

A TEI Project

Interview of Miriam Matthews

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1. Transcript

1.1. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (October 11, 1985)

KELLEY

So when did you come to California?

MATTHEWS

Our family arrived in Los Angeles from Pensacola, Florida on July 29, 1907. I was just short of my second birthday, and my sister Ella [Shaw Matthews] was about three and a half, and my brother Charles [Hearde Matthews] was seven months old. Are you interested in our trip to California?

KELLEY

Oh, yes, definitely. Before that, I was curious— Do you happen to know why your family chose California? Because there was a general trend of migration to the north, like Chicago and New York, and not a lot of black people were coming to California. Is there any reason that they chose this area?

MATTHEWS

I have never heard them say why they chose California. It may be because my father's godfather [A. Dunbar] lived here. He was actually the only contact we had before arriving here, and perhaps he felt it would have more advantages than the places that were so crowded already.

KELLEY

I see.

MATTHEWS

But the main reason we came from the South was to avoid segregation. He [my father] didn't want his children brought up—my mother [Fannie Elijah Matthews] or my father [Reuben Hearde Matthews, Jr.]—didn't want the children brought up in a segregated atmosphere. 2

KELLEY

Do you have any recollections of the trip at all? Or what your family told you?

MATTHEWS

I was too young. All I know is what the family told me. I remember I was standing up in one of the seats and the train went around a curve and I was thrown in the aisle on my head. Luckily, I wasn't injured. And you know when you're that young, sometimes that soft spot at the top of your head hasn't fully gotten to the point where it's covered. And my uncle kiddingly said, "You have a hard head." He was my father's brother, the next one to him in age. My father [Reuben H. Matthews, Jr.] was the eldest one of the family. And this brother was Albion Dunbar Matthews, and he came out the same time with our family. But one thing that might be of interest was in terms of the segregation on the trains. We were traveling on the Santa Fe railroad. I'm pretty certain it was probably the same on all of the roads—or the lines. Southern Pacific would have been the other one we could have taken. They didn't have separate Jim Crow cars for Negroes. They simply had a curtain that could be moved back and forth. And if the particular car had too many of one group, then they'd push it—the curtain—to make room for more whites or more Negroes as the case might be. And it happened the space that was allocated at that moment for Negroes was getting crowded, and my father went to find the conductor because individuals were not supposed to move the curtain, even though they could easily have done it. When he asked the conductor he presumed my father was white, because he didn't show any signs of being a Negro, and he said yes and came expecting to do it. He was very affable. When he arrived and found out my father wished to give the Negroes more room, he cursed him and wouldn't move the curtain.

KELLEY

How long was it before you moved into your first house? Because I understand that your family moved in with friends in Inglewood.

MATTHEWS

I don't know the exact—oh, we lived, at least just stayed with my father's godfather who was Mr. Dunbar. I just have "A." for his initial. I don't know. But I have a feeling it was probably Albion. I rather think his brother, being named Albion Dunbar Matthews, was possibly named, first and second name, for him. They had a little farm, you might say, of about an acre, with a nice house, a horse, cow, chickens, dogs and garden. And I have no idea the exact location, because it was really rural at that time and really wasn't called Inglewood until later. But when Inglewood finally developed into a city, then they didn't want Negroes there. But it's rather ironical now. [mutual laughter] Negroes have about taken over Inglewood again. So we stayed with them until we could find a place to rent. My father went out the next day after we arrived and managed to get a job immediately. And I don't recall how many days it was, but I don't believe we even stayed with the Dunbars a full week before we moved on Lawrence Street and rented a house. I don't recall either exactly how many months later we started buying it. At that time you didn't need to make a down payment. And it happened in this case— They drew up the papers, and what we were paying was equivalent to the rent we would have been paying. After a certain length of time, my father decided he wasn't interested in the house, felt he was paying too much for it, and just let it go. And he didn't really lose anything, because it was just like paying rent during that time. Then we moved on East Seventieth Street—I would judge it was a couple of years after we came to California—and lived in a house next door to the one that we were to buy and live in for forty years. And when we saw the "For Sale" sign, my father investigated and, as I recall, I don't have the papers, it was about \$3,000 or \$3,500 for the house. And we lived there from 1910 to 1950. My father died in 1949, but I won't go into that now. It was after he died that we moved.

KELLEY

When your family first moved to California, how did they secure employment? What did they do for a living?

MATTHEWS

Oh, my father was a painter. He had gone to Tuskegee [Institute] and had their full course, not just in plain painting but, you know, the hard wood finishing and the finer points of painting. And he was well-trained and was excellent in his field. He had done that in Pensacola and always was employed and had no problem in keeping a job. After he arrived here he worked for several people and eventually was employed by Cooper, Pile and Clopine, who were building contractors. First he was a working foreman for the painters, then he became a regular foreman, and eventually they put him in full charge of painting. Then if they sold a house before it was painted, he dealt with the new clients and wrote the specifications according to their wishes and followed through on the entire job. In those days they had to know how to mix paints, because there were no

ready mixes like there are today, and it was a rather fine point, because there were many different colors. You'd be amazed how many different ones go in to make up certain colors. I was surprised when I'd see my father putting black in something that was a light color, that just intensified some particular part of it.

