the decision makers. She would invite people like people in higher places, whoever it was, to come and talk to us about what was going on in the community and how the community could work with them and make it happen. That was the beginning of the development of a representative on the--a beginning--of the [Los Angeles Community] College Board of Trustees.

MOBLEY

So some of us in that same group were people that had all started working with them to get a representative for the College Board of Trustees, and if I recall right--I'm not sure; I need to check with Mrs. Carter and those. Do you know Ken [Kenneth] Washington?

STEVENSON

Yes.

MOBLEY

Yes, we supported him in the early days of the formation, you know, of the College Board of Trustees.

STEVENSON

But it was, I take it, an uphill battle to get Southwest College.

MOBLEY

It was, always. Yes, it was. It was very challenging. It's been worthwhile. It's something that needs to keep going. You know, when you talk about the leadership in the little group of people, every time we lose a seat, we don't gain it back. So we have to be cautious and careful about how we do that, how we stick together to hold onto what we have while we gain ground; not give up and think you're going to get something, because once the door is closed, it's closed. You know, you just don't get back in.

MOBLEY

So we have to start paying attention to--I think too many times that we don't have constructive planning and conversations about how do we really see it moving on. We leave the grass-roots people out, the real--

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MOBLEY

So what was I telling you?

STEVENSON

Community college--oh, the uphill battle.

MOBLEY

Yes. You know, if we could just understand how we could stay with a project until someone else is able to come and take it over and move forward with it--a lot of times we just lose, because we just say, "Well, it's okay," and just walk away, and when we walk away, they slam the door in our face. So we have to do things with the understanding that there's no completion to it; that you have to continue to move forward.

STEVENSON

You've talked a little bit about your involvement with L.A. Unified School District over the years. Could you tell me about maybe some of the highlights of your involvement with L.A. Unified, as far as bettering the education of the community's children?

MOBLEY

You know, it was a period of time like when your dad [Alfred S. Moore] worked with us. He worked with us with a sense of understanding of what it was to educate your kid, to have real parent involvement, and he believed--and if I'm lying, you check with him--that it was part of the church, the school, and the family. He believed that, because we used to hold meetings at his school at night, with Opal Jones and whatever.

MOBLEY

But he felt that it was unity in the way that we worked together; that you didn't just leave it to the church to do. The church had an important role to play, whatever religion or spiritual or whatever, but it had an important role to play in it, and that you had to have a grounded sense of understanding of what family is all about, you know, what it was. With the school and the family and the church, he believed that that was the foundation of what we need to build on. He used to talk about schools without walls, you know.

MOBLEY

So check with him to make sure that I have his understanding right, because I remember many nights we'd sit and talk and work and had plans to do things, and the unity that was built.

MOBLEY

We don't have that now. I think during that period of time people had a different desire and a different understanding and a different love of what they was going to do. It wasn't all the kinds of things that 's happening now. It was a very challenging time, but you felt that something good came out of during that period of time. Maybe we got too comfortable, you know. Being uncomfortable, we reached that point that we stopped looking at what we was building and just started looking at what we want and what we desire and just forgot that a lot of hard work and clear understanding of what you was striving for. Maybe that's it.

MOBLEY
But those was challenging times, but you look back on them now, and they was good times, wholesome times when parent groups used to meet together and talk about the--during the period of time that we used to meet with him over there, we used to go over to Hamilton United Methodist Church with Bob Francis--he's gone on now--to carry on the mission that we was working with, or trying to keep that family unity together.
MOBLEY
You know, we've known all the time that it takes a village to raise a child. It wasn't just new when Hillary [Rodham] Clinton talked about it. It was true when we had instructors like your dad, educators, real bona fide educators that understood what they wanted to put in and what they wanted to look for.
MOBLEY
Like you hear now talking about what it is we're trying to hold onto, what are we trying to share with people, what we are trying to tell them, what are the mistakes that we feel that we made, and what is the ground that we've gained; you know, what it's all about. He knew one day that we'll come to that. I think that's the kind of leadership that he brought to us when we met and worked together.
MOBLEY
It was a group of people at that time that was just trying--we all shared the same vision. You know, it was a shared vision that we all nurtured and worked on to go on, and we were hoping that we would leave life, love, and legacy for the coming generation.
STEVENSON
Are there any other organizations or initiatives that we've not discussed that maybe you want to discuss, or any other aspects of your community involvement?
MOBLEY
I think besides the junior college, the battle with Martin Luther King [Hospital] and [Charles] Drew [University]. It's really been a struggle.
STEVENSON
What do you think about this recent turn of events in this last week?
MOBLEY
With the incident that happened?
STEVENSON
Well, yes, with the incident that happened, the tragic incident involving the woman who died, but also the attempts now to revoke the license.
MOBLEY
You know, King was never supposed to survive, and those of us that worked closely together in the early days understood that it was always a challenge to just see how long that it was going to stay. The day it opened, it opened with a challenge. We was out there at five o'clock in the morning to see if it

was really going to open. King have never, never gotten what it needs to just continue to grown and on.

MOBLEY

So all the fight that it's been to just maintain it and see that it moved forward have never been there, and nobody's taken a look at the Department of Healthcare Services. The supervisors are so busy fighting amongst themselves for a hospital in their area that they're not looking at it. They don't care about what had happened to King. That's not their thing.

MOBLEY

I think by the time that the supervisors woke up and found out the things we were saying--she thought we was trying to protect employees. That wasn't it. It was the foundation of the institution that we was fighting for; what it takes to clean it up, to do better. You can't come from the ten best teaching hospitals in the country down to where it is now. You had qualified doctors that just left because it was too much to try to teach and do the work they was doing and fight a political battle. It was just too much.

MOBLEY

So a lot of people just say that, "I would rather move on and go someplace else than to continue to do this." If they was close to the community, they was suspect. So they felt that they'd have to be estranged from the community in order to survive. But then they found out if you never spoke to them, if you never spoke to the people in the community, you wasn't going to survive.

MOBLEY

So it's been a long struggle just to stay afloat, you know, with it. I look at all the people that just have given their life, like Miss [Mary] Henry. I think that her illness is part of her love for King Hospital, and it just began to be too much, you know, because in the early days she worked with President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson to begin Head Start. So her lifelong battle had been to just start from the cradle to the grave, you know, working with the babies and their parents and their mothers, to make this a better community to live in. She could see the best in the training at Martin Luther King. If it was going to be a teaching hospital, it had to be the best. So she struggled and tried, and tried to share with them what it is to be the best, to continue to.

MOBLEY

So when I look at what happened at King, it was planned. We just tried to get the best out of it, to maintain the best, to support the best, and haven't given up the fight yet. It's hard to do it. But I think part of Kenny Hahn's illness was the battle he had with the supervisors to maintain Martin Luther King Hospital, because he could see the vision of where it could go if we really worked together and tried.

MOBLEY

I think by the time that the supervisor realized that they was running a con game on her, that it was late, because right now, you know, my heart goes out to where she's sitting now, looking at how could you be in charge of all the hospitals, and this one is bad, when you can rotate the doctors and the nurses and the staff out to someplace else, and bring in the best. How could you do that? So you know the intent is not what the paper is writing and what you see. The intent is that it won't be a teaching hospital, that it won't be a hospital, that it will be a big convalescent home. They'll sell it off to somebody or do whatever, you know.

MOBLEY

So until the people wake up and look at the game that's been played on us, because truly it is. Truly it is. It's [unclear], because if you read the McCone Commission, you know the need for that hospital.

MOBLEY

I have a close friend that she was a diabetic when she was fifteen years old. She passed on now. But I remember the long days that her mother and I used to go with her to General Hospital, all day, you know, like packing a lunch. We'd take the kids. You know, because you couldn't be off of work all day and buy a lunch for everybody. At that time Martha was fighting for her life, because she didn't know she was a diabetic. Her mama didn't understand what was happening to her.

MOBLEY

So we would spend all day at General Hospital to see a doctor, and I can just name many cases that that happened. But I just remember how hard it was on her mother. I would go just to be with her to give her support, to see what was wrong with her daughter. And those trips, changing buses to Big General, it was no joke, none whatsoever. It was a job in itself, just getting there before we sit there and wait for the rest of the day. So it was really something.

MOBLEY

But it's been a uphill battle from the moment that hospital opened to where it is now. My oldest son used to drive for Goodhew [Ambulance], and he talked about, you know, in the early days of the gang killing and stuff. Some days he would be so depressed, he would come home, and he said, "Ma," he said, "we picked up this child, and its life was shot away, and he was hollering, 'Don't take me to Killer King,'" because some of the doctors in the emergency room had named the hospital "Killer King." Those was horrible days, when they would leaflet people's cars about "Killer King" before they had this system [phonetic].

STEVENSON

I heard about that, yes.

MOBLEY

Yes. Yes, put leaflets on the cars and wear T-shirts in the emergency room with "Killer King," you know, knife and gun and whatever. So it was planned

to fail. The money was never put into that hospital they need to make it grow and develop and be what we believed it can be. They may have had bad nurses and bad doctors, but then when you think about all the good, qualified--I remember that when my friends would go into King Hospital, and they would say, "I'm going in the hospital. Make sure you check on me," because of all the stuff that they've heard. Then they'll come out and say they had the best care anywhere in the world.

MOBLEY

I can say that, because I used to always go. Even though my husband's hospital is Good Samaritan, I'll always go to King, because I can't fight for something I don't believe in. And it was good to know who the doctors was, with the sense of understanding about what it is. I used to tell them all the time, "I don't want you to just take care because you know me. I want my neighbor to come in and feel just as comfortable," with the service that they provide as someone that's paying a million dollars for their care.

MOBLEY

I believe that that's the commitment that a lot of those doctors had, a lot. A lady just called me this morning. She have to go into the hospital on Friday, and she said, "With all the turmoil, should I go?"

MOBLEY

I said, "Yes, go." I said, "If you have any trouble, just give me a call. I don't know what I can do, but just give me a call. Go and see what's going to take place."

MOBLEY

So there's a lot of people out there don't want to go to Harvard [phonetic] General, don't want to go to Big General, and don't want to go anywhere but where they are. If they're living in the housing project, they're right at the hospital.

MOBLEY

They have never fulfilled the mission of the McCone Commission. They need to look at that and hold it up, or throw it in the trash can and burn it up and say, "We're through with that forever." But if you're not, look at it and say, "What can we do to make it better? Why do we want to destroy a hospital? Why is it a need?" You can't say the worst gang killing in the world is happening here in this area and then shut the hospital down.

MOBLEY

The doctors that you're pulling out of there is working at California hospitals and all around, and they've trained some of the best doctors in the world. Something is off balance. Something is really off balance, and we need to really take a look at it. I just say until God say it's over, we have to continue to fight for it.

STEVENSON

What do you think about what Mervyn Dymally is proposing for it as a remedy or as something to get the hospital back on its feet, which I think

involves taking it out of the L.A. County system and having it run by another body? What do you think about that?

MOBLEY

I know it needs to be taken from the County of Los Angeles, because the County of Los Angeles have just thrown it away. So it won't be taken from them, because they have thrown it away; they have given up on it. I'm sure in doing what they're doing, they have something in mind. I just feel that whatever we do, we have to be cautious and careful, because when they start pulling away the layers of things that they pretend that was wrong at King Hospital, they put together all kinds of committees, but never wanted the community to be involved in it, as if the people that use the hospital don't have a say-so and don't have a right, and that's not true.

MOBLEY

How better do you know what's happening if you don't talk to me about what it is that's hurting me? You have to have a sense of understanding about the people that you serve. If you don't understand the people that you serve, anything will do, especially if they're going to be quiet. But if we're not going to be quiet, then see what it is. What is it that you need? What is it? Let's look at it and see what we can do about it. How can we work together to fix this?

MOBLEY

So I don't know about the structure that Mervyn is talking about for the change. I would hope that we have a sense of understanding. They put together all these different committees with these people; they haven't even spoken to the people in the community about what's happening. They haven't. Everybody that went to that hospital wasn't just without medical insurance or without a healthcare plan. The people that's making the planning just come up because they're educated or whatever, but not sharing with the population that use that hospital what's happening.

MOBLEY

So I would have to look at Mervyn's plan and see what he means about it. Take it out and give it to who? Who are the players? You need to know who, this group of people that he's talking about giving it to, and maybe we can support it, with a sense of understanding what it is. What are you giving up? What you're giving up and what you're planning to gain. You know, what benefit's going to come out of this?

MOBLEY

But I know the county have just written it off. But they need to look at the Department of Healthcare Services that operates under the Board of Supervisors. If that hospital end up being as bad as it is, what kind of leadership was the Department of Healthcare Services giving? Is it equal throughout the county? Why is the other hospitals so great and you've got such great doctors, but you don't here at Martin Luther King? Something is off balance.

MOBLEY
If you have six or eight kids, and you feed them all the same thing, they may not all be nourished the same way, because some of them probably can't eat potatoes, and some can't eat green beans. But you look at that, and you look at the diet and you look at what you're feeding them, and say, "Johnny can't eat what Alan is eating, and so I have to do something about it."
MOBLEY
That's back to what I'm talking about with your dad. You look at the family; you look at the spiritual growth; and you look at the school. So you have to look at everything that plays a part in the growth and development. We're all operating under the Department of Healthcare Services and not looking at this, not looking at what is being fed. Something is wrong. Something is wrong.
STEVENSON
Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add to the interview that we didn't talk about before we close?
MOBLEY
I think that I've shared with you--oh, you know, I look at everything I do, at this point in my life, of Grandma's Hand [phonetic]. You know, I pride myself, every morning God may get you up to look for the mud and straw to make the bricks to build the bridge into the future. I'm proud every day that God let me live to make one more brick, because one of the things that I have hope that I've done well is to be a bridge builder. You make the bricks, but the architects and the engineers, the young people that we just got through talking about, our grandkids and great-grandkids, will continue to work on that bridge into the future.
MOBLEY
Our success or failure will lie with them, and I would like to just know that it's a success; that we prepared them for the best that opportunity can offer, the best thing in life, and that they can't be afraid or ashamed of hard work. The challenge in life just makes you stronger, and they have to be proud to be bridge builders, because, you know, I think about Mrs. Abrams [phonetic], Mrs. Bennett [phonetic], Mrs. Sims [phonetic], Mrs. [Nola] Carter, all the ladies that I feel that are truly bridge builders, that have given so much to the growth and development of this community, because they care. They want to leave something for the coming generation and was always proud to be part of Grandma's Hand, because we are builders.
MOBLEY
The strength in what we do and the pride is because we're leaving a legacy for the coming generation, not only the kids that we gave birth to, but all the young people that want to be something. If the kids out there continue to get in trouble, somewhere we've lost a brick, and we have to continue until God take us home to try to strengthen our knowledge and

understanding, what it is to love, have life, and the legacy that we're leaving for the coming generation.

MOBLEY

So every day we have to get up and look for that mud and straw to make those bricks, because I would hope that we'll leave a brickyard for them to build on and continue to understand, you can't make bricks without straw. You can't do that. If we continue to work together, with a sense of understanding in how precious life is, and like I said, we have to understand how we're doing this. We've got to leave something for the kids, something that they can hold their head up and say, "I'm going to work as hard as I can. I'm going to do my best," because there's joy in the doing. There's joy in living. Even if it's the challenge of a life, there's joy in it, because every day you'll be able to face the challenge. It just makes you stronger.

MOBLEY

So, for me, I've had a good life. I've enjoyed the people that I worked with. If I don't respect people, I leave them alone, because God haven't asked me to separate anything or anybody. He said he would separate the wheat from the what?

STEVENSON

Chaff.

MOBLEY

That's right, and I leave that to him. When I rise in the morning, I say, "Let me do your will," and I'm grateful to be able to do that, grateful.

STEVENSON

Okay. Thank you.

Date: 2014-04-09