A TEI Project

Interview of Tommy Jacquette

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 June 23, 2006

STEVENSON
OK, good morning. This is Friday, June the 23rd, and this is an interview with Tommy Jacquette. Tommy, could you tell me something about your early life, your parents, siblings, where you grew up?
JACQUETTE
OK. I am one of six children; myself -- four brothers, three other brothers, one is deceased, and two sisters. We were all born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I attended school in South Central; I lived in South Central most of my life -- still live in what's South Central right to the day. For awhile, we lived in Imperial Courts, in one of the housing complexes in Watts proper. I attended schools in South Central Los Angeles, attended what would be called [Samuel] Gompers Middle School now, but it was Gompers Junior High back then, and John C. Fremont [High School]. That's why I dropped out of school at John C. Fremont; I also attended a school Riis, Jacob A. Riis; it was for not-so-good-behavior teenagers. And then after awhile, I attended Cal Poly [California Polytechnic] Pomona for two years, majored in political science and public administration, and that was pretty much my whole educational background to date.
STEVENSON
OK. Can you tell me something about your parents, grandparents?
JACQUETTE
OK. Most of my people are from the South; they're from Texas and Louisiana. They came here, I believe, during World War II, from what I can -

- I wasn't quite born yet. My father was from Texas, Louisiana; my mother's side of the family I think was pretty much Texas; they came out here, I guess, in the '40s sometime. She was a factory worker, she worked in factories. My grandmother who raised us, she was from a little place called Call, Texas, from what I can understand. I'm not sure what part of Louisiana or Texas, but Galveston, I think, was my father, Galveston and Beaumont, those were the names they talked -- you know how parents talk about like back-in-the-day type things -- I think they were in New Orleans for awhile, some relatives was that whole New Orleans/Texas, with the migration or the connection, but they were all -- my father was in the service, and he came to California -- let's see, he came to California and he went into the service and then I think he went back to Texas, and then he came back to California, where he lived until he died. He was a veterinarian, he worked as a truck driver, and several other jobs, he played in a little band.

STEVENSON

OK. Can you tell me something about your neighborhood when you were young, elementary and middle school, something about your neighborhood?

JACQUETTE

Pretty much a predominately black neighborhood. It was a mixed neighborhood from single parents to two-parent families to professional people, working-class, I guess it would be a working-class community. And pretty standard type of community I guess for the '40s and the '50s; what we know now would probably be more of a segregated community than an integrated community. And had the same I guess problems of most communities of that nature across the country, in terms of school, job opportunities, education opportunity, job opportunities, housing restriction, you know, in terms of where we could live as a people. Police, community conflict, mainly between the young people, churches and schools and small businesses, that type of thing. I think it was pretty typical in hindsight; I never did a historical assessment or evaluation. But off the top of my head and looking back, I think it would be a typical black community in South Central Los Angeles.

By the time I was born -- I did live on 14th [Street] and Central Avenue. But then through a migration period, we moved south, as a people and as a community, because I hear that was our base back in the early '40s, and we migrated south. And I happened to see a program on PBS, hosted by -- I believe it was Norman [O.] Houston, when he was talking about back in the day when he was a youngster, and that the divide line was Slauson Avenue, and it was some housing covenant that only allowed blacks to move to a certain level -- that whole type of thing. It was sort of like above my head at that time, in terms of what was happening then. But my family I'm sure was a part of that whole migration into the South Central Los Angeles area, into what would be called Watts now, or then, because it's now South Central, Watts and then became South Central.

STEVENSON
OK. In your home, did you have any discussions about race, segregation -- did your parents tell you -- what were the discussions like?
JACQUETTE
Most of the discussions about serious race, and that whole issue came probably I think from the male side of the family. The women talked about the conditions; the men were more descriptive or vocal in terms of white/black relationships, and they were never complimentary, in terms of how we and they had been treated over the years, and the things that they had to go through in the South, I guess may have been part of the reason a lot of them migrated from the South. But it was always discussions on how we were treated as a people, and how we were -- and when I say treated, I mean abused as a people, and exploited as a people. And the terms that was tossed around was like, "cracker," that was the word for the white boy before it became "honky" and "whitey," how the crackers did black people this and how the crackers did black people that, and the things that black people had to do to survive, as well as leave town for their own survival. So that was pretty much the only type of discussions I heard as related to racial relationships in the South, and some comparison to what was happening even after they had left the South, and what we were dealing with here, and what, for the most part -- I considered, you know, California, and it wasn't as dramatic as the things that I heard that people lived in the South, how people was treated in the South. But it was still here; it was more subtle. I was not aware of it, of the subtleties, because I was contrasting them against the extreme situation of the South. Not 'til I got older did I understand, the dynamic was the same but the approach was more subtle.
STEVENSON
What can you tell me, as you were coming up in school -- I assume that your school was predominately black as well, reflecting the neighborhood. Looking back, what would you say about the education you got? And could you also discuss whether, in the early days, you had black teachers, any black administrators?
JACQUETTE
I had black teachers. I don't remember if -- there were some white teachers at the school too. I think most of my teachers happened to be female, if I'm not mistaken, through pretty much the sixth grade. And I think I may have had one male teacher that I can remember, named Mr. Cash, who was my male teacher in elementary school. The rest of them that I can remember were female teachers. And I know the principals was white; the principals or vice principals was white. I don't remember a black principal. When I got to junior high school, which was Gompers Junior High -- I don't remember a black principal there either. And I'm sure -- I think I remember one teacher, I don't remember her name -- in junior high school, in a couple -- because I

went to Willowbrook Junior High and to Gompers Junior High. Miss Carey was Willowbrook Junior High that I remember. I don't remember my teacher in Gompers Junior High, but I don't remember a lot of men teachers, it was mostly women that I can remember. The reason I remember Miss Carey and Mr. Cash is because they were good teachers, I thought; they talked about learning, they talked about getting an education, and emphasizing the whole importance of education, and what we need to do for life and while we were in school, and what the value would be later on in life.
I didn't have a great school life, in terms of academics. I don't -- I went to school and that was just about it; I went to school and I hung out with what would probably be considered the -- not the bad boys, but we weren't the best, you know. (laughter) We hung out not with the upper-class, with the nerds of the school. I don't remember a whole lot of academic or educational kind of experiences, other than just being there. I went to school, that was pretty much it; we did what we had to do. Math, maybe history may have been a subject that I had a little interest in and paid some attention to in the classroom.

STEVENSON

OK. Going back to your homelife, what emphasis was placed on education in your home?

JACQUETTE

A lot of emphasis was placed on education. I believe my grandmother had a third-grade education; I know my mother didn't graduate from high school, but I know she went further than my grandmother. But school -- education was important, and it was always talk about, you're going to need an education to get a job, education/job, education/job; they were synonymous with one another. Never -- although my grandmother was an entrepreneur, because she owned a restaurant and had some small businesses type of thing, and so she would always say, you know, even if you're going to own your own business, you need to be educated, you need to -- I think they called it arithmetic back in those days, and would have to have skills, know how to -- read, write, and arithmetic kind of a thing. So it was emphasized, and that was about it, the importance of it, and that we need it, and that we went to school every day, until I got to 16, and then I dropped out of school. But other than that -- and it was a time, too, when other people who had gotten good jobs necessarily did not have -- or had not graduated from high school, so I think opportunities were a little better; you can always say, "Well, I can get a job even though I dropped out of high school; I can read, write, and spell." That was the -- when I got to be 16, that pretty much ended up educational career until later on, when I went back to school, to college.

STEVENSON

OK. Well, maybe you could tell me a little bit more about the community life, what you did outside of school, maybe a little bit about what was going on in your neighborhood?

JACQUETTE

It was pretty routine. We just hung out for the most part; we hung out at friends' houses, we hung out at -- some of the girls' we went to school with houses. Some of -- I was never a drinker, but some would drink beer, smoke cigarettes, and just hang; there was not that much to do, and that was pretty much our lifestyle. We hung out on corners; sometimes we got into little hassles and did other little juvenile things that most juvenile kids did. We built our little motorbikes out of lawn mower motors, and we went to parties on the weekends. It was just a hangout kind of a thing, until we got to pretty much 18, but then we had to start worrying about -- begin to deal with working, going to school, going to work, or you could go in the service.

So some of us began to -- after that 16/17, began to look for jobs, or our parents forced us to, saying you have choices now; you go into the service, or you got to go to college, or you have to get a job. And I got a job and had to go to work. And that was it. But in terms of the whole teenage thing -- and we did some juvenile antisocial behavior kind of a thing; we got in a fights -- there was nothing like it is today in terms of gangs, but we had our little cliques that we were a part of. We did what we did. No -- had our little conflicts with the police force; we got our driver's license and we could drive outside of the community, because pretty much everything -- we were confined to the community for the most part. And you got your little -- call your friend, got a car, we all ganged up in the car like we would do today, and we would go -- maybe over to Fremont [Avenue] and Western [Avenue], that was a trip for us at that time.

And we hung out with other teenagers, did what other teenagers did, and some good, some bad, and some things were just ho-hum, we just hung out. If there was nothing to do, we'd find something to do, sometimes good, sometimes bad. I wound up being arrested for some gang activity and juvenile behavior; I was sent to Central County Probation Camp for 14 months. Then after I got out, I think I went to work for awhile, and then, maybe a year or so later, I went to the California State Youth Authority, and then after that, it was over with for me; that was my last juvenile institutional experience. Until I got involved with the Movement, there was some jailhouse things that happened. No time, but some encounters with the police.

And that was pretty much -- I grew up with Marquette Frye, the brother who was arrested in 1965, we were friends; we lived in South Central together, we went to school together, we were in Juvenile Hall together. And when he was arrested, myself and other brothers in the community helped raise money for his bail, his mother's mail, because one of the houses we hung

out at was his house. And as I said, the families at that time -- everybody, regardless of the children, what we were doing, good, bad, indifferent, the parents always pushed the need for education and doing the right thing. We had choices and we -- the community morality and the morality of the day was to do the right thing, get a job or get an education, that was -- we heard that all the time, regardless of if we adhered to it or not, we did hear it. And it was from -- not only my parents, but almost every parent of everybody that we hung around with in the entire community. As young men, as teenage boys, that was the -- from single parents as well as two-family parents, that was the constant thing. And that we would need it later on in life, and stories about people who didn't get it, and how they wound up.

STEVENSON

Right. OK, you mentioned that your neighborhood community was mixed by class, and could you talk about whether there were any class tensions? You mentioned you had working class as well as professional class in your neighborhood or your community.

JACQUETTE

There probably was, but it was not extreme. It may have been a family with a mother, father, couple of kids who didn't hang around with the rest of us, even though some of us had mothers and fathers too at the same time, we had a little more freedom, we were not as tightly controlled or tightly monitored as some of the other families were. So it created a little tension between the children; I don't know what was happening on the parents' side, because our focus was with our peer groups. And then there were -- even some of the people who had tight reins on their children, the boys for the most part, not so much the girls, they would maybe hang out with us on our way to school, but not after we got off school; they would hang out with us during school, but when they got home, they had to walk another line. That was the extent of the class consciousness that I was conscious of, in terms of association with certain of our peer group, both in single-family as well as two-family households, there was the association, and at nighttime, we may have been out until 8 or 9:00, 10:00, and they were in the house by dark. So it was these kind of little things that we noticed, in terms of differences. But like I said, we all lived together, we were all same neighborhood, same block, so we still had to deal together in the daytime, hanging out on the weekends and going to school every day, because we all went to [David Starr] Jordan [High School] or Gompers or Willowbrook or Jordan or Fremont High. We walked to school, we rode the buses to school together, we did -- even though they had tight parents, when they got from under their parents, they did some of the same things we did. You wouldn't believe some of the stuff that went on outside of their parents sight. But when they got home, they got back to the neighborhood, it was -- we didn't hang out at their houses, they didn't hang out with us. Things like that.

STEVENSON
OK. Can you talk about what role the church -- going to church had in your upbringing?
JACQUETTE
We had to go to church -- as a matter of fact, very few people that I knew in the neighborhood was not a member of a church and didn't have to go to church. And we were raised Baptist, so we went to church all the time; we had to go, it wasn't an optional thing. Especially up until the age of 12, and that's when I believe that, religiously-speaking, the parent was not responsible for the sins of the child. But we were baptized in the church, we were in the Junior Choir. We were in church pretty much all day on Sundays; we had to go to -- there was a little lady in the neighborhood, we had to go to Bible School, she had a Wednesday Bible School, a Monday Bible School we had to attend, and even those who didn't want to go, she had cookies and Kool-Aid, so they would come just to get the cookies and Kool-Aid.
So religion was always in the mix, with most of the families in South Central, and the families in the neighborhood that I grew up in. It was always there. The teenagers dealt with it because we had -- our parents usually made us go to church or something, but it was there. It was dominant or predominant in the lives of -- I want to say most of the black families. I never met an atheist; I didn't know what an atheist was until my teenage days. But I know, during that time, even if we just went to church to be in the choir, to be with the girls, it was always -- it was a church thing. And my grandmother belonged to the church, so we had to go to church, it was mandatory for us.
STEVENSON
OK. And the name of your church?
JACQUETTE
King Solomon Missionary Baptist Church, that's one of the ones I remember. There was another church too, but I remember that one. It still exists down on 74th [Street] and Central [Avenue], I believe it is. So it was one of the -- I think it's been in our family, our family's been associated with that for -- even since I was a little boy. And it's still there down on Central Avenue, so that's why I remember the church, and the pastor and his wife. There was a couple more churches we had attended, all Baptist, until -- but my father and them was Catholic, on my father's side of the family was Catholic; on my mother's side was Baptist, and I believe my grandfather was Lutheran. But I didn't know anything about the Catholic church, except for when I went with my father one time, we were in and out in an hour; I came home and told my grandmother I wanted to be a Catholic. (laughter) That was it. One hour and you're out of church. But that was pretty much it. As soon as I -- when we became 12, it was not mandatory we go to church. But we periodically still went, when my grandmother said, "You're going to church,"

so we'd go to church, but we didn't have to go to church. Before we were 12, it was mandatory that we were in church.

STEVENSON

OK. So you mentioned you left school at 16, and then you got a job. Could you tell me what type of position that you had?

JACQUETTE

I worked in a factory putting birdseed and making bird cages, it was -- I forgot, but we might have been making $1.10 an hour or something like that. But it was a little factory job, and I was doing birdseeds and making bird cages. I think I worked at a carwash; I washed dishes at a Thrifty [Drug Store] -- one of the stores, I was a busboy. These kind of little jobs, just miscellaneous little jobs. Paying minimum wage for that time. And still, you know -- not quite being grown and still trying to be grown at the same time. I was still doing a lot of juvenile things, even though I had a little job, a bunch of little jobs. And that's when I got busted for gang activity, for fighting and that whole thing, and then I got sent away. Came back, I think I got some more jobs, similar to the job -- I worked in a factory where they made -- it was like woodwork stuff, little things you assemble together almost, like little tables and things you put together yourself, and you package them up. And another carwash job, just general labors. I think I tried to work in construction for awhile, and it was hard work -- just those kind of jobs, pretty much. And then I finally settled into -- in terms of a permanent job making money was automotive tune-up and repair, I did go to LA [Los Angeles] Trade Tech [College] for specializing in that. So that was a good-paying job, and I made a little money at that. Always working with my hands, and doing mechanical kind of things until 1965, when I wound up in the middle of -- 1965, and the revolt, and then began to develop administrative -- well, really started out in clerical skills, and then developed the administrative skills. And I've been doing that pretty much ever since.

STEVENSON

OK. Can you tell me when you first became involved with -- as an activist, for the Civil Rights Movement? When was the first -- if you can really trace for me the start of your political consciousness?

JACQUETTE

August 11th, 1965. Prior to that -- I know exactly, because it started with the revolt. Prior to that -- we had had a few friends who was active in the Civil Rights Movement, but we were not active in the Civil Rights Movement at all, at least the crew that I hung with. But we did have friends who were active in the Civil Rights Movement at that time, and part of our non-participation was because we saw the Civil Rights Movement in the tradition of the South, where people were being brutalized and not fighting back. We were not -- we were from California, we did not understand that. So we just begged off of that whole -- what seemed to us a religious, passive, non-violent kind of movement.

But like I said, we had friends who was involved with the Civil Rights Movement. Not until 19- -- just prior to '65, because we had a lot of friends, I think, when the Nation of Islam was beginning to develop. So we had -- as a matter of fact, Marquette Frye's sister was a member of the Nation of Islam at that time, and I think Marquette had probably even attended a couple of meetings at the mosque. In 1965 was the first time I and a lot of our friends had ever attended the mosque. We knew what the Nation -- we had friends who had gone into the Nation of Islam, and it was on the street, because they reached -- they got the street brother. And so we knew friends who had joined the nation; we knew brothers who we had went to school had become Muslim; we knew brothers that probably had some juvenile time, we converted over to Islam. So we were aware of the whole Islamic movement, and its doctrine in terms of self-defense. You know, you don't start any trouble, but you don't let anybody abuse you.
And then right after that, then the Black Power Movement started with the 1965, which just engulfed the entire community, even to the gang members; they all became members of the [Black] Panther party, the US organization, the Nation of Islam, and community groups like the Sons of Watts was formed, and other community-based organizations, in terms of what people would call militant overtones or militancy or Black Power Movement. And that's when I became involved. And like I said, Marquette Frye was a friend of mine, we had hung out together, even the house that he was arrested in was one of the houses we hung out at, with one of the girls that we had gone to school with. So we were all -- we knew each other, and we had grown up together. So we were -- like I said, we had our cliques; there wasn't -- it may have been a little gang activity, but mostly neighborhood clicks, that type of thing, that we were a part of, and that we participated in together, and as I said, hung out together and did whatever we did together.

STEVENSON

Were there any formalized gangs as there are now? And who were they?

JACQUETTE

Yes, they were, but they were formalized in the sense that you would belong to them, you had a gang. The leadership was still shaky, like it is today. There was no gangs then or now that had leadership, in terms of disciplined soldiers, or this is the one recognized leader; there was more a bunch of individuals that hung out with common interests from time to time than any -- something like -- and I used, from the Nation of Islam to the police force, to any disciplined organization as a symbol for -- a measurement for true gangs that you have one leader, you take orders from him; we can tell you, "Go stand over there," and you stand over there, as opposed to saying, you do it if you want; if you don't, "You don't tell me what to do" kind of attitude that was what it is today. A lot of people hanging out with common interest and with a common identity, but it's not -- it's not a real leadership or real

disciplined -- it's not a disciplined organization. Maybe that's why they call it a gang, because they hadn't defined what a gang was quite yet. But I measured it in terms of having levels of leadership, levels of control, and levels of discipline, that you could control your membership. That's what I would have to define as a true gang. Other than that, like I said, you have a bunch of people; some people might want to get high, some people might want to drink, some people might go there for the girls, some people want to be protected so the next neighborhood won't jump on them. But it's not with a doctrine or philosophy or code of ethics or anything like that.

STEVENSON

OK. I want to go back to something you said earlier: you mention the response to racism and discrimination here being different than that in the South, the South being more passive, and that here, you wouldn't go for that. What do you attribute that to? What do you attribute the difference to?

JACQUETTE

(inaudible)

STEVENSON

OK.

1.2. Session 1B
June 23, 2006

STEVENSON

OK. I was asking you what you would attribute the difference in response to racism in the South, as opposed to here in Los Angeles; you alluded to that earlier, and I wanted to know a little bit more about why you think that is.

JACQUETTE

I think because of the subtleties of racism in the North. They were just as racist in the North as they were in the South, but in the South, I think they were crueler, they were more overt in their racism and their brutality to people in the South. And I think because they had had a long history of it, they had pretty much oppressed the people to where there would be little to no resistance, where in the North, it was just as brutal, but it was more subtle. And probably more active institutional racism in the North than it was in the South, because from what I can understand, any white person in the South would just come up and abuse you on GP, and there was pretty much nothing you could do. Here, it was mostly through law enforcement and institutions and through jobs and educational institutions that you would be dehumanized or brutalized through discrimination and bias. I think that was the main difference.

And there was a lot of physical brutality as well, but I don't think it was as overt as it was in the South. And when 1965 hit, and the city went up over police brutality, which was the front line of racism, in terms of maintaining the police department, law enforcement, that it showed America that we

would physically strike back. And I think that put a whole new prospectus on any kind of physical brutality, or outward brutality in the form of racism that we as a people would be subject to. That's pretty much because once the people choose not to defend itself, then brutal people can do anything they want to. That was one of the turn-offs by a lot of young people for the Civil Rights Movement, but especially those of us who were born in the North or in California, when we saw dogs being put on people and heard about the Klu Klux Klan riding on people in their homes, and this was not -- it was sanctioned by the state, but it was not -- I mean, you had a right to defend yourself against some cracker riding up on you with a sheet on your head. And so I think that our willingness to strike back put a whole new dimension on overt racism in the form of brutality by the law enforcement agency, and even institutional racism where they can demean you, you can still be an uncle or a boy or -- they would want to have you buck-dance for a dime in their own way. And I think once we as a people struck out against it and struck back, they had to realize that we were not going to allow that to happen to this generation and further generations. So they began to devise another level of racism to continue to maintain their control over us as a people, because we are an oppressed people in this country, and this country is not going to allow us to be a free people without us physically fighting and struggling against it by any means necessary, they're just not going to do it. This country is known for even destabilizing governments, so I know what they look on us as a people, especially what their consider their slaves or their niggers in this country. So the struggle continued, in terms of our freedom as a people in the form of self-determination and exercising our right, and this country wanted to exercise its right over what they figure is their property, one day or another.

STEVENSON

OK. You said that your role as an activist started on August 11th, 1965. Could you tell me in detail how that pulled you in as an activist?

JACQUETTE

It pulled me in -- once Marquette had been arrested, and we went down on Avalon, because they had taken Marquette Frye and his mother away before it actually started, the rock, bottle, and brick-throwing didn't start until after they was in jail, as they left the scene. When we went down there and they began to try to break up the crowd, and they began throwing bricks and bottles, that was my involvement right at that point. I too join in with the rock-throwing, the brick-throwing, the bottle-throwing, and everything else that was happening in the city, from the time it started 'til the time they put the curfew on, we were out every night, not only those of us who grew up in South Central, but those of us who were even from one part of town to another part of the town during our teenage days were united and were supportive of one another, and engaged in tactics that -- even though we had not planned together, we executed as if they were planned together, in

terms of hit-and-run, and when they advanced, we would retreat, and when they would retreat, we would advance kind of a thing. We saw and recognized that we could affect the police department, and that they were literally powerless to do anything with us. And even though they were doing shooting, that would only last so long before shots would begin to be returned on them.

And so that's when the National Guard was called in; that's when they actually squashed it by putting a curfew in effect. But then, at that point, a whole new consciousness had been developed, and a broad range and a broad base of support had been developed, not just by the young people in the street, because it was mostly young people in the street, but by the middle class and even the seniors in the community were voicing the concerns and issues that they had been voicing for years and had never been heard; now they were being listened to. And we were the army, the advancing army that they were able to allow them the protection that was needed for them to voice their concerns and to back up their concerns through our actions, if the establishment failed to listen.

STEVENSON

OK. So in terms of the middle class, the seniors, were there organized groups, organizations at that point, or were there any individuals that you remember that stand out in leadership roles?

JACQUETTE

Yeah. [Augustus F.] Gus Hawkins was one of them. Gus had complained about the conditions and what we were dealing with here as a people in South Central, and warning them of impending possible situations. I think John Buggs, Mr. John Buggs, from the County Human Relations, was another. The NAACP, probably Celes [tus] King [III] was another. There was a number of organizations, Civil Rights organizations, and possibly even church leaders who were constantly articulating the concerns and the issues that affected of as a people, or was getting no result and not being heard by the establishment.

After that time -- as well as, I'm sure, a lot of community citizens, just -- not necessarily part of an organization or anything, was also doing -- after 1965, they were all heard; everybody was listened to, and they were listened to by the establishment, and they were not just, you know, heard and dismissed; they were heard and addressed, the issue was addressed. Because they -- once they went to them at this point, they understood that there was a standing army of young people ready to do whatever was necessary to ensure that if we were not treated as decent human beings, there would be hell to pay, and we were willing to pay the price, just like soldiers do when they go to war and fight for what they believe in.

And as I said, it was the young people who was in the street, it was young people, and some older people, but for the most part it was young people out there in the street and without fear, and without fear and willing to take

on the establishment, which at that time was considered -- it was the Los Angeles Police Department, as well as the Sheriff Department, and all the law enforcement agencies. And especially the Los Angeles Police Department, because it has built its reputation as being the finest police department in the world. And it was taken down by a bunch of community people, a lot of young people in the community across the whole city of Los Angeles, and because an example and a source of inspiration and encouragement for those who had not the courage nor the commitment to do it, but felt that now it can be done if they so chose to do it.
And so at that time, we as a people, especially -- but I'm talking about black people now, the vanguard of an ongoing movement. We didn't start the movement; the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle of the '50s and the '40s and the '60s -- that struggle had been going on. We took it to another level. The generation that's following us will take it even to another level, but we took it to another level, and we continued the struggle for all of those who had preceded us to this point in a different kind of way. Not only had we fought back, but we began to be articulate and to express and explain our situation, and we began to exercise our right to self-determination, and began to speak in a language that the oppressor understood.
And so that's how I see it, in terms of my involvement from the '60s, and a lot of the -- the whole '60 era, from not only those of us in Watts, but later the Panther Party came into being up in Oakland, I think a year or two later; the Blackstone Rangers out of Chicago came into existence. And black people across this country began to stand up as organized groups of people with concerns of the masses and programs that would benefit us as a people in the field of education, in the field of employment, and business opportunities. All of that was -- it was a huge advance, in terms of us as a people in those areas, as well as just the general consciousness on who we were as a people, because I believe in that time, in 1965, I think we were still Negroes, if I am not mistaken. Right after that, we became black people or Afro-Americans, but now we made the complete change to an African people in America, like all the other hyphenated cultural groups in this country.

STEVENSON

Right. I want to ask you about an organization that I run across in my research called TALO, Temporary Alliance of Community Organizations. Can you tell me more about that? And I know that it was formed, according to my research, in response to the problems of police brutality.

JACQUETTE

Right. That was an organization that came into being as a part of a community effort to both police itself and to protect itself from the police. And it was set up where any time we see the police stopping people, legal, legitimately or illegitimately, we stop to observe the behavior of the police and what was happening at that time. It gave the police -- put the police on

notice that we were there watching, number one; number two, that we would not go for it; and number three, for the persons that were being victimized, or stopped by the police, even if it was a legitimate reason they had to stop them, that they would not be brutalized by the police at that time. And it was another organization that came into play to deal with the multiplicity of problems that we were facing, but that specifically addressed the police issue at that time. And one thing -- and this is in hindsight -- everything we did, we were not aware -- we were aware of what we were facing; we were not aware of the fact that as we initiated action, that there were a whole series of situations or actions that was to counter that action that we had initiated, from beginning to arrest people that didn't have driver's license, and maybe have warrants for tickets and that type of thing. So it was a back and forth kind of a thing for everything that we did, not only for TALO, but for community meetings, with infiltration of not only spies, but agent provocateurs as well, and not just from -- in terms of men, which was where the focus was, but in terms of some females who also were working as agents for the establishment.

So all of that was being put into effect around everything that we had done, because it was -- we did not fully understand, at least I do not believe those of my generation fully understood the depth and the extent of the oppressor's willingness to do whatever was necessary to keep us as a people in check, by any means necessary. And the resources they were willing to expend, because even then, we were -- as a people, we got this morality thing about right and wrong with us. So we're standing up for the right, then what could hurt us? It was things out there they were doing to us to undermine and destroy -- like I said, not only those of who were on the front line of the movement, but those who were in the background and trying to establish institutions and reinforce this, and legitimately carry our concerns to the powers-that-be.

STEVENSON

OK. So did you know that these spies or agent provocateurs, did you know them to be such at the time? Or is this only after COINTELPRO?

JACQUETTE

No. Right, right. COINTEL program, number one, and some reports that came out afterwards from people who were in there, and began to tell the story or write books of what they were doing. But we didn't know at the time, and we couldn't know, because they couldn't have successfully survived the experience of being open agents; it was not the plantation of the old days where [Uncle] Tom could just be alone, [Uncle] Tom could run to the man without repercussion of consequences. So, no, they kept themselves with good covers, or hid very well. And it was two kinds; there were those who were being paid and were being nurtured and sent in by the man, and it was those who just, for whatever reason, believed in the man so much, and against everything we were doing, they volunteered their

services, and made telephone calls and had meetings. So it was two kinds of agents that we had to deal with, those political and those who were brainwashed, psychological enemies.

STEVENSON

OK. At what point did your group, even though you weren't a formalized organization, come together with some of the other people like Gus Hawkins, John Buggs, NAACP, come together to address some of these issues? And this is after the rebellion.

JACQUETTE

Right, right. Some established agents, such as the County Human Relations Commission, began to send people out into the street. And the County Human Relations people form a probation office, where I knew from my street activity, I knew a couple of probation officers, Jim Burke was one of them, I think Larry Aubry was another, people who had known in the institution, or after we got out of the institutions. And they began to -- we began to make alliances and have conversations, begin to be bought into the formalized process that was taking place, as opposed to just the physical resistance that was happening on the street level, then began to involve a lot of the young people in the meetings and in the hearings and in the dialogue that was taking place to voice the issues and concerns, not only of those -- the seniors and other adults that were having problems, but those that affected young people and teenagers as well.

So we began to have an opportunity to -- through people like the County Human Relations Department and others, a voice at the table, as opposed to outside raising hell, at the meetings. And then things began to evolve from them to other community-based organizations as well that have been set up, like one of the major ones was the Los Angeles Black Congress, where a lot of the street organizers or the street -- grassroots-based organizations, was able to come together around the table and voice joint concerns to and with the established leadership and the established institutions. So -- and began to just evolve like that, and the community people began to organize themselves and start organizations to address specific issues as well as the general issue of conditions that we as a people face. People began to specialize in education and childcare and job development and business development, as well as those who took a broad, big picture look of the overall problem that we had, and seeing how it all complements one another, good educations, good job; good job, money -- the whole economic development source as a people, to develop our businesses that we as a people would support and be a part of. And then another phase of the movement came in by the oppressors, to disband the movement -- first of all, discredit the movement, then disband the movement, then to disperse us as a people throughout communities and suburbs from Riverside to [Pocoima] to -- that's the phase we're in now.

STEVENSON

Right.

JACQUETTE

But we're still, in terms of the consciousness and effectiveness of us as a people, that's still intact. Our commitment, our dedication, our sense of self is still intact, so wherever we go, we're still an influence. No matter what community we go in, no matter how much they shift us from one community to another, we still maintain that cultural identity and self-pride at the people, and the willingness to defend that. That's something that stuck in spite of the attempt to disperse us and to undermine the movement.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to talk about two areas in detail. Could you tell me about the War on Poverty and those programs, and just looking back, if you tell me something about the ones that you may be familiar with, and secondly, what were the benefits or lasting effects of those?

JACQUETTE

I have two positions. One, that the concept was a good idea, in terms of what it was supposed to do. I think it was subverted, in terms of being used as an opportunity to -- like they did in Vietnam, and some people, (inaudible) -- they called it a pacification program to pacify those of us who were supposed to have been the young angry force, willing to get in the street through employment and through promises of change. And I think that in some instances that it did help, but I don't think that was the ultimate plan from the enemy who presented it to us at the table. The ultimate end was to suppress and to buy off and to squash real opposition on a grassroots level, and to reestablish the status quo, in terms of their leadership and us being tokens, at best, in various phases of not only society's development, but our own development as a people.

And I was a part of Westminister Neighborhood Association; I was one of the people who were hired at Westminister at the time to go into the streets to talk to young people, to get them involved; it was a training program where they would go back to school, they would be paid while they were in school, and from there, there would be jobs, which was a positive thing. There was no political education component, or no base philosophy for what you were to do after you were to get this job and after you had this training, and how you were to -- it was generally understood, but it was not applied, that it was an inward kind of a thing and you were supposed to bring back and give to the community, as opposed to get yours and leave the community kind of thing. That was the ultimate plan that they had, and it worked to a degree, in terms of people getting what they could and then leaving, as opposed to getting what they could and then bringing it in and rebuilding.

STEVENSON

So would you say, when that money started to dry up, that any benefits basically went out the window?

JACQUETTE

Yes. They were very effective in dispersing us, because along with that came the frustrating the efforts again and the disbanding of organizations and people, the disqualification of people, the character assassination of he's getting al the money and you're not getting anything, all that whole what they call -- what is it? -- Thomas -- the [Willie]Lynch -- it's some letter that (inaudible) black people separated through dissention. And all that dissention began to set in, and not only in terms of just the Man and his programs, but those black people in leadership roles who was paid to also squash the black movement. I remember one time when they were talking about a Black Studies, disqualified that -- "What do you need Black Studies for? Black Studies is not going to do any good; why do you need to learn the African language? Swahili, do you speak Swahili?"

And you know, we're still the only people in this country, as an ethnic group, we don't speak the language. And they're not even recognizing Ebonics for us as a people, and more black people now are speaking and studying Spanish than ever before as a second language, and we still as a people have not committed to, or addressing the issue of us as an ethnic group, without the one language to speak as a people. And as I said, not just the Man coming to take (inaudible) program, and being able to implement his program, and through some of his agents, conscious or unconscious, in terms of discrediting the efforts and the self-determination on the part of the people, not recognizing our culture, not recognizing our heritage, and saying things like, "I don't know anything about Africa; I was born in Chicago." But you've been to Europe, you've been to Israel, you've been to Italy, you know things about other people; you pride yourself on your European knowledge of the European, and your experiences in his homeland or his cradle of culture. And I think one of the first things Ronald [Wilson] Reagan did when he became President, got on the plane and went back to Ireland, I think it was, where his grandparents was born, to reconnect with his cultural heritage. And here we are talking about, "I don't know anything about Africa, I don't know anything about no Africa." "But you know everything about the Italians, you know everything about..." -- and this is the black intelligentsia I'm speaking of here. These are the ones who pride themselves on being fluent in French and Spanish and Russian and German and Chinese, but they can't speak a word of Swahili, the African continent itself doesn't even exist, or not relevant in the world community.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to ask you, at this point in your activism, were there particular black scholars, movements that you looked to for inspiration at this point?

JACQUETTE

For me, mine was Dr. Maulana Karenga. And, you know, I knew Stokeley [Carmichael] and Kwame Ture, H. Rap Brown, Angela [Davis] -- all the major movers and shakers, Eldridge [Cleaver], Bobby [Seale], Huey [P. Newton]. And that would include Malcolm X and Dr.[Martin Luther] King,

[Jr.] in terms of -- when I say Maulana, I see him in the same vein as Dr. King, intellectually and philosophically, as Malcolm. And the Messenger I think also would rate up there, as well as [Marcus Mosiah] Garvey. There were people in the movement, and even [W.E.B.] DuBois, in terms of intellectuals who had a world vision of us as a people and of the world, and understand our historical significance of history and our role in history. All of them was my source of inspiration.

My direct connection, of course, was with Dr. Karenga, because he was here, he was local. And I met him at [Freemont] when he was teaching Swahili. At that point, I didn't understand; I was a revolutionary and I didn't -- I thought, you know, we don't need Swahili; we need AKs and whatever to address this issue. But listening to him and talking to him, I began to be exposed to a whole 'nother level of consciousness, philosophical and intellectual connection between theory and practice, and how it complemented one another, and you had to have both to succeed, which opened me up to other areas of study and other peoples who had made contributions that they did, writings and assessments of the struggle for us as a people.

And as a result of that, for me, the Nguzo Saba , the Seven Principles, and Kawaida as a doctrine; I was committed to that because it gave me the philosophical and intellectual foundation I needed to confront and to deal with forces that were functioning at that level, as well as a physical level. That did it, and then I began to just integrate that into a practical, everyday kind of existence. Everything I did organizationally, the people that I began to meet and deal with, it was not just whitey this and whitey this; it was our responsibility and relationship to whitey and what we have to do as a people, in order to counter what we would be faced as a people, and the level of commitment and dedication it would take.

When we got in the Movement, we thought it was going to be over in six months. We, like Bush, had predicted too early that victory. But with age comes wisdom, and we realized that this was a lifelong struggle, and that generations upon generations will have to continue to struggle, and our job now is to lay the foundation and leave a legacy of struggle and resistance, as well as a legacy of building a construction of what we develop as we go through life, collectively as a people, not so much individually. Individual accomplishments as well is good too, but when they can come and do to us what they did to the Jews in Germany with the stroke of a pen, or confiscate your wealth, what good is it going to do you, if you're a millionaire today and a pauper tomorrow, because the government can, in the name of right now national security, take everything you got, including your dreams, if they chose to do so.

So -- but we're not -- we understand the value of individual wealth and individual success, but it has to be protected by this collective, or shared by the collective in order to be protected, if we're all going to survive as a

people. It was at one point 180 million Indians on the North American continent; now, I think it's less than three. And we're only 30 million to begin with, and maybe not that now, in terms of our numbers, in terms of our infant mortality rate, in terms of the deaths, that we die young, before white people die, in terms of the stresses that we have to deal with, go through as a people, just being human, being victim of discrimination and racism and poor health, poor education, and all the numbers; Urban League came out last year with their report on the state of black America. It's there for all to see. I've said, I see not only the enemy role in it, or the oppressor, the ruling class -- they don't like to say white people anymore. (laughter) But that our role in aiding and abetting the ruling class, the oppressor -- in my mind, still the white people -- in terms of where we're at as a people today.

We have to get a grip, and I'm talking to leadership now, black leadership, in terms of what we as a people have to do. I remember an interview with -- I think Mike Wallace had with Minister Louis Farrakhan, who is also another deeply critical thinker, in my opinion. When he mentioned to Farrakhan about, we cannot survive as a people in our own separate state and that whole thing, and Minister Farrakhan said, "You would never say that to the Jews. What's with us as a people where we could not survive, but the Jewish people could survive, or almost any other people, with the exception of us?" And that's true; the way that a lot of us look at it, that we couldn't survive without the white man. But we're still in this country; we're not talking about moving out and going back to Africa, we can do it right here. The Jewish people do it right here; they not only influence the economy and the development of this country, they influence several countries. And I believe it's probably less than 3 million Jews in America, maybe 6. And so with the influence and the status that they have, they could go anywhere; nobody would dare say, "Well, you can't survive out in the desert of Las Vegas; how you can survive?"

But they would say that to us as a people, in terms of this country, which shows, you know, the level that they're thinking at the highest levels, by supposedly some of the most profound thinkers that they had. Not that Mike Wallace is a profound thinker, he's a newsman. But I mean, at that strata; I think that's the sentiment as well, in terms of we as a people really cannot survive; we're really not -- if America got up, if we got up tomorrow morning and white America didn't exist, we would perish. I don't know why they believe that, but they do. And a lot of us believe it as well. But I understand, that's from the slave mentality and 430 years of oppression, racism, discrimination, and just force brutality, because behind all of this -- a racist without power is nothing more than a white boy with an attitude; he has to have the power to enforce his racist values, his racist attitude, and to exercise his will over the people.

And so that comes through the government, the state, the country, where that racism exists institutionally in order for that to survive, because just on a group basis, on an individual basis, they have about as much as a snowball in hell as to exercising that kind of stuff over -- not only us, they probably -- I couldn't see them exercising it over a roach, to be quite honest, not only to mention a people. So it's the power of the state, and it's the power that empowers the attitude of racism and discrimination through institutional racism, to come up with policies, social policies, that are of a negative nature or unproductive nature to affect us and other people of color, and then as I said, it's not just us; this is on a global basis -- now that we're talking global, everything is global this and global that. And it's the same mentality I'm sure that Greece had and Rome had, and Britain had, Great Britain at one time had, in terms of -- I believe what they believe in was Manifest Destination or Manifest Destiny, that they were chosen by God to civilize all of mankind. I think it's that deep for them, I really do. Some people may not believe that, and even a lot of white folks do not believe that or even care, but it works to their advantage, so they go along with the application of it, if not the conscious philosophy of it.

STEVENSON

Right. OK, could you tell me about your first involvement with the Black Congress, and what can you tell me about why that was started, maybe the organizing philosophy as you understand it

JACQUETTE

Right. The Black Congress was a coalition of community-based organizations, and it was to bring us all to the table to discuss our various interests on an individual basis as well as a collective basis, and to support one another in our efforts to whatever goals we had in mind, whether it was education, whether it was in economic development, whether it was in housing, employment, or just community development, in that we could all come to the table, since the one goal, the one thing that we all had in common, was a high quality of life; it was to build a community that would be beneficial to all who lived in it, and that was our common goal, we had in common with one another, whether you are a member of the Community Party, which some members were; whether you were a member of the US organization, which some members were; whether you were a member of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], the NAACP, the Urban League, the [Black] Panther Party, or just a concerned citizen: everything was about the quality of life issue for us at the time, then and now, and how we could individually as well as collectively support one another and enhance that overall goal. And here again, that was the foundation, that was the purpose for which we came together, and hopefully a strategy that could be developed to move out from and be supportive of one another in.
Things begin to happen there too, in terms of -- I believe that everybody came to the table, except for those who had other missions and were

assigned to come to that table, believed that it was a good thing, we were to be there for that reason, and others had other programs and other agendas, and began to disseminate dissention and maximize dissention within the group, and eventually the group disintegrated, into ineffectiveness first and then physically just disintegrated. As I said, people were there with other agendas. And we're no different from any other people now, I don't want people to think that every time we try something, it's always because it fails. Like I said, this country destabilized other countries, other nations; they send their agents in there. Right now they have people in Iran or Iraq that will say, "Well, Saddam did this and Saddam did this," (inaudible). He was doing whatever he was doing, they had people that was there undermining him, and there were actually agents of this government. And so of course they're going to apply those same principles on a local level in order to maintain and gain power, but at a price.

And as I said, it's not just us; you can spread dissention in heaven, that's why the devil supposedly got kicked out, for those believers. (laughter) It started in a peaceful place. And so I think because of our belief in justice, our belief in fairness, our belief in the right thing, that we were vulnerable to it moreso than others. I think we still are probably the most moral and spiritual people, bar none, including the Native Americans, in this country right today, because of what we had to go through as a people. And I think that's the one thing that's in all of us, in all of humanity. I'm not (inaudible) anybody; I'm just understanding the level that exists in us as a people, and in our faith in the right thing and the sense of justice, the sense of fairness, a sense of right and wrong. I think we as a people are number one in America, if not on the planet, bar none. And again, that's just my opinion, my personal belief. But to quote Malcolm, of all of our studies, history is best suited. And I think if you study our history as a people, I'm close to correct, if not correct.

STEVENSON

OK. Can you tell me at the beginning, or when the Congress was formed, who were the key players? Was there an executive council, organizing group, individuals who maybe wrote the organizing philosophy?

JACQUETTE

Dr. Maulana was a key player. Walter Bremond was another key player. Who else was in that? I'm thinking Reverend Thomas Kilgore may have been. There was a handful, I know no more that a handful. Those are the ones that I remember. Dr. Karenga, Walt Bremond. I'm trying to remember -- it was a lot of people that came through it, but I'm sure -- Reverend Kilgore, it was a handful, no more than a handful who began it, and then others came in quickly, because as a community, we were still pretty much functioning together, so it didn't take much to get everybody at the table, from the ministers to the community activists to the community militants around the

table to concerned citizens. I think Margaret Wright may have been another; I remember Margaret Wright was active in there.
And then that was another thing, that there were a lot of key women, like Margaret Wright, Johnnie Tillman, Mary Herbert, Ruth Robinson; there was a lot of females in the movement that contributed as much if not moreso than a lot of the men. The emphasis was on the men who were a part of the movement and were in leadership roles, but none of it would have been possible or sustainable, including the church, without the women being an intricate part of the movement, no matter how unrecognized she was, in that she was there, lending all of the support, including moral support and everything else that they contributed to the overall movement. I don't want to forget that, and that should never be forgotten; people need to give women the credit that they deserve, not just in terms of the Black Power movement, like Angela and Elaine Brown -- it was just a bunch of women. Some of them -- and they all did -- and nobody's perfect, so I'm not going to deal with, "Well, they said this about her, they said that about --" Yeah, you know, first perfect person I see, I probably won't be in human form, so I'm not dealing with perfect -- I'm dealing with people who for what they -- who believe in the goodness and the righteousness of what we were doing, and tried to contribute in some little way. And women was an intricate part of that, from day one; from Harriet Tubman to Fannie Lou Hamer, it was just a host of women who contributed throughout the years, and still do today, to the struggle and to the liberation of us as a people. So it was definitely some women a part of that; I don't remember right offhand who they all were, but they were there. I didn't understand at the time when a lot of this was happening, the value of history nor archives, and a lot of it is in the minds of those that are still around and a lot of it is lost to history.

STEVENSON

Exactly. Can you tell me in detail about Walt Bremond's role in the Black Congress, and how his skills as a community organizer fed into the success of the Black Congress?

JACQUETTE

Well, I met Walt really as a community organizer. As a matter of fact, I went to one of his trainings -- he had an organization called Social Action Training Center [SATC], which was an organizing school. And I attended the school, an that's when I first met Walt. After the school disbanded, because I think he had the money from either union organizers or Saul Alinsky or something -- there was some other forces that was in there that I think he may have attended or been a part of in his education. Then he moved into the -- I believe it was the Black Congress right after that, there maybe have been something in between, but I know the Black Congress came later. But Walt, he just continued to -- because out of the Black Congress came the [Los Angeles] Brotherhood Crusade. It was a part of all of that -- the whole evolutionary process, street organizing brothers and giving them organizing

skills on a street level, to the formal organization of the Black Congress, and to the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, which became an institution for a source of resources to support community-based organizations and community development.

So my knowledge of Walt is that he was always organizing and using his skills as an organizer, I believe he was a trained social worker, a psychologist, a social worker. But he was -- from the time I met him, his skills was always about organizing, and I think his contribution was those areas -- for me, the organizing school to the Black Congress to the Brotherhood Crusade, along with -- Dr. Karenga was also an intricate part of all of those, that's why I knew him, because he was -- every step of the way of all the things that was happening in the community at that time, including the development of Kwanzaa. And with his teaching skills and organizing skills and people skills, he played I think one of the most intricate consistent roles in the development of the black community, to the point where he too became under attack, agents of COINTEL would put the US organization and the Panthers together, and spend literally millions of dollars to do it, and untold man hours. Like anything else, you break up the source of it, and then you hope everything just dies, like they say cut off the head, (inaudible) the body. But Walt was in it, Dr. Karenga was in it; I think the church had a good foundation, because they had a longer history of it, and it had its own economic base to pull from, and its membership is huge, which is the foundation of all organization, money, material, and skilled personnel, and the church had that on its own, without government grants.

So the ministers played a role, some ministers played a key role, and other ministers felt that they'd leave it in the hands of God, they just wanted to take up the collection plate in their hands. Some ministers. There was always a ministerial representation at the table, from my history of the movement, going back to the Civil Rights Movement with Dr. King, and all the other people that was active in our continued struggle for liberation, they were at the table too. Reverend Edward Edwards, I think, was another name that was there. Edward Edwards, I think he was another one that was key in the formulation of activities and support, organizing. And of course, Ted Watkins from WLCAC [Watts Labor Community Action Committee] was a definite force. He had the union behind him, UAW [The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America], so he had a powerful institution behind him, and he came in with a great deal of resources at his disposal. And his emphasis on economic development and man acquisition, he was able to do quite a bit, in terms of significant resources being in the hands of black people, in that sense. And there's been others that have done the same thing, like from John Johnson in Chicago to other people across the country, who for both personal as well as organizational wealth have built wealth.

I still think we have a long way to go, it's still a drop in the bucket compared to the wealth of this country, and the white institution and the white billionaires, in spite of Oprah [Winfrey], like Chris Rock said in one of his jokes, if Bill Gates woke up with Oprah's money one morning, he'd commit suicide, because it's -- I mean, we're happy to see one or two of our people, there's always just one or two. And then when they go on, it's a gap probably, a 50-year gap or 100-year gap, in terms of somebody else closing that gap again, whereas with white America, they could have five billionaires die tomorrow, they won't miss a beat. So we have a long way to go as a people. Jesse [Jackson] says that if we as a people, we generate enough expendable capital where we as a people would be number nine as a nation, in terms of world community, the money we generate or we spend or that goes through our hands. So it's there; it's just a matter of organization, to pull this together, and that's going to come through an educational process, in terms of our own self-worth, our own self-value, our own self-esteem, and our own self-accomplishments, that we will hopefully be able to corral those resources to our benefit, and to make them benefit us as a people. It's going to be a struggle, though.

STEVENSON

OK. Could you tell me something about the involvement of local college students in the Black Congress?

JACQUETTE

Yeah. There was the college student that were -- they were very active, because they were the front-line soldiers; they were the ones with the energy, the time, and the resources to implement the ideas and to carry the message forth, in terms of what the plans were. They were the -- they made the majority, I think they made up -- not the majority, but they were the vanguard of the educated crew that would hopefully come in and develop strategies and ideologies and institutionalize it on the community level, in terms of growth and development. And institutional influences, once they reached that level, that they became heads of agencies and organizations, they had the background and the history to understand how to reinvest, to a certain degree, certain resources into community development and to continued education.

I think a lot of them got diverted along the way, because the institution is set up to perpetuate itself, not -- men don't change institutions; institutions change men and women. But on a grassroots level and on a community level, they were an intricate part of it, and I think it benefited them greatly, not only from their involvement, in terms of their self-development, but in terms of spreading a degree of consciousness through other young people, and a force of inspiration for other young people that came up behind them. And as I said, they were an intricate part of the movement as well, the college students and the college campuses; not only did they work on a grassroot level, they worked on the college campuses, where they were

most effective, in terms of accessing minds, new ideals and thoughts, and interjecting new ideals and thoughts on the college campus.
Like everything else, all of that sort of like died down because of the 30 pieces of silver syndrome, and an opportunity to move into levels of economic status that their parents never dreamed was possible, and a chance to not only carry golf clubs on the course, but to also swing them. And so I think a lot of them have been seduced by money and material now, and have almost never talked about it, never discussed the rich heritage they came from that got them to where they are today, and experiences that were shared, that they shared as well as got out of the overall movement, and to talking about their next vacation in Europe or Italy or China.

STEVENSON

Right. Could you talk a little bit, to your knowledge, about the Black Congress' role in the formation of the Black Studies Center at UCLA, and the selection of the first director for the -- what's called the Afro-American Studies Center there?

JACQUETTE

I'm not that familiar with that aspect of it, other than probably through Dr. Karenga, who was I think a key player in that development, in that aspect of it, and possibly Walt Bremond also played a role in it. I'm not sure who the other players were in it, academically or institutionally. But I do know that Dr. Karenga was one of the major players, and I'm sure that he could probably better elaborate on that aspect of it. But mine was more community, grassroot. I was there and I was supportive, but the academic community was not my forte, it was not my forte.

STEVENSON

Right. Any recollections about the shooting of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins on the UCLA campus?

JACQUETTE

No more than what I heard about it, and it was -- what had preceded that was all the COINTEL activity that stirred up hostility and animosity that was created by COINTEL toward both groups toward each other. And then it culminated in the shootout at UCLA, based over most of the COINTEL activities. I'm sure even the Panther Party in hindsight now realizes how they were manipulated in this whole program; they were not exempt from the powers-that-be, in terms of wanting to be disrupted, because they were a lethal force, as I'm sure that the Man, the establishment, considered them a lethal force to have to deal with. They needed a way to keep their hands clean, but at the same time, destroy them.
So I'm pretty sure that in hindsight, they recognize now that their behavior was being manipulated by the force, and that it culminated in the conflict at UCLA, just like brothers right now. I mean, the Bloods and the Crips, give me a break. A red and a blue bandana, and you're living with your mama in

a rented house, and you talk about your turf? It was almost to that level, in terms of the animosity and jealousy had been created, in terms of those two organizations, because they were the two most effective, and I'm going to say most lethal organizations that was established to deal with the establishment, and they could not have that by any stretch of the imagination.

Even before that had happened, they had back in '64, I believe, they had attacked a mosque because of the Muslims in the Nation of Islam. And they couldn't get any dissension going there, so they just ran into the mosque down on Broadway, 50-something Broadway, mosque number 27, and just -- I think they may have killed a brother and beat up a few brothers, because they considered them as that force, but they did not have the resources or the organization to pit them against any community-based group, and certainly not another religious organization, so they had to take on to do the dirty work themselves, where in this instance, they were able to effectively manipulate the two greatest forces in the community at the time, and do enough name-calling and slander and enough gutter work that the two organizations found themselves defending themselves from each other, based on what was happening on the outside. And as a result of that, Bunchy was killed. John Huggins. And it was unfortunate, because it was definitely unnecessary, but they chose to use that energy to fight each other, as opposed to fighting the oppressor, which is they all started out to do. Their initial job was not to fight black people, but to fight the oppressor, and it got turned around.

STEVENSON

I see. So you would say that the shooting, and the dissention that led to the shooting, the in-fighting, was orchestrated from outside forces?

JACQUETTE

Just as sure as Jesus hung on the cross, without a doubt. Without a doubt. And it's almost documented now through the COINTEL program and the Freedom of Information Act [FOIA]. They spent millions of dollars and thousands of man hours to infiltrate and to undermine. They had their own leaflets that they, by their own admission, that they set up; they sent leaflets to the Panther Party and then sent leaflets to the US organization with the name-calling and the whole thing. And a lot of the leadership of the Panther Party bought into it, and I have to say, part of it was due to their base philosophy, which was left-wing. I mean, it was the Party that organized the Party, the CP [Communist Party] part of it who organized the black part of it, and that whole left-wing -- and it was whites who were a major influence in the Panther Party, their newspapers, their writings, and that whole thing. It was forces in there greater than they were conscious of or aware of, and especially in terms of the rank and file, especially in terms of the rank and file.

And I don't know how knowledgeable the leadership was, in terms of Eldridge and Huey, and I don't even necessary include Bobby in that leadership role. And Bobby was a key part of it and he was there. But I do know that Eldridge and Huey was the true leadership; they were the influencers and the shot-callers in the Party. And I'm sure, like I said, Bobby was too, but I'm not sure that he was aware of -- I know he wasn't aware of all the dynamics that was going on, because a lot of it was secret, so how could he be? And there were some forces, as I said, that was in the Panther Party; there was -- if not for establishment, certainly anti-black power and black nationalism, it was into the name-calling, going to call the people (inaudible), because we believed in the right to self-determination as a cultured people, and they wanted to push the whole internationalist concept, which didn't even work for Russia. Didn't even work for Russian. Not working for China.

STEVENSON

Can you tell me if either the Nation of Islam or the Panthers or both had an integral role in the Black Congress, as far as attending meetings and --?

JACQUETTE

The Panthers did. The Nation of Islam -- well, they had a couple of ministers, Minister John Shabazz, and -- was John here during that time? It may've been a couple of ministers; you could probably ask Maulana about Minister John. They had an influence, because they were the first soldiers on the street; they were the first black organization that was on a grassroot level and with the masses. So they definitely had an influence. And the Panthers were a part, they attended the Black Congress. Shermont Banks, who was one of the Panther leaders, was also housed in the Black Congress during that time.

So the Panthers was represented at the table, as well as the Communist Party was represented, in the form of Deacon Alexander, Gary Alexander, Deacon Alexander, Charlene -- Angela was a Party member as well. So even -- but the one thing we all had in common, we were all black, whether we were Communists or Nationalists or Christians or Buddhists or whatever; we were all black and we recognized that, and we all came to the table based on that commonality for a higher quality of life, or for us as a people and for the world in general. And it was conversations, in terms of philosophical belief and what -- most of what [Karl] Marx and [Nikolai] Lennon said, as opposed to what [Kwame] Nkrumah and [Jomo] Kenyatta said, and even some Mao. But the goal was self-determination and liberation.

STEVENSON

OK. Can you tell me if there were other groups, non-black allies, Latinos, even whites, that interact with the Black Congress?

JACQUETTE

I don't remember right offhand, but I do know the Brown Berets was active at that time; I'm not sure how much involvement we had with the Brown

Berets as a formal organization. And there were -- I'm trying to remember, SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] -- I don't think it necessarily had a part to do with the Congress, but I think there was some association with some SDS members, some Brown Beret members. Outside, I'll tell you, it was mostly outside of the Congress, mostly outside the Congress. But there -- I'm pretty sure there was some affiliation, based on just the organizational makeup of the Congress, that people were dealing with other people. And that included, I think it was the Presbyterian church, they had some kind of representation in there, because they were considered left-wing anyway. And I'm thinking Bremont may have been connected with the Presbyterians, if I am not mistaken. So it was some affiliation, some association, but not directly that I remember, but influences.

STEVENSON

OK. Could you speak to which black elected officials -- of course Hawkins we know -- who either attended meetings or sent representatives to meetings and have interactions with the Congress?

JACQUETTE

Merv [Mervyn M.] Dymally was one; I think he was a key player. Merv was an organizational person, and he understood the struggle well. (inaudible), who else outside of Merv? He was in the City Council at that time; I don't know if we had anybody -- I don't remember too many of Tom's [Bradley] people; I think Tom may have been a City Councilman, and Gil [Gilbert W. Lindsey] was a City -- I think we only had two people at that time in the City Council. Merv was one of them, and I'm trying to think who else outside of Gus, because Gus was a key player politically. Merv and Gus are the only two that come to mind. Dr. Karenga would probably know, because as I said, he was an intricate part of the whole formulation of the concepts that was being flowed, so he would have been at the table a lot more than I was, I came to the big meetings with the rest of the grassroot organizations and people who attended.

STEVENSON

All right. And you mentioned, the big meetings you attended, how did they handle dissension among -- how do you maintain the autonomous nature of the groups and then come to some consensus on things? How did they do that?

JACQUETTE

It was quite contentious a lot of times, there was a lot of yelling and shouting; it wasn't a prayer meeting by any stretch of the imagination. But a lot of times, logic and reason won out. It was just common sense or the right thing to do, or a little tweaking here and there where everybody was pacific to the point of it being acceptable, palatable for everybody who was an attendant. But it was a lot of knockdown-dragouts, sometimes literally knockdown-dragout of meetings. But we were still -- there was still enough of a concept of unity, and I believe Maulana advanced the concept of

Operational Unity , as opposed to Ideal Unity, for us to go along with the group and still have a level of autonomy, where you could still do what you want to do and still support the group effort as a whole. I think when Maulana introduced the concept of Operational Unity, that was able to resolve a lot, and then, like I said, a lot of times, we were still enough in agreement with one another, understanding what the goal and the mission of the Congress was, for compromises to be made but not yet deteriorate to nothingness or inactivity for the group to go along with some of the proposals and some of the ideas. But it was -- like I said, nothing was just thrown on the table and everybody just agreed on 100%; that never happened.

And like I said, a lot of times it was a lot of shouting going on, but it happens everywhere, it happens in the church, from what I can understand, out of sight of the parishioners, but it happens. And it happened there too, but it was up front, it was on the table, people understand where people was coming from. That was another thing; everybody knew who everybody was, and how their particular belief system or philosophy weighed in on what was being said and why. And everybody -- it was an open enough forum for everybody to speak their mind as well, too, because -- so you got a chance to say exactly what was on your mind; you didn't have to bite your tongue. And so as a result of that, I think that made it all possible.

And as I say, it was the -- I think it was the ones who was there who was there to undermine opportunities and -- I mean, that was their job, to be there to do that, the agent provocateurs, both paid and unpaid, who may have continued to try to manipulate or maximize contradictions with the group, because the group had contradictions, of course, but their job was to maximize those contradictions, to whisper in the ears of those who may have felt they had a legitimate case about -- for or against something. And -- which I think ultimately later took to the demise of the Congress itself. Things got shaky, a couple of guns got pulled in a meeting, and that sort of -- that sort of didn't sit right with a lot of people, because that, for me, I felt it went over the line when that happened. And again, that was the demise of the Congress, when it got to -- your job, you felt you had to shut somebody down, or shut them up, as opposed to allowing them to speak their mind. So it got to that point.

STEVENSON

OK. Why don't we stop here?

JACQUETTE

OK.

1.3. Session 2
June 27, 2006

STEVENSON

Good morning. I'm continuing an interview with Tommy Jacquette on Tuesday, June 27. First I have a follow-up question: I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about the dynamics and tensions between the community and the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department].

JACQUETTE

Did you say the dynamics or the conflict?

STEVENSON

Both. Both.

JACQUETTE

(laughter) It was an ongoing, in my opinion, premeditated harassment and suppression of the black community by the Los Angeles Police Department to keep us in our place and to ensure that our resistance or struggle was held to a minimum, in my opinion. I think it was conscious; I think it was endorsed by the former police chief, the other police chief at that time, William Parker, and based on the type of recruitment that they were doing at that time for the police department, which was a lot of Southern whites coming to the North with the Southern mentality, and that the focus was here again mainly on the youth, on the young people, in terms of their constant daily patrolling of the black community, and I think it was also directed to the seniors of the community, in terms of the treatment that the seniors receive by the hands of the police.

And so based on that, the conflict between the community and that police was constantly at a pitch, in terms of a resistance and conflict. And I think -- for me, it was that was until 1965, and after '65, they stepped back and stepped down, and I think prior to 1965, if I'm not mistaken, they had probably less than five black officers on the police department or in patrols if they were in the department, to patrol the entire city of Los Angeles and the black as well as the brown communities. So it was, in my opinion, basically an oppressive, racist institution that was set up, that was perpetuated by the attitude of the police chief, William Parker

STEVENSON

I see. What role did the Black Congress play in addressing that?

JACQUETTE

After 1965 -- 1965 for the black community and for most of this country, signaled a new era in not only black people consciousness and participation and resistance, but also institutional racism. A lot of organizations was able -- those that were organizations in existence prior to 1965 but did not really have the attention, or could not get the attention of the institutions or institutional representative, including elected officials. After 1965, with what happened in '65, all the institutions that existed prior to that, and those that came into being after that, such as the Black Congress, was able to get the attention, and was able to sit down with various institutional representatives at that time to voice our concerns in the issues that affected us as a community. The Black Congress was one of many who were able to sit down

with the powers-that-be and begin to voice our concerns and request or demand, in some instances, a change in policy as it related to the treatment of the black community.

STEVENSON

The assassination of Dr. King in '68, could you discuss the role of the Black Congress in keeping the peace, as it were?

JACQUETTE

Right. You may or may not know that Los Angeles was the only city that didn't go up after Dr. King's assassination, and that was primarily due to the Black Congress and its leadership. Here again, Dr.[Maulana] Karenga was one of the major players in that role, in terms of what took place in Los Angeles and with the LA Black Congress. I'm not familiar with the details of what negotiation took place at that time, because I was on a flight out to Atlanta [Georgia] to Dr. [Martin Luther] King's [Jr.] funeral. But I knew LA did not go up, and I knew that they had instituted, or -- they had put together a program after Dr. King's -- and I think it was held at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, where they brought a lot of people into the Coliseum, and I think had a memorial service or something to that effect for Dr. King, and that as a result of that, nothing major happened in Los Angeles after Dr. King's assassination. As I said, I was in Atlanta for the funeral.

I do note that LA was probably one of the few if not the only city that did not go up in flames after the assassination, which I thought was a big surprise, to be quite honest about it. I thought LA again would be in the midst of a rebellion as it related to Dr. King's assassination, mainly because of who he was and what he stood for. And that the assassination, I think even to this day, most people believe was part of a bigger conspiracy on the part of the established order, indirectly if not directly. I know they keep their hands clean; they throw rocks and hide their hands. But they do nurture and support and instigate those type of actions by forces that's already in play, in existence. So I was surprised that LA was able to -- and the Congress was able to suppress or to divert any kind of civil outburst after Dr. King's dead.

STEVENSON

OK. The Black Congress was relatively short-lived. What factors do you think contributed to its dissolution, and do you think the resignation of Mr. Bremond played a role in that?

JACQUETTE

Well, I think what really played a role, in my opinion, was the infiltration of agents and agent-provocateurs who were adept at maximizing the conflict that existed, natural conflict that existed. And some organization of political conflict that was there as a result of all the diverse philosophies and personalities who came together at the Black Congress. I think, you know, now, like then, there's very few people who command that kind of leadership, where if they walk away from the table, then everything's gonna

fall to pieces. Walt [Walter Bremond] was an organizer and a motivator, but he did not -- he was not in a position to either -- to sort of like dismantle that organization because of his absence, it would take a little more than motivation and inspiration to do that. And the personalities that sit around that table, they were very strong personalities, very determined, dealt with philosophies and ideologies.

So one man did not stop that show. I think it was the issue of people that had infiltrated the organization, that maximized the contradiction in the organization, and had a couple of incidents that took place at the Black Congress, where one night someone got out of hand, and somebody jumped up and put a gun to somebody's head and was ready to pull the trigger. So that sort of mellowed things out for a lot of people, because that was really serious, and it happened in front of the whole group, and I think it was unnecessary in my opinion, a lot of people thought it was unnecessary that that situation got out hand to that extent. People sort of like pulled away as a result of that, because that was a bit extreme for us as people. We don't like -- that's not quite our makeup, in terms of that kind of premeditated kind of thing, violence. Emotional, yeah, that's something else, but -- and it wasn't supposed to be there anyway, we were not supposed to have had guns in the meeting in the first place; that was one of the understandings, that the factions that was there was -- it was understood that because of who was at the table, that weapons should not be a part of our meetings, because of just what got out of hand. That was violated it, and I think that was really more the cause that anything else.

STEVENSON

How would you measure the success of the Black Congress, and what would you say is its legacy?

JACQUETTE

The Brotherhood Crusade was its legacy, I think. Its success was the ability to bring a lot of people together from different philosophies and different ideologies to sit around the table and to discuss a common issue, which was the quality of life for black people in this community on a grassroot level, as well as the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, who was also able to come be a part of that whole operation. I don't think it's been one like it since, to my knowledge. But I think that was its contribution to the movement as an organization. And I haven't seen functioning like that in terms of any organization or community-based organization or operation since that time. And as I said, this other legacy, out of the Los Angeles Black Congress came the Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, and its success speaks for itself, in terms of it still exists, its raised millions of dollars and made contributions to mostly community-based grassroots organizations, which was its purpose in the first place. So I think that was its legacy.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to now talk about the Watts Summer Festival. Can you tell me about its genesis, how and why it was founded?

JACQUETTE

The Festival began in August of 1966, almost one year -- it was one year after the Watts revolt, some people -- the initial founding members of it was Billy Tidwell, Stan [Stanley] Sanders, Baltimore Scott, Clarence Mackie, and a lot of the [David Starr] Jordan alumni [Association] -- it was actually the [David Starr] Jordan [High School] alumni who headed up -- well, really it was Westminister Neighborhood Association that instituted and pulled together the individuals that proposed the Festival for August of '66. And actually, it was a deterrent; at that time, they would use it to another long, hot summer; they wanted to prevent another long, hot summer, so they instituted the festival for things, for young people to do, to engage in, other than the possible other insurrection. Some people felt that it was an attempt at pacifying the people and keeping things quiet when things really were in an uproar from the year before. It went off well; it was an extreme success, extremely successful in the community, and it had a very nice turnout, a huge turnout.

The following year, it was taken over by the Jordan Alumni Association, and it had another successful year. I think in 1968, there was one incident at the Festival that sort of -- because it was on the street at that time, and Jordan High opened on the street, we had an incident at that time, it moved into Ted Watkins -- what we call Will Rogers [State Historic] Park at the time, and everything was running smooth until the development of gang activities, mainly the Bloods and the Crips in the community that began to plague the Festival in its later days. But it was actually rumored to have been that it was to prevent another long, hot summer. And it did in fact do that. And it's -- that was one side of it.

The other side of it, that it opened up channels for both -- business people began to set up vendor stands at the Festival, mom and pop operations. It opened up a whole avenue of cultural and artistic avenues for young people with talent, from singing and performing to art, and it also provided a format or form for dialogue for concerns and issues as it relates to the community. And it allowed for people to -- the community itself to govern and police itself, in terms of the event itself. So it did a number of things that was significant and that was cutting edge at that time. And so that's how it all began, but it actually came out of the ashes of '65; a lot of organizations do not like to give their beginning to Watts '65, because it's supposed to have that taint, and they were supposed to have been more progressive than that and more influential than before '65, but history speaks for itself. This community was under siege; it was being brutalized and exploited by both police and businesses up until 1965, and with those who were even active out in the community at that time, they did not have the effect that they thought they had, and they didn't have the influence that they thought they

had, nor did they have the respect that they was trying to get from the institutions 'til after '65.
The Festival, as I believe, if not the, one of the only organizations that still recognized the '65 revolt, that after '65, it was -- part of its mission statement was to do a constant memorial for the 34 people who lost their lives in 1965. And it's done that for 40 years; it has never not had -- even when the Festival itself didn't go well, we maintained a memorial service for the 34 people who lost their lives in 1965, which was part of the mission. The other part of the mission was to produce and promote an annual festival involving the total community. So it's done that.

STEVENSON
What were some of the other organizations that collaborated with you on the Festival?

JACQUETTE
Almost every community-based organization in Watts was a part of and collaborated with the Festival. As I said, Westminister Neighborhood Association initiated Jordan alumni, took over its leadership. The Sons of Watts was security; the US organization assisted in the planning. As a matter of fact, the first Miss Watts was a member of the US organization; Tamu Harper was her name. And just about every organization in Watts proper was supportive of the organization through their participation, contribution, or involvement at some level. OIC [Opportunities Industrialization Centers] was another organization that supported the Festival. Even WLCAC [Watts Labor Community Action Committee], and they supported or participated in the Festival from its inception. Maintained relationship with the local businesses in the community. Even law enforcement supported the effort and participated.
So it had a total community involvement; total community organization, such as the Sons of Watts, the Mothers of Watts, which was another community-based organization which was a tutorial program that was started out at the Jordan Downs housing projects. We had a lot of support and a lot of participation. Even your father supported us with equipment to do our film festival. Alfred [Scott] Moore was the principal of the school there. We had quite a bit of support and involvement from the community, in the institutions and the organizations that made up the Watts community. That was the foundation for its success, because of the community participation.

STEVENSON
OK. And support from black elected officials or others in government?

JACQUETTE
Yeah, black elected officials -- I think at that time, it was supervisor Kenny [Kenneth F.] Hahn. Even Mayor Sam [Samuel W.] Yorty, who was the mayor at the time, 1965. Let's see, who was in the City Council? I think it was John Gibson who may have been in the City Council at that time. These were

representatives that were in and about. Nate Holden. Pretty much all the elected officials; we had total support by the elected officials, for the most part; I don't think there was any elected official who opposed the Festival, to my knowledge.

STEVENSON

You mentioned that one of the ways -- one of the things that you did with the Festival was foster dialogue. Could you talk more about that, how you did that?

JACQUETTE

Right. It was through the community forums that was held. At first it was an informal thing where people got together and talked at the Festival. And then later on, we turned it into a community form and began to invite guest speakers in to address issues that affect black people. And it was like those issues that affected black people both here and abroad, because the Festival, at the time, we're dealing with a Pan-African, as well as local issues that affect black people. The forum was dealing with how we as a people were dealing with our issues and what the issues were that not only affected us, but affected people in New York, Chicago, Detroit. Because as you know, during that time there was a little migration into South-Central and into Watts and into California after 1965, by a number of people coming to California looking for jobs, better opportunities, and being involved in the activities, which some said was the beginning of a new Renaissance, in terms of Los Angeles. And with that dialogue, began to realize and understand the problem that existed in New York was also the problem that existed in California; the problem that existed in Detroit was also the problem that existed in New York and California.

And so this dialogue would -- and then some travel, you know; we begin to travel, those of us who were in community grassroots organizations, the Sons of Watts and myself and others who begin to travel from state to state and other cities, in terms of what happened in Watts. We were beginning to see the similarity of the conditions that we all were faced as a people, and the condition we had to live in, in terms of the physical condition. And for me, it was a bit of a surprise, because I grew up in South-Central, and then after'65, what was the ghetto. And then I went to Chicago, I went to New York, I went to Detroit, and I saw the conditions that didn't compare to what Watts was, supposedly, as a ghetto. And at that time, I think I met with Dr. Karenga, and I was explaining to him that they say this is a ghetto, but I went to Chicago and I went to New York and I've seen this and I've seen that, and it was a big difference, but it was the same situation in that the people in Chicago, Detroit, and New York suffer from the same as people in Watts, and that's not having power and not being in control of their destiny. So that became the commonality, in terms of -- regardless of the physical makeup, whether they had the housing complex, in Watts it looked much different than those in Chicago and Detroit. But the people were in the same

position; they did not have power, we did not have power, nor were we in control of our own destiny. We sort of saw this as, you know, the -- if not the overt, the covert consciousness of America, in terms of their racism and the policies of racist and racism, in terms of controlling and maintaining people in positions, and denying them the right to self-determination, and allowing access to power in this country. All that type of dialogue was taking place and was taking place with a lot of dialogue taking place with a lot of young people, as well as academicians and intellectuals as well.

And that's another program that's still -- we still exist today, with emphasis on those issues that affect black people, from the family, which -- the organization is a continuous part of the Festival. By holding the community forums and dealing with -- like I said, from issues of families to police/community relationships to gaining, maintaining, and using power to your own advantage or to your best interest in the community. We think that the contributions the festival made was significant contributions, but it's not enough in its [continuance], in terms of what we continue to try to do with the Festival even to this day. And still trying to get a foothold, reestablish a foothold, in terms of our organizational efforts, due to the gang thing that came into the community and just wrecked the community, including the Festival, because at one point, the Festival was the only organization in town that young people could come to, it was totally free and open park atmosphere, and the problem just moved right into the Festival; they had killed off most of the youth programs, Teen Post and all the activities that young people were involved in at that time, a lot of the organizations whose jobs was to work with young people in the community had been de-funded, and that whole stripping down of gains that had been made during the '60s and the '70s was in reverse or in suspended animation at that time.

So the Festival fell victim to all the conditions that had been set up and the progress that had been made had been rolled back. So it was a struggle for us for awhile to just keep the Festival alive, but we were able to do it. And it was -- the resources and support had dwindled down a lot, because the fear of the gangs took over the whole city. I mean, it took over probably the whole country, in terms of -- there's no place in this country now that you don't know about Crips and Bloods; they're as famous as slavery, in terms of the destructiveness of the gang, and the myth that's around, because everything got gang-tagged. It also became a growth industry for law enforcement, and you can always use the gangs-this and gangs-that and get more money out of the Justice Department, more money out of all the federal agencies to curtain gangs and gang activities. The only thing that even now put somewhat on a damper on gang and gang activities, is international terrorism. Because of that, that's taken low-key, in terms of the publicity.

But even the gang thing, part of it was myth, and the reason that I say part of it was myth is that when they did the '84 Olympics here in South-Central, which was definitely in South-Central, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the number-one issue was not a question or a threat of gangs, what's supposed to have been over 50,000-plus gang members, but a handful of terrorists coming into the Coliseum and disrupting the Olympics. No gang problem; it just went away for some kind of reason. And after the Olympics was over, the whole threat of the gangs, the boogieman gang thing came back into being, and people began to re-focus on a need to control gangs, gangs was out of control, every crime, everything that happened in the community was blamed on gangs. Something not gang-related; something was -- senior citizens got into a fight with one another, but it was gang-related. And so they were successful in perpetuating that myth to their own interests, vested interests, in terms of resources and control and oppression. So like I said, it's on the decline now, in terms of the publicity on it, because they're more concerned about terrorism, even with the little arrest in Florida the other day, which that little crew that they had, they don't matter on a scale of Al-Qaeda.

STEVENSON

OK. I've got a few follow-up questions. Your community forums: who were some of the educators or local scholars that participated in those?

JACQUETTE

It was elected officials, from Maxine Waters to the US organization, to professor Ahman Rah, Compton [Community] College, who will also be hosting a forum this year; Bernard Parks, the Watts Chamber of Commence. Who all, who else. It was mostly the community-based organizations, and community-active politicians. I'm trying to think of who would be considered scholars. That's a deep word.

STEVENSON

Well, was there -- it was a forum for dialogue on issues affecting the community, but at the same, was it -- did you teach about black history? I mean, did you have --

JACQUETTE

Yeah, yeah. The whole foundation of the forum had to do with black people in our lives. So everything was -- from starting businesses to continued education to men and women relationship was all about black people. So everything that we did was always about black people. The Festival is a culturally-specific organization. I know we enter a lot of multiculturalism and a lot of diversity, but we too are part of that diversity, as well as cultural pluralism. We too are a cultured people; we too are part of the diversity of the culture, of the cultural pluralistic concept supposedly that America is based on. So the issues that we address that affect us also affect society and the world as well. So we don't take low or deny that our cultural contribution in the world or to society, or the fact that we too are a cultured people, and

that what benefits -- what we do that helps ourselves also helps the community, the society, and nation.
So we start with us first, like all people do; I don't know of anybody that start with the people first and then they put themselves second. I know it's a tendency for black people to be super-humanitarian to the point of non-existence, but the Festival is culturally-specific. We are a cultured people; we are African-American in this country, and we do have a context, a framework to build from, in terms of our cultural and historical contribution, not only to the community but to the world. And so we deal with that, and we understand that our position in this country is a unique position, and that we speak from a unique position as a people who were forced in this country, brought to this country as slaves, and oppressed in this country for over 430 years.
So our reality and our assessment of this country is a unique position, and we feel that everybody can benefit from our experience, and a lot of people have, whether they were white or non-white. A lot of them came in and even continued, built off the backs of us who were here when they got here, a lot of the immigrants. So we do not bow down to take second or feel that our humanity's or our history's less valuable than any other people that ever came to this country. We feel we are in a unique position with a unique history and a unique truth that we speak to the world and to any people, of color or non-color, that not only are we special, we are a supreme -- not superior, a supreme people in our own right, that we had been able to survive under the conditions that we have been able to survive under for all this many years.
So everything we deal with is about our black experience, about the black experience in this country, about us as a people in this country, and that's us. Like I said, we don't bow down to nobody for their world struggles; we've all had struggles as a people. We think ours -- all people think that theirs is a bit unique. And in this country, our experience are a unique experience that no other people in this country can speak to, bar none. Even though I'm familiar with the struggle of the Native American, and the total genocide of them as a people, to the enslavement of the Chinese in this country. But we are a unique people; we have a unique experience to tell, and we are the people who were stripped of our cultural heritage and our history and our language as a people. And so that makes us special, and we always deal -- in the terms of the Festival, context of the Festival, and the philosophy of the Festival; that's where we always come from. And we support the Native American Indian; we believe in the cause of the Native American; we realize the total destruction on most culture of the people, the Native American people. And the enslavement of the Chinese in this country, as well as the other immigrants, such as the Irish, the Italian, all. But ours, ours is unique, bar none.
STEVENSON

Yes. OK, you mentioned visiting other cities that were dealing with the same issues. Were there other festivals in other cities, Detroit, Chicago, similar?

JACQUETTE

They came after. Jesse [Jackson], I think he did Expo in Chicago [Illinois], and there was one in Detroit [Michigan]; they're getting ready to celebrate their 40th anniversary next year, as a matter of fact, in Detroit. Festivals began to pop up. Though the Watts Summer Festival, from what I can understand -- I know it's the oldest festival here in the state of California. And it's probably one of the oldest festivals in the US, because we were the first ones to come out and deal with -- in terms of a unique cultural festival, in terms of black festivals that represented the interests and images of black people. So we were like the vanguard, in terms of black festivals.

And a number of festivals have come and gone since that time, but for here in Los Angeles, in California, we stand out as the first and one of the most unique festivals, in that we had -- first, we were the first festival that ever put on a major film festival in the park itself, outdoor area. We had a huge screen erected in the park; we were the first black concert ever held in the history of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. We just did a lot of unique, creative things for the first time, and a number of festivals that's coming into being have duplicated a lot of the efforts that we had, and continue to come into being. But the Festival, the Watts Summer Festival; it laid the foundation. And it continues to stay true to its mission, as opposed to trying to grow into a mega-festival with mega-dollars in mind, or mega-dollars as the end result of the effort. I think it's still people involvement, and doing it on a grassroots level, and to make the event and what would come out of the event the goal of the festival, as opposed to -- and we're not opposed to having money at the end of the rainbow, but that's not the emphasis. The emphasis is people and creativity and contributions and access and forums, a platform for people to come in and express the creative talents that we have as a people.

STEVENSON

OK. Could you talk a little bit more -- I know you had showings of artwork; you had musicians, performances. How did you consciously get visibility to promote the artists, the musicians?

JACQUETTE

Mainly through the art exhibition. Vanessa [Varnette] Honeywood, Bernie Casey, John Outterbridge -- a number of black artists have exhibited and were give the opportunity to exhibit at the first Watts Summer Festival. Cecil Ferguson was the curator, along with Claude Booker, who was also one of the original curators of the art exhibit at the Festival. And Cecil [Fergerson] was the first black curator at the Los Angeles County Art Museum. So people like that who have access and who have knowledge of potential artists and celebrity artists, brought them all to the Festival, they've been a part of it, they've exhibited at the Festival; some of them, their first works were

presented at the Festival. And so that's how the art exhibit was -- and the artist was brought into the Festival, because of people like Cecil Ferguson and Claude Booker, who -- well, Cecil grew up in the area, Claude came from another city, but he was active in the arts. And they saw the Festival as a vehicle for allowing that kind of a platform to exist. And in terms of celebrities, we've had almost every major celebrity either visited or performed at the Festival, from Smokey [Robinson] to Diana Ross, Barry White, Isaac Hayes, Stevie Wonder, just -- Mandrill, what's the name -- Norma Brown, Richard Pryor, Redd Foxx, Sammy Davis, Muhammad Ali, [Raven] Symone -- what's her name --

STEVENSON

Nina?

JACQUETTE

Not Nina, the little child actor that was on Bill Cosby --

STEVENSON

Raven Symone.

JACQUETTE

Raven Symone, D.L. Hughley. We've had just about every major celebrity and artist here in LA. And I'm missing a lot of them. James Brown, Hugh Masekela. We've had just about all -- and I think that was because of the history and the reputation of Watts as a unique community who started another phase of the struggle, in terms of black liberation in this country. And it's like, you don't go to New York without going to Harlem. Watts has that kind of reputation. And a number of artists and celebrities know the reputation of Watts and understood that part of the new black consciousness, Watts was personified in the community and the people of Watts. And so they honored us by their presence and participated in our events and attended our communities, mainly through the Watts Summer Festival.

STEVENSON

OK. Could you talk about --

JACQUETTE

And the Watts Christmas Parade was another major organization that supported the Festival throughout the year, Miss [Edna Wine] of the Watts Willowbrook Christmas Parade, who also celebrated her 40th anniversary last year.

STEVENSON

Could you discuss if there was ever any conflicts or differences of opinion in terms of the content of the festival, or even what the festival was about, as the years went on?

JACQUETTE

Yes. At one point, it was some conflict over the amount of security that was at the Festival, in terms of police presence. That was due to the increasing gang activities in the community at the same time. In terms of other

criticism, I'm sure there was some. I'm not sure if I consider it legitimate criticism or not, but of course there was criticism. I don't know anything on this earth that's beyond criticism or assessment. I don't know of anything that was addressed to the Festival, in terms of a criticism or an issue that the Festival did not address, and was not resolved, other than some people thought the Festival shouldn't continue, and that was not for discussion, from that faction of either the community, external or internal. That was not open for discussion or consideration. But we even discussed that; everything is open for discussion, but it wasn't open for consideration, in terms of not having the Festival.

Like I said, some people thought the Festival brought bad elements into the community, opened up -- gave gang members a platform. But even doing that discussion, we let people know that people are not coming from outside the community. The gang members are our children, some of your children or your neighbors children and that whole kind of issue, so in terms of stopping the Festival because of gang activity, that was not helping. We would take other alternative measures to minimize gang activity or gang behavior at the Festival, but stopping it was not a consideration, and it was not a consideration. As I said, the issue was probably more parental control than Festival demise. And so everything had been discussed, from not having the Festival because of gang activities to -- but never so much the content of the Festival; everybody was pretty much satisfied with the content, the fashion show, the art exhibit, the carnival, the vendors, the things that we did at the Festival. People were concerned about the -- some of the things that was happening at the Festival, in terms of gang activities. These are the things that was voices to me that I've heard that I've had discussion with, and some people though because of that, at some point the Festival should be dismissed, and some people talked about the relevance of the Festival. But these are the same people who didn't understand the relevance of being black, and we had that discussion too, because -- and we had that discussion too, because -- and I reminded them, before we were black, we was colored, and before we were colored, we were Negroes. There was people even today who can't even say black people; they still say colored. It's an evolution, and it's a conscious-raising kind of a thing, and that if we as a people do not celebrate what we are as a people and make our cultural contribution to both ourselves and to the world, then we'll always be looked at as second-class citizens or less than humans, or sub-human. And as I said, that had even been discussed, in terms of the Festival and its relevance. But in a cultural context.

And for me, I discussed it on a cultural context; they may discuss it from a political context or from a commercial context, or even from a -- and an other context they choose to discuss the issue of a festival, of a cultural festival, for me is without foundation, because you have to understand the culture, first of all, what it is and how it manifests, and the purpose that it

serves, in terms of reinforcing and identifying your value and your contribution to the world, in a cultural context, in terms of your art, in terms of your literature, in terms of your poetry, in terms of your writing, in terms of your creativity. It all comes from you; that's a cultural perspective, a culture presentation. And to deculturalize it and try to make it a people's festival, what -- with no identity, I don't know what a people's festival is. Every festival I've gone to has either been the Lotus Blossom Festival, with the Japanese, the Cinco de Mayo, the Latino festival, the Greek festival, the Italian festival -- every festival that I know is a cultural festival, in terms of the people that it represents, and what they present at their festival, from their food, their art, their song, their dance, their writing, their literature, their history, it's all coming from that context. So we're not about to abandon the Festival and what we feel is a legitimate contribution to the community, in a cultural sense.

STEVENSON

OK. Any other challenges in putting on the Festival over the years, keeping it going, that you haven't discussed?

JACQUETTE

It's always challenging. (laughter) We're part of the black community; we've always been challenged from mainly an area of financial support, political support, people feeling that it's old hat and that maybe we need to do something different, even though they haven't abandoned Christmas or Easter; that's much older than the Festival. And it's the same thing every year: a fat white boy in a red suit, for those who don't know what Christmas is. And Easter, a rabbit bring chicken eggs to children. But people want to -- some people feel that it's old hat, but -- and that maybe it should do something new. But what, I can't imagine, and they haven't offered any suggestions or alternatives; they just feel that it's old and that's it.

STEVENSON

OK. Over the years, have you had participation by Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latinos, Africans, as the years have gone on?

JACQUETTE

Right. Especially the Caribbean community had been active. As I said earlier, we had Hugh Masekela back in the day, in terms of Africa. And even in our music mix, we recognized the Afro-Latin contingency of the world, and the contribution from that segment of the community as well. The emphasis is more on African-American than the Caribbean or the continental African, but we welcome the Caribbean and continental African, and we have participation. That's what brought into being the African Marketplace, more a direct African participation on that level. We as a people still dealing with our unique identity, in terms of Africans in this country, as opposed to African -- we're from that continent, we recognize that, but we have to -- like African proverbs say, "A journey of 1,000 miles begins where you stand." We've got

to re-Africanize ourselves before we step back on the continent of Africa, or into the context of being true Africans.
So the Festival is still dealing with where most black people are in the community and in this country, in terms of being born and raised in this country, and identifying culturally to this country, to an extent. So our contributions is from our experience, but it's all with a -- it's in our African context that we come from Africa, in terms of from going from the natural and to the Dashiki and to the African names, that we recognize our beginning, and also where we find ourselves at this point in time. We still have a long way to go as a people, because as I said, we're the only ethnic minority in this country who only have one language, and I think part of our re-Africanization should be the redevelopment of our language, which is Swahili, pan-African language, that we should as a people actively engage in and begin to learn, just like we're learning Spanish. I mean, every day, more and more black people, especially the working class and the middle class, have to be bilingual to even compete in the new America.
And so -- and that's I guess necessary, but then we're supposed to be in a global community now, so that includes Africa as well, and the continent of Africa with all the resources that it has, probably moreso than Mexico. I mean, I know they have a lot of oil; Africa's got oil, diamonds, gold, silver, people, land. So in terms of being able to deal in being bilingual or multilingual in this world and especially in the US, I think Africa the continent should be on the table, and Swahili as a pan-African language should also be on the table for us as a people, to reconnect with our people. We talk about the Latinos, connect with their people and send resources back to Mexico, we can send resources to Africa. I mean, we got the same agenda, so we need to act similar or like other people. Like Malcolm [X] said, look at what other people have done to gain their liberation, and use whatever you need to do the same thing. And that is the reconnection with the continent and its vast resources, if its about being up with Mobil.

STEVENSON

Yes. Could you discuss what effect, if any, the evolving or changing demographics over the years have had on the Festival?

JACQUETTE

We have had an increase in Latino participation, from both -- not only in terms of participating but in terms of attendance as well. It is still pretty much a black festival; we still dominate in terms of black people, because it's a cultural kind of a thing. It's -- it has seen an increase of Latino and other ethnic groups, in terms of involvement on the commercial level, in terms of our vendors and things like that. And some social areas, in terms of the art and entertainment presentation. We have a Latino group that's been performing for the last couple of years that is a Latino Gospel group that performs (inaudible), but they're good, but they're really good. And they sang good gospel music, but we've had an increase of participation by the

Latino community, and as I said, some other ethnic groups in the Festival, small but it's there.
And that's fine, because I go to Cinco de Mayo. I mean, more Latinos there than it is us, but I also go to the Lotus Blossom Festival, more Asians there than us. But we go to these things, and we will continue to do it in terms of being -- as I said, being culturally specific, because it is a diversity, I think, to bring people to other venues and other groups; that's why we go to Chinatown for Chinese food; we go to [Alvaro] Street for Mexican food or Latino food; we go to Koreatown for Korean food, because -- and we as a people, we as black people, we patronize and support other people, and they're the dominant culture there, but it doesn't stop us from going and eating Chinese food or eating pizza. So it's the same thing with the Festival. They come there for our unique experience and what we have to contribute to them, and what is it of our culture that they like and want to participate in. And so it will stay a culturally-specific festival, i.e. a black festival, and regardless of the change in demographics, black people will come to it. Disneyland is in Anaheim, not South-Central, but people still go to Disneyland. Chinatown is in Chinatown, but people still go to Chinatown. And so if it's a cultural thing, people come to it 'cause it's our thing, it's a black thing, and people will still come to it, and we will make things and maintain it as a black thing, because the minute we cease to be a black thing, what are we? We're not Latinos, we're not Italian, we're not Irish, we're not German; we're black people. And we're still here, the demographic has just changed, but the location is the same. South-Central Los Angeles, it has a reputation, and it'll -- wherever the Festival will wind up at, it'll still be a black festival, even if we wind up in the changing demographic -- I mean, in a different location because of the demographic -- it's still going to be a black festival, whether it's on Central Avenue or on Crenshaw [Boulevard], it'll be black.

STEVENSON

OK. In terms -- I know the festival has been mainly a cultural festival; had you had anything more political in nature? Like, say voter registration?

JACQUETTE

Yes. As a matter of fact, from day one, we had always maintained a voter registration booth; it used to be manned by a woman named Miss Elizabeth Eastman, who was one of the black WACs [Women's Army Corps - 6888th Central Postal Directory] in the service, and a community activist. She always had the first booth in the first social services spot that we had for voter registration. We always pushed voter registration and voter education. We also pushed the concept of black businesses, entrepreneurship. Most of our vendors are black vendors, small mom-and-pop operations, but just like in small business, they bring their mothers, their fathers, their sisters, their brothers to go in or be a part of their little operation, and I hope they share

the profits that come off of those types of operation. As well as, you know, emphasizing the importance of school; education becomes the foundation. And everything we do, it's an educational process, just like in the '60s, they said our message was in our music. Our message in the Festival is always about education, always about self-improvement, always about our cultural enhancement and who we are as a people and how we should treat one another as a people. It's not just a festival for fun and games; we have a message in everything we do. Every component that we have in the festival has a message in it, and it's a message for young people, for middle-aged people, and for old people as well, in terms of pride as a people, in terms of our creativity as a people, in terms of a need for unity as a people. So everything we do, that's the underlying message.

Even our theme for this year's festival, which is A Musical Journey -- it's not just the music about the '40s, the '50s, and the '60s, but it's about where you were at socially and culturally during that time as well; we want you to have memories with the music to come by, and what you were dealing with, and what it was like for you at that time, and what it means to you. So everything we do, it's in a fun context, but it has a serious message underlying. So from education to starting businesses to even as I said in our community forum, men/women relationships, the value of the family, the raising of your children, and how best you can deal in an environment that's hostile to you and your culture and still maintain some level of sanity in your consciousness. All of this is themes that run throughout the Festival.

And whenever black people get together, the conversations are there, even formally or informally, about us as a people and what we're going through and dealing with as a people, as if no more than the informal conversation that comes about as a gathering, as a coming together as a people, dialogue is exchanged, ideals are exchanged, and views in terms of where we're at and where we ought to be are exchanged as a people. So all of that is taking place; some of it's informal, some of it's formal. But it's there, and the need for it. And like I said, from young gang members and what they're doing and why they're doing it to what they ought to be doing and why aren't more adults responsible for getting involved with them and giving them more guidance. And young people have their views, I'm not quite sure what they are, but they have them, in terms of what those of us in leadership roles, what those of us who are the parents and the grandparents and mothers and fathers failed to have done to give them the kind of direction that they need in life. All of that's a part of the Festival.

We don't duck out or try to suppress any kind of dialogue or conversation that takes place at the Festival, because it takes place at the community. The Festival is just a gathering place for a lot of different people to come together, from not only outside the community but from within the community as well, there are people who are in one housing complex that never visit another housing complex. But at the Festival, it's neutral ground;

people can come from the entire community. Some people are from Alameda [Street] to Central, and from 92nd Street to Imperial [Highway], which is Watts proper, it's a two-square-mile radius. But it's thousands of people in that two square miles, and then hundreds and maybe even thousands of people never meet each other except for in a Festival context, or maybe going to the local Food 4 Less supermarket.
But at the Festival, they can meet and have dialogue, engage in dialogue. At the other venues, businesses or venues that's in the community, that just pass each other in those places. But at the Festival, it's a relaxed place, you can come, you can sit on the grass, you can enjoy yourself, you can engage in dialogue, you can meet old friends, you can meet new friends, you can talk about the past, you can talk about the present, and you can talk about the future. And so that's how we see the Festival as an organization, and the contribution we make to the community as a whole, and the contribution we plan to continue to make, whether we are on Central Avenue or on Crenshaw, whether -- and before Watts was black, it was Latino, Italian -- I forget which one of those. And we changed the demographic.

STEVENSON

OK. Anything else you want to say about the Festival?

JACQUETTE

No, there's -- this year, 2006, our 40th anniversary. And the Festival has always had plans of trying to establish a cultural tourist attraction, like our Olvera Street, Little Tokyo, Chinatown, and we still have that in mind, we'd still like to find ourselves a three to five-acre facility in Los Angeles, preferably South-Central, where people would be able to attend activities. Like Olvera Street; you go to Olvera Street every day, but then when Cinco de Mayo comes, it turns into a celebration for the Latinos, in terms of Cinco de Mayo. We've had that in mind since the inception of the Festival, and we still have that i mind, and we'd still like to do that type of venue. And as a tourist attraction, as opposed to a theme park. We want a tourist attraction; we want it to represent the culture of our people. And it's just a matter of finding enough land in the location and establishing it, because as I said, if it's worthwhile, and if it's something of value, people will get there, regardless to where it is. People get on the plane to go to Jamaica all the time. I mean, that's a lot farther away than South-Central Los Angeles, or even Crenshaw. So if you have something of value, if it's something of value, if it's something people can get out of the experience, they'll come wherever it is. Like they say, you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door. So what we are talking about doing is building a permanent, year-round tourist attraction that deals with both culture and commerce, and all that entails.

STEVENSON

OK. I'd like to wind up by asking you if you could tell me about some of the other community organizations, or causes that you've been involved with over the years.

JACQUETTE

I don't remember them, but it's been a lot, from the Watts Health Foundation to the US organization to the Watts Christmas Parade, the Watts Chamber of Commerce, the Watts Summer Festival, the Community Alert Patrol, the Black Congress, the Brotherhood Crusade. What else has been out there? Sons of Watts, Mothers of Watts. The Watts Renaissance Committee. I think that's as much as I can remember. There maybe have been some other little things that I've been involved in, but pretty much everything in South-Central Los Angeles I was a member of our active in or affiliated with in some kind of way, and that's from 1965 right up until this day, I'm still involved or part of a couple of -- I forgot, but it's some things -- something that I'm sure I forgot. But that's just to name a few that I've been involved in.

STEVENSON

Any that you were more active in than -- if you were to look at the ones you've mentioned?

JACQUETTE

The Watts Summer Festival and the US organization probably have been the two longest organizations that I've been active in our affiliated with. Some organizations have come and gone, like the Congress is no longer here; the Watts Health Foundation is still around, but it's gone through a whole lot of changes since that time. Let's see, what else? The Community Alert Patrol is no longer around. It's -- those are the two longest-running organizations that I've been involved with. But anything that has come up even of late, such as -- even Watts Renaissance was about two years old; if it's dealing with Watts, pretty much, because I grew up in Watts proper, I grew up in Imperial Courts for awhile, I lived in Imperial Courts for awhile. I grew up in South-Central, and when I say South-Central, I'm talking about almost Watts proper, but not all the time in the housing complex of Imperial Courts. I'm always active and a part of anything that's happening in the community as a whole, first as a resident, I was born and raised in Los Angeles; I'm a native here, I didn't come from anywhere, number one. And number two was my role as the director of the Watts Summer Festival, and I promote the Festival and solicit participation by the entire black community to continue to be a part or to contribute to activities in the Festival. So those have been the two most consistent organizations that I've been affiliated with, and affiliated with right up until this day.

STEVENSON

OK. Anything you could tell me about the Community Alert Patrol, which has come up in other interviews in terms of what was the premise of it, and how did it operate, what was its success?

JACQUETTE
It came up in order to monitor the Los Angeles Police Department, and to make sure that people who were being stopped were not being abused while they were being stopped. And we were there to both observe as well as film the activities on the part of the police department, when they stop people on the street, for whatever reason, even if it was a legitimate reason, that they still had to be treated with respect, and they could not be brutalized or disrespected just because they had been stopped for some infraction, as well as for just being black. That was the purpose of the Community Alert Patrol. And it went well, but it was one of these organizations that started out with a group of volunteers and was done just by the resources that the volunteer brought to it, was eventually funded, and then once they were de-funded, they were deactivated, because it was a form of [cooptation] to me; you get many, you pay your volunteers that was doing it for free, and people would donate, they gave us money for free, or donate money for gas, and things like that. And somebody said, let's write a proposal and get funded. And they wrote the proposal, they got funded; they began to pay the people who used to do things for free, and then once they got used to that, then people say, "Well, there's no more money," and then the organization goes to the dust. A number of organizations that happened to.
And that's why we as a people have to be more self-sufficient in the things we do and the institutions we build, because once they become funded, they become vulnerable to being destroyed, dismembered, dismantled, because you've turned it into a commodity; it's a job, it's not just a commitment. And when that happened, the Community Alert Patrol, like a lot of other organizations, including the Sons of Watts and some others, was de-funded, and by being de-funded because deactivated. And so one of the things about the Festival is that it had received funding, but it has never received enough funding from government to be run as a major institution, and we've always tried to maintain a level of independence, in terms of our funding sources. We do take and we do apply for certain government grants, but it's never enough money to run the organization, it's enough money to put on events at the organization, and that we do maintain a volunteer staff.
Most of the people at the Festival are still volunteers, in terms of the events and the components that we had. And we tried to maintain our staff, which is three to four people maybe full-time, and that's only if we're successful in our fundraising efforts. And that has to be done mostly from the private sector, as opposed to the governmental sector, because the minute we are funded, the minute people begin to get those paychecks, the minute people begin to have a routine thing, then we have to -- he who pays the piper picks the tune, and if they're paying us, they determine what we can do, what we can't do, and how we have to do it, complying to laws that they don't even comply to, in terms of diversity. When I see more than one black Senator in the US Senate, then we'll talk diversity. (laughter)

STEVENSON
Right. OK, looking back to the '60s, what can be instructive from the '60s, whether it's philosophy, whether it's organizations like the Black Congress, that can be used today to address some of the same issues that haven't gone away?
JACQUETTE
I think independence, self-determination. We as a community and as a people have got to do this for ourselves. We cannot depend on the government or foundations or anybody else to fund our revolution or it will not happen; they will not fund what we have to do, and I call it revolution because what we're doing is revolutionary, in that we're talking self-determination; we're talking about exercising our will as a people; we're talking about looking at our vested interest as a people. That has to come from a people, and I think the legacy of the '60s is that from the [Black] Panther party to the US organization to the Black Congress to the Blackstone Rangers, these were all community-based organizations that was volunteers, and dealt mostly with our own resources, no matter how minor they were; they were our resources, we were in charge, we set the policies, we instituted the programs, and we implemented the programs for ourselves. And those organizations that were successful are those organizations that maintain those principles. A group of people who had a common interest and understood the importance of being interdependent, or independent of the greater power or the greater society to do the things that was to our best interest. So if nothing else, we have to learn how to take our own destiny in our own hands and to do what is best for us as a people. I don't see any other way.
STEVENSON
OK. And also, I've asked you at various junctures to discuss black elected officials. How do you view their role over the years in dealing with issues, and how can they be more effective, if you feel that way?
JACQUETTE
I don't want to say anything negative about elected officials, and I'll try not to. (laughter) But they're elected officials, they're politicians. That means they're somewhat opportunist, and they go with the flow. And with the exception of that handful, people like Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums, Maxine Waters -- who else? What other elected officials who will go against the flow? It's not many, because the politicians, they've got a diverse constituency. Plus, they're one in many. There's 400-some-30 -- 430 I think Congresspersons, and it's (inaudible); they can get up there and raise hell on they want to, they voted 400-30, even with the [Congressional] Black Caucus [CBC] up there, they can hopefully at best keep the issues alive and articulate the concerns of the masses. But in terms of doing anything legislatively and politically, I don't see the politicians being able to be that effective.

And as I say, even the exceptions to the rule, at their best, they can speak the concerns of the masses and keep the issues that affect the masses out front. But in terms of effectiveness as politicians or elected officials, I think it's minimal, because they are there to represent America, to represent America and all that America represents (inaudible), good and bad. And as a result of that, it's not -- they can't really represent a people or a constituency, because the constituency is too diverse and the people are too few in numbers. The only people that's able to effectively do that -- I know it can be done, because it is being done, is the Jewish community, without a doubt. Nobody questions it, nobody, not elected officials, not academics, not even a scholar can question the effectiveness of the Jewish people who watch our for their -- the interests of this country as well as the interests of the Jewish people and Israel. There's no exception to it; there's no people that would debate that issue, I don't think. Some of the people don't like it, there's a lot of people that don't like it; they're mostly white, though, not black or Asian or people of color.

But they're the people who, in terms of a model or an example, who you can look to to see the effectiveness, and then again it goes to their resources, both natural and monetary resources, that they can do that type of thing. But we are 30 million people strong in this country. We're 30 million people strong, as black people. And even with the influx of immigrants in this country, mainly Latinos, we are still the most organized, the largest single minority in this country. We have the vote, we have the resources, we hopefully have the intelligence to exercise our will to a greater degree than what is being done. As I said, the elected official are not, in my opinion, taking more advantage of this situation, and using it to our advantage. And I think they could, even in spite of all that they have to face. The Jewish people face it as well; this country is just as anti-Semitic as it is anti-black. And I don't care what anybody says; I believe that if they were not as strong as they were as a people, it would be more obvious, in terms of the treatment they would get too.

So it's -- but we can do it. So I think probably less than six million Jews in America -- it's 30 million of us, 30 million strong. That's a lot. I don't care, by anybody's count, that's a lot of people. And we have power we have not exercised yet as a people, both financial and political power, and part of it is -- it's a shared responsibility, it's not all elected officials. We the people are responsible for our destiny, and every segment of the society, from the educators to the elected officials to the businesspeople to the single parent has a responsibility to the race, and therein lies our success as a people, I think. I believe. I hope. (laughter)

STEVENSON

OK. Anything else you want to say before we wind up?

JACQUETTE

No, that's about it, that struggle is continuous and forever. Even when we get to where we going, we only -- when we get there, we're only in a position to continue to do it better. That's it.

STEVENSON

OK. Thank you very much.

JACQUETTE

OK.

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