KELLEY

Were the owners of Cooper, Pile and Clopine—? Were they positive, were they sure that your father was black?

MATTHEWS

I don't think he was passing. I think they knew the family. And in fact, in many cases it was rather surprising. A man came from the insurance company— You know, at the beginning only the Metropolitan [Life Insurance Company] would insure Negroes and for very small amounts, what you'd call petty policies, and my father was getting a policy from one of the big companies. At the moment I don't recall the name of the company. And the insurance agent came to our home to take all of the information, interview him and so forth. And he saw the whole family. And yet he gave my father the kind of policy they generally didn't write for Negroes. And he knew. My father introduced his wife and his children, so there was no question about that, and I'm pretty certain that the people he worked for knew.

KELLEY

What did your mother do for a living?

MATTHEWS

She was a homemaker, but more than the average homemaker. She would have been a teacher and was ready to go to normal school when she got married. And then, of course, the children came fairly soon, so she didn't go back to school. But when she came to California— My father was not the kind of person who was a good manager. It happened in his family, his mother [Ella Shaw Matthews] wasn't a good manager but his father was. But his father [Reuben Hearde Matthews, Sr.] died early, so he, I guess, had acquired or maybe just had the traits of his mother. I know one of his brothers had the traits of the father: knew how to manage well and to save. But my father, knowing my mother [Fannie] had this ability, would give her his pay envelope unopened. Then she allocated everything in the proper fashion, but always saved something. And it wasn't until he went into business for himself that he didn't have to do that, that he kept a big wad in his pockets at all times.

KELLEY

In the community you lived in on Seventeenth Street, would you say that there were a considerable amount of black people residing in that area? Was it mixed?

MATTHEWS

Well, even when we lived east of Central, on Lawrence Street, it was a well-integrated neighborhood. I know we had white people living next door to us there. And there was no friction, no feeling at all about race. Then when we moved on Seventeenth Street there were only two or three families in those early years that I remember living on the street. It was mainly— And the whites were mainly Anglo-Saxon. And even after we sold our property—because the [Santa Monica] freeway was coming through— One Anglo-Saxon family still lives there. But in the meantime, there were changes. First, there were some Italians and Middle Europeans, eventually some Mexicans and various other European types. They weren't all first generation, but just happened to have— Maybe the parents might have been first generation and then the children were second generation, of these who came from Europe. And there was no problem, except one Armenian family, and I don't remember exactly when this was, but I would suppose it was around 1915. I do remember that Birth of a Nation, D. W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation, was being shown for the first time. They happened to have a billboard on our corner with the scene showing the slaves and everything. And when one of the Armenian children got angry—you know how children play—about something, said, "You'd better go down to the corner and look at that poster." And my mother was very outraged when we told her what the child had said. So she went over to visit the parents and told them that we had been here for generations. They had just arrived. And we were better educated and better off financially than they were. And they had their nerve coming here trying to throw up slavery to us when they had just come from Europe where the Turks were treating them like dogs. She told them the whole thing, and after that I guess they told the children and calmed down. But it's interesting how some people who've been persecuted go to a place expecting and hoping to be free themselves and then want to find somebody to look down on.

KELLEY

I see, that is interesting. How would you characterize the class background of your community? Would you say that you were sort of all working class or lower-class families or middle-class people, working—

MATTHEWS

On Seventeenth Street?

KELLEY

Yes, on Seventeenth Street and the people in the outlying areas.

MATTHEWS

Well— Or do you mean Negroes?

KELLEY

Actually, the whole community, as well as specifically black people who were in the neighborhood.

MATTHEWS

Well, it's rather difficult to generalize. I do know in the early period, beginning with the first decade, in some cases some of the men who may not have had a particular trade might not have had ready employment, and some of the wives perhaps worked in service, because that was the only thing available and somebody had to bring bread home. But it's rather interesting to note, there was an early issue of the Liberator, a black newspaper that started around 1900 and I think was published until around 1914. In 1904 they had a special issue on black businesses. And it was quite remarkable how many different fields they were in—and as small entrepreneurs did very well. But that was true, too, of white small businesses in those days, because we hadn't come to the age of the supermarkets and the super everything else, where one particular company had branches all over the place and could buy at wholesale to greater advantage than an individual person. But there was a crockery shop. And it is interesting that the man who owned it with his wife worked for Parmale-Dorums, a very large firm which had a downtown store that was in business until very late, because I remember it well after I was grown. And they had very fine merchandise. So the wife ran the crockery shop but I imagine the husband's expertise from working for this other company helped them do well in that particular business. I think the name was Brown, but offhand I can't recall the first name. And they had grocery stores and meat markets, the usual things that you would expect, and pharmacies. Then there were some people in contracting businesses, too, at that time. They may have come out, were expert brick masons and that kind of thing, and possibly in the beginning worked for some white firms. The Blodgett brothers are an example, and then they went into business for themselves. First they were Blodgett Brothers, and then they, two brothers, separated and had their own firms and did very well in the contracting business for a number of years. Actually, they worked on buildings in downtown Los Angeles early, long before anybody would have expected anyone to permit black contractors to do that. And some of the white contractors built buildings using almost all black help. Those people who came from the South in those days were trained in lots of the trades, not only as brick masons, but in other areas of the building trades. There was a coal yard that employed a number of Negroes driving the wagons to deliver coal. I recall one early family: the head of the family worked for the company in the morning, then did his own in the afternoon—and they seemed not to resent it. He started getting his own customers and delivering coal for himself in the afternoon.

KELLEY

Do you remember his name?

MATTHEWS

It was the Diamond Coal Company and the man was the grandfather of Norman [O.] Houston's first wife. I'll think of his name in a minute. But there was such a— Oh, and they had several, I would call them more boarding houses, because they were converted houses, but they called them hotels. There were two hotels, and there was another hotel that actually had a brick building on San Pedro Street. And he had started with a restaurant and cooked such delicious biscuits they called him Biscuit Jones. I believe his first name was Andrew, but the nickname stuck. And he built a hotel I believe around 1904 and had a dining room where he served meals. And the meals were very reasonable, I think some of them at fifteen cents in those days.

KELLEY

What was the name of the hotel? Do you remember?

MATTHEWS

Jones Hotel.

KELLEY

The Jones Hotel. And you mentioned there were two hotels that were black owned.

MATTHEWS

I don't recall those names offhand. They don't stick in my mind right at the moment. But they were patronized largely, I believe, by Pullman porters, who had their layovers in Los Angeles.

KELLEY

I'd like to turn to, I guess, your mother's activity in the church. And you mentioned St. Philips Episcopal Church, which she helped found. I was wondering if you could go over that background.

MATTHEWS

When my mother arrived, her family had been Episcopalians for years in Florida. Her parents, and I guess some of the other members of the family, because my mother was next to the youngest in her family, were all married by the white Episcopal priest. And my mother went to the white mother church until a couple of years before we came to California. They formed a black church, and she was the organist for that church before coming to California. So when she arrived here it was nothing for her to go downtown to the Cathedral and attend church there. She wasn't thinking about the need for a black church. But a person who was here earlier who had come from Texas thought they should organize a black Episcopal church and investigated the possibilities. Because there were so few Episcopalians, that is black Episcopalians, here, she went along with it, even though she was perfectly content to go to the white church. When they had the first service, which was October 6, 1907, this Mrs. Sanford had to go back to Texas for a wedding, so she wasn't present. My mother, Mrs. Reuben Hearde Matthews Jr. [Fannie

Elijah Matthews] and a Mr. Ceril Gish were the only two blacks present at the first service. There was a white minister and a white lay reader who conducted the service. Sorry, I don't remember the minister's name at the moment, either. And the minister's wife came too. And my mother had been asked to play for that first service, but the minister's wife wanted to show off, so she played. But after that my mother was the organist—or I think they had a piano in those days. And the first service was held at the neighborhood house, which was under the Episcopal church. But after that, the services were held on Central Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Street at Scots Hall, which had been erected by Mr. and Mrs. John Scot for lodge meetings or any type of activity, clubs and so forth, in the black community. There were some places in the early days that could be rented. But, generally speaking, there weren't a lot of places that were open to them for regular meetings. When they had big affairs they would rent some different auditoriums both in the far downtown area and then closer out. I mean, not closer out, but in another area. So Mr. Show, I think it was E. L. Show, who had finished a theological school in the South and had been a teacher before he came to California and was working for the assessors office at the time, took over the services and conducted them until Father W. T. Cleghorn was appointed to become the first minister of the church in 1910. He arrived in February, 1910, so the church had been operating almost three years, having begun in 1907. In a short while, I believe it was by the fall of 1910, they had built the first frame church on Paloma Avenue near Fourteenth Street and began having regular church service in their own church building. My mother had continued as organist all through this preliminary period and after Father Cleghorn came. And at some point, I don't know how long afterwards, an individual wished to play, and either she suggested or the minister suggested that she play for the morning services on Sunday and my mother play for the evening services. And my mother said if they wanted to accommodate her, she would be content to alternate Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings, but by no means would she permit her to have the big service every Sunday, especially since she anteceded her. And I shouldn't say this, but when this particular person retired she received a nice gift; when my mother retired she received a pocket handkerchief. The interesting thing about what has happened to the church through the years— After Father Cleghorn served twenty-two years— He died in 1932. And they had interim white ministers for two or three years, maybe four years. Father H. Randolph Moore came as the second permanent pastor for the church. And he happened to talk to some people who were not even here when the church was organized in 1907. They might have been here when Father Cleghorn came, I'm not certain. But they told him an entirely different story about the founding of the church, said it started as a Sunday school in somebody's residence and then eventually was made into a parish, or

a mission, I should say. And then when the minister talked with my mother and she told him when the church was actually started and all the preliminaries, he didn't believe her. And if she could give dates and times that preceded what the other people had told him, I don't know why he would think she would have to make it up. But recently the church celebrated its 75th anniversary, and they had a brand new rector. This was in 1982. And they have used 1907 as the date for the founding of the church. And there were people who were old-timers who knew about our family who helped with this souvenir program. The souvenir program has only one picture of that first church and it's a picture after it was sold to the Four Square Pentecostal Church and has the big sign across there. And that's the only picture they have in the souvenir program of the first church. They have no picture at all of Father Cleghorn, who served all of that time as the first minister. They have a very tiny picture of Father Moore, who served as the second minister for a long period of time. And I was not even sent one of the invitations about the celebration. It was inexcusable, because every year they had had what they called a reunion of the people who had once attended the Paloma Street Church, they used to call it. And I was invited every year for that and I went every year when they had that little celebration of the people who were old-timers. My brother had rejoined St. Philips and was there. Now he could have gotten one of the invitations, but he was never as interested in the church as I was. Neither was my sister. And he may have thought I had gotten an invitation, so he didn't bother to mention it to me. So when I found out two days before the eight-day celebration began that they were going to have the celebration— The person who happened to meet me in a supermarket and mentioned it sent me her invitation. And I happened to tell her I had a lot of early pictures of the church and the people, not knowing that they didn't have— I hadn't seen the souvenir book yet—that they didn't have anything. So she sent a school teacher who belonged to one of the church guilds over to pick up the pictures. And I had taken the trouble to put captions on the back and identify everything. Much to my surprise and horror when I arrived at the first celebration this first Sunday, went to the reception in the parish hall after the church service to find they had scattered the pictures two by two all over the parish hall, no captions underneath any of them. And when I was standing in line for refreshments, somebody looked at the picture of Father Cleghorn and said, "Who is that?" And I said, "That's the first minister of the church, Father Cleghorn." Then they saw a picture of my mother and wanted to know who she was. And I said, "She was one of the two founders of the church." Naturally, people looking at pictures want to know who and what, and to think they'd put those up and didn't take the trouble to retype the caption I had on the back and put it under the picture. I mentioned it to the new minister, who naturally didn't know the history of the church—and apparently they didn't have it in their files.

Otherwise, when they had this yearbook put out, they would have had more pictures and more information—and told him that I was disappointed they didn't have those captions retyped. And he said, "We'll have it done tomorrow." The whole week passed and it was never done. And I had one more picture that I gave them later, and I typed the caption separately. And they put it up without putting the caption up. Then I indicated that the church could keep those pictures for their files. The person who first told me about the celebration called me up and said someone had given her the pictures to return to me. Now here they didn't have history. They were offered the history, didn't properly display it while the celebration was going on. Then they don't even want to keep the pictures for their permanent files.

KELLEY

That's amazing.

MATTHEWS

So I plan, one day—I hope I get around to it soon—to do a real history of the church and have the proper information there, and include all of the early pictures of the choir, and of Father Cleghorn standing on the front porch, with the various men's groups, and the Sunday school, and all of the things that went on at St. Philips.

KELLEY

Oh, okay. That was certainly enlightening. Let's turn back to you as a child growing up in Los Angeles. Was education stressed in your family? Especially, if one were to compare you with your brother, you being a woman, a lot of times males are pushed into the field of education, whereas, a lot of females are kept from those endeavors.

MATTHEWS

Both my mother and my father felt that all the children should be treated equally. And they, you know, wanted the best for their children. That was one of the reasons they came West, thinking that in every way, aside from not being segregated, that they would also be better educated, perhaps, coming to California. Now it happened—I don't know whether my mother read an article, but they said, if you have three children and some are smarter than others, that if you can't afford to—perhaps if it's a matter of college—send all of them to college, it's better to send the person who has less ability than the ones who have the most ability, because the ones who are brighter can make their way, where the other one may not without the extra training. It happened in our family, my brother [Charles Hearde Matthews] and I were perhaps equally bright. We both finished high school at sixteen and college at twenty. My sister [Ella Shaw Matthews] and I graduated from high school together. But it wasn't because she was slow, because she graduated at the same time most people were graduating—at eighteen. But she didn't show the same interest in certain

things as we did, and she wasn't interested in going to college, but she did wish to go to business college, and she was sent there. And it turned out that she picked the exact thing that was right for her and was at the top of her class. You know, when I say the top, I mean she wasn't in the middle, she was in the upper echelon there. And in business, later on, there was a time—I had five years of college—she was making more in business than I was in the library with five years of college. And I think her business college was possibly a two-year course. So they did emphasize education for all of us.

KELLEY

What elementary school did you go to?

MATTHEWS

We went to San Pedro Street School. It was about a block and a quarter—well, you see, we were in the middle of our block, so I would say in terms of the actual walking distance it would be just about a full block. It was at Eighteenth Street and San Pedro Street.

KELLEY

Okay, at San Pedro, what do you recall were the backgrounds of some of your peers? I mean, were they all in the community, especially some of the black students who went to—?

MATTHEWS

Well, there were very few black students there at the time. And I've told you there were only two or three families on our street. And there was no feeling, generally, among the children or the teachers of race. There was only one experience that I can recall. My mother had written a note—I forgot to mention that the parents bought the textbooks in those days. My sister was older than I was, so she was in the first grade before I went to first grade. My mother would help her with her lessons and I would listen. When my mother saw how interested I was, she taught me to read too. So by the time I was in the first grade, the lower part of the first grade, I could read—in fact, I could probably recite that reader all the way through without even reading it. And they used one reader for the whole year. So after the first semester, my mother thought I would become bored of that same reader and wrote a letter to the teacher asking her to put me up to the B2's. They said B1's and A1's. See, the lower part was the B and the upper part of the grade was the A. And after two or three weeks passed and she said, "Are you in the second grade?" And I said, "No." So my mother didn't go to see the teacher; she went to see the principal and told him that I was past the stage of staying in the A1's. So he went to the teacher's room and told her that she wanted me to be put into the second grade. And the teacher said, "There are plenty of people in this room who are just as smart as she is." My mother said, "I just came to see about my daughter." And the principal saw that it was put in effect. But after that, all the teachers I had,

in the second grade, the third grade, the fourth grade, the fifth grade and the sixth grade, all wanted to skip me. My mother did let me skip the A3's, because the teacher who had the third grade had both the B3's and the A3's in the same room. So she would be teaching one half of the class while the others did their homework or their busy work. So while she was doing reading for my group, the lower third grade, I was listening to the upper group do their practice and reading. So when I went to the fourth grade, as I mentioned, they wanted to skip me all the way through, but my mother said I might skip something important after a while, so she didn't want me to go ahead. Then I went to junior high at age eleven, and after the first part of the lower part of the seventh grade, they not only wanted to promote me, but they were promoting several others in that class. My mother said, "No." So the only way I happened to graduate from high school early, when I was in the ninth grade, at intermediate— Of course, they used to have intermediate and they changed it to junior high, and you could either stay through the eighth grade and then go to high school for four years or you could stay through the ninth grade and go to high school for three years. But that meant they were duplicating the ninth grade at both the intermediate schools and the high schools. And when I took Spanish in the ninth grade at intermediate, when I got to high school they were teaching that same course at the tenth grade level. So that gave me two extra courses I could take, and I happened to take courses that were required courses. So just before the winter graduation when I was expecting to graduate in summer, the counselor told me that I was graduating in the winter along with my sister. And she said I'd fulfilled all the requirements, so they were putting me out. So I really didn't skip anything except two lower grades in elementary.

KELLEY

While you were going through elementary and junior high, did you have any sort of aspirations or goals? What in particular did you want to do in terms of an academic career or anything like that? And tied to that, were you interested in any subjects where you did outside reading?

MATTHEWS

Where I did outside reading?

KELLEY

Yes.

MATTHEWS

Well, I was a great reader beginning from the time I was a child. I used to go to the library and if I ever kept books or had them renewed after two weeks, that was a disgrace that I didn't get them all read in two weeks. Lots of times my mother was calling me to do something, and I was hiding around the corner reading. And I read a lot of everything. In our home we had Dickens and Shakespeare and a number of the classic authors. I had read most of those by

the time I got to junior high school. I had no real aim or ambition in terms of what I wanted to be, but I definitely wanted to go to college. And when I got to high school, I was taking college preparatory and so was my brother. I don't recall whether my sister took college preparatory or not, but she might have and then decided she wanted to go to business college instead of going to the university. But it wasn't— And even when I went to college, or university, I still only knew I didn't wish to teach. And at that time teaching was the main occupation open to black individuals—women, I should say. And I just thought, I don't know why, I didn't wish to teach. All of my teachers and even a number of people in my classes thought I would have made a good teacher, but somehow it didn't appeal to me. And it wasn't until I finished college that I decided to enroll in the [University of California, Berkeley] library school [School of Library and Information Science]. When I was still in Los Angeles on the campus at the University of California—they called it Southern Branch at that time; eventually it became the University of California, Los Angeles—I was in classes in all of my major subjects— I was in "A class" with a girl who was a good friend of mine who happened to be white. And one day when we were walking across campus she said she was either going to be a physical education teacher or a librarian. And I said, "Oh, librarian, that's a nice idea." And so that's what first made me think about that as a possibility. But I still didn't bother to go to the library and read any of the books on vocations to find out what courses I should be taking or majoring in. I don't know why. That seemed kind of silly after I thought it was a good idea. But just a few weeks before I graduated from [U.C.] Berkeley, I went over to the library school and enrolled. And the director said that they could only take thirty people so they would accept the thirty highest in scholarship of those who applied. And when I came home after graduation, which was early May—the commencement was always early [at U.C.] Berkeley, entirely different from Los Angeles, eventually I think they synchronized all the schools, because it made it so difficult for people transferring—I went to the Library School, Los Angeles Public Library, which was not, of course, on a par with the university library school, but, yet, it was a good one of its kind. And I secured an application, but I never did bother to fill it out and send it in, because shortly after I arrived home, maybe a few days after, I received acceptance to Berkeley. And then later when I found out that the Library School, Los Angeles Public Library, wasn't accepting Negroes and Jews I was sorry I hadn't filled it out and applied and let them reject me so I could make a fuss about it. Because I thought that was outrageous. An institution supported by tax dollars and then not accepting Negroes and Jews. But at that time I didn't even know about the Jews. It was many years later after I'd been working a long time that I had a Jewish children's librarian, and she had been teaching, and her father had pulled all

kinds of strings with politicians trying to get her in the Library School and they wouldn't accept her, with all of the backing he got, you know, from outsiders. And then later, of course, she managed to get the training. I'm not sure, but I think she may have gone to USC [University of Southern California].

1.2. TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (October 11, 1985)

KELLEY

During World War I, you came in second in an essay contest where you had to write about the thrift stamps. And I guess it sort of had patriotic fervor behind it. Now, in terms of winning the essay contest or coming in second, did that have any impact on your career goals? For instance, had you considered being a writer after you'd won the contest? Or never?

MATTHEWS

Oh, the contest, you know, was very incidental. As a matter of fact, they didn't even announce it in advance. It was when we were in our homerooms. They just passed out some paper to all the students and said everybody has to write maybe a page or a paragraph or gave us a certain length of time to write it in. And so it was just something I dashed off without any great thought about it, and I was surprised when I won the second prize. But I thought it was very interesting that a Japanese got first prize and a Negro, second prize, when the school was largely Caucasian.

KELLEY

The other kind of paradox which is sort of a paradox of the post World War [I] period: after the war was over a lot of blacks were killed in race riots in Chicago, Washington, D.C. Were you or your family or other members of the black community then aware of some of these activities and the fact that a lot of black people felt that they lost out in democracy after—?The idea that they fought for democracy in Europe and then when they came back in 1919, it's like they didn't get—

MATTHEWS

Well, it was worse after World War II. But naturally, we were aware of what went on, even though my father was exempt because he had children. He had to register, but he didn't have to go. And I'm trying to recall whether we had any close friends who went. There were several people in Los Angeles that I know of through Beasley's book [Beasley, Delilah L., *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*], and I think my parents probably knew them, but I don't recall too much discussion about that particular subject, because we were still rather young. I was in junior high.

KELLEY

I see. Now when you entered L.A. High, were there a lot of black students?

MATTHEWS

No. L.A. High, just before, about two years before my sister went to high school— When we came to Los Angeles, Los Angeles High School was downtown about where the Los Angeles [City Central] Library is now, somewhere in that area. They called it "up on the hill." And they moved out to the present location on Rimpau. Now let me see, is it Olympic. Yes, Rimpau and Olympic, two years before my sister went. And it happened my mother didn't think about— Oh, she just decided she wanted us to go to L.A. High. It was the only high school when we arrived in Los Angeles. In the meantime, naturally, the city had grown and there were high schools all over. And we were within walking distance of Polytechnic High School. It was a pretty good walk, but we could walk there. And so I don't know why she decided she wanted us to go to L.A. High. And it happened my grandmother and my uncle lived in that neighborhood, I mean in that district. So we used their address and went to L.A. [High]. But my mother had not made the change of address before my sister graduated from junior high school, or intermediate it was then, beforehand, and so she had to go out with my sister to L.A. High to tell them about it. Because, you know, if a student just went to make that transfer without any parent there, they wouldn't have done it. But later when I went and my brother went, we just changed our address before we graduated [from intermediate school], so they sent our records on out to L.A. [High] and it was all taken care of that way. But other people, later, a number— In fact, hardly any of those Negroes who were on campus lived in the district. So in some cases they got friends to let them use their address. And after a while, I don't know whether they followed some of them home or whether they began to be suspicious. They [L.A. High] would telephone, and then if some kid in that family didn't know or forgot about it [the false address] and they'd say, "Oh, they're not here," or "They don't live here," or something. I don't know of any who were actually put out of the school for giving a false address, but that was the way most of them [the blacks] were there. But it was very small, I would say no more than ten at the time we were there. I don't remember the exact number, but very few.

KELLEY

In high school did your color preclude you from, say, enjoying certain extra-curricular activities, or any of the other students?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't know how many tried to join certain types of clubs that were, you know, extra-curricular type, but I do know one friend, Marion Robinson, who put her name in to run for senior board, and one of the teachers—I don't know whether she was a counselor for that group or whatever—called her in and had her withdraw her name. And you see, the only people who did any

electioneering generally were student body presidents. And then, of course, the students would know who that person was, but the other people running for office were just names on a list. So I guess they thought by accident that she might get elected by people just stamping so many names, and asked her to withdraw her name. So there was that little bit that showed they didn't want you [as a black person] in any leadership role in what they call school politics. But I don't remember about any of the clubs. I belonged to the Alliance Française and I'm not sure whether that was a school club or whether our French professor had us join; whether it was a city-wide organization, I'm not certain. And I was trying to think of some other types of things that would be special that I believe some Negroes belonged to. But, see, it would depend on what subjects you were taking and what your interests were. But this matter of being elected to the Senior Board. That would be a kind of a governing board, you know, kind of like a board of directors would be for a business or something.

KELLEY

So you studied French in high school?

MATTHEWS

Oh, I studied Spanish and French. I started with Spanish first. And when I got to L.A. High School, and I think I mentioned earlier, I'm not sure whether it was on tape, that the Spanish I had in ninth grade at the intermediate school was the same course they were teaching at the tenth grade level at high school. So I had two extra spaces for other subjects. And then I also asked to take French when I first went to high school, and the counselor said, "Oh, you might become confused taking it so soon after the Spanish." So I took another course instead for the tenth grade and started French in the eleventh grade. And there was only one thing [small difficulty]. And the French professor I had was excellent. I don't know whether he was French or not, but he was very good in terms of his accent. And the Spanish has C-I-O-N at the end, and the French is just a little bit of difference with your ending on that. So he would always smile and correct my pronunciation, because I was giving the Spanish pronunciation instead of the French for that ending of words that ended in I-O-N. But that's the only thing I recall that I had any little problem with in the beginning. And [with] another teacher I had, while I was taking French, one day, it was the first class we had in the morning, I arrived, and everybody was standing outside the room, and I said [to them], "Why aren't you inside?" [They] said, "The teacher hasn't come." And the teacher always unlocks the room for the first class. So it happened they [the students] had been talking about the assignment, and it was a difficult one. They hadn't gotten the answer to some part of it. And so then one of them said, "Did you get so and so and so and so?" And I said, "No." So then they said, "Well, then nobody knows." And I was amazed at them thinking I knew everything. And so I've been surprised many times at either students or

different people expecting me to be perfect with everything. And I've always been amazed at that all through life, even in Sunday school. I remember one time the girl in front of me, I knocked her head a little bit, I didn't knock it off, and she told the teacher. And when she told the teacher, the teacher didn't believe her. I couldn't do a thing like that. And she didn't even ask me. [mutual laughter] And I've had that happen many times. And I just can't understand it. They don't think I can tell a joke and do anything of the things an ordinary person does. And always putting me up on a pedestal. I don't feel I've acted that way and I just can't understand why they [others] always expect me to be so perfect.

KELLEY

How about the other—? Well, actually, let me backtrack. Had you made any career plans by the time you got to high school? And if not, what sort of disciplines were you interested in, especially in terms of your college career or before your college career?

MATTHEWS

I thought that we discussed that partly and I indicated— Or was that off tape?

KELLEY

Oh, that. You talked about when you got to college, everyone wanted you to be a teacher.

MATTHEWS

No. no. It was just that most of the black women, that's all they could select. I just knew I didn't want to select teaching. And no, no, everybody didn't want me to be. In fact my parents didn't put any pressure on me at all. And by my starting with languages in high school, I was interested in languages, so the only thing I did know is that I wanted to major in Spanish. That was all. But that had nothing to do with teaching Spanish or being a career. And so I was just what I call taking a liberal arts course, planning to specialize after I got my A.B. And then when this white friend I had during my sophomore year had mentioned being a librarian, that sort of appealed to me because of my interest in books and various things. So I thought that might be just the thing for me. But after I decided to take the library course, my parents and friends said, "You'll never get a job," because they hadn't known of any other black librarian.

KELLEY

What about your peers, some of the black students that went to L.A. High? Do you recall them having any particular aspirations? Can you generalize and say—?

MATTHEWS

Well, most of the ones that I can think of now all became teachers. And those who were taking college preparatory, I don't know whether very many of them

had a definite goal in mind by high school. But some people do, some even in grammar school. Although when I think back, when I was about thirteen, I wanted to be a nurse, and later on that would have been the last thing I should have been. Because, you know, I didn't like to fool with anything that was messy, and I'm sure I wouldn't have liked waiting on people. And I soon got over that notion, but that was one of those things without any thought behind what it actually entailed. I guess maybe I may have seen a movie that had a nurse in it, and it just looked romantic, maybe.

KELLEY

By the time you graduated from high school, Marcus Garvey and the UNIA [Universal Negro Improvement Association] were extremely prominent in the United States, even in Los Angeles, according to Emory Tolbert, who wrote a book about it [The UNIA and Black Los Angeles: Ideology and Community in the American Garvey Movement]. What do you remember about the Garvey movement? And how did your peers view it?

MATTHEWS

Well, all I remember are the things that appeared in the newspapers. And, you know, they didn't give him too good a write up. And a lot of [black] people spoke about it and said, "I won't go back to Africa." So some thought it was a foolish notion, trying to re— What shall I say?

KELLEY

Repatriate.

MATTHEWS

Yes, all the blacks to Africa. So they figured this was our country and we should, you know, make things better here instead of worrying about going back to Africa. So they kind of laughed about it in many cases.

KELLEY

What about the idea of— You know, they used the term back in those days like "Racemen" or "Racewomen," where you'd have a commitment to the race and the advancement of the race. When you were in high school—and even into college—was this sort of the pervasive attitude among black students?

MATTHEWS

You mean about thinking a lot about race?

KELLEY

Yes. About— It wasn't?

MATTHEWS

Not when I came along. Now when we were in our—after college— Actually, most of these people were either in college or graduates. We had a junior branch of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] in Los Angeles. But the man who was the president, James McGregor, was studying law. He was a journalist, and I think at that time he had some type

of position with the [Los Angeles] County, I don't recall in what department, because I think he was married too. And we were interested in, you know, pursuing the aims of the NAACP, and because we were more mature than the general junior branch— I don't know whether they had set any age limits for it. But in other cities I imagine they were high school people at least, or I mean at the most, I should say. Not at least. And it turned out we decided to put on The Star of Ethiopia, which was a pageant written by W. E. B. Du Bois. And we were renting the Hollywood Bowl to do it in and really going to put on quite a production. Well, the senior branch of the NAACP in Los Angeles got jealous and they decided this is too ambitious a project for little kids. Well, of course, we weren't kids at all; we were all adults by this time.

KELLEY

What year was this, by the way?

MATTHEWS

It was in the middle twenties, I guess, might have been '27. It seems to me I saw that program the other day. So they made some complaints to— Either they first tried maybe to run us a little bit and get involved in it, and we let them know we wanted to run it our way, and so they wrote to the manager of branches who came out and did some investigating. Then, I don't know whether Du Bois came out to see that it was done properly or whether he— No, he was involved in this controversy too. And so the junior branch just resigned and said, "You take it." And only one person that I can recall stayed in and didn't resign. And then Du Bois in the next issue of The Crisis talked about us like we were dogs, when they were the ones who were, the adults in Los Angeles and whoever the branch manager who came out to investigate was. But the whole point was they were thinking of us as being the age that most of the junior chapters were, when we were adults. I'm pretty sure that the fellow who was president must have been close to thirty and was studying law, and the others were in college. I had a picture that I got recently, showing them—I wasn't in it, so it might have been when I was up in Berkeley [at the University of California]—but, you know, all of the people there were near the same age, and nearly all of them went to college. Now, my sister was the secretary, and I don't know whether some of those books are still around with some of the minutes or not. I do have the charter for the branch which was signed by, I think, James Weldon Johnson and Mary White Olvington. And I was about to tell you, when I was showing this book that you saw today, that I'm planning to get letters from important people, you know, that have their signatures on—whether they were addressed to me or not, just as the one from Claude MacKay was not addressed to me—and put them in a separate book, just to have an interest in people who signed what documents.

KELLEY

Exactly, that's vitally important. So, when you entered college at both UCLA and Berkeley, you obviously came into contact with, you know, far more serious intellectual circles than back in high school, especially among black students who had some sort of aspirations. What names stand out among your peers in college who may have made advances today, or may not have made advances among—?

MATTHEWS

Well, most of them had what you might term a profession, if you begin with teaching. And the majority of them were teachers, at least in terms of the females. Of the males, several were attorneys, or became attorneys. I don't think of any doctors offhand of the group that were with me at the beginning. Now, of course, through the years there were different ones, but I think more of the ones I began college with during the first couple of years. And then of those people, they didn't all grow up with me. Some of them went to grammar school that I lost track of. They moved in some other area and we didn't remain friends. And it's surprising too, I've met some of the people in later years that I knew pretty well earlier. As a matter of fact, one called me up recently, I don't remember what she wanted, and their family lived in the next block. And our families always went on Sunday picnics in good weather. Each had their own little Ford. And we did a lot of things together. After high school she [planned on] going to Howard University, but I don't think she did. And she was good in music and she went to USC, studying music, but not as a college student, but just, you know, they had a music department where people could study music. And she married and moved to Arizona. But then she got a divorce from her husband and moved back to L.A., and she had one daughter. So we've just sort of met very rarely from time to time. And yet to think that our families were just so close knit in those early years. And so some things happened that way and then others you just remain with all the way through. And then others were people who may have come more recently to Los Angeles that you became close friends. And in my adult years, now, more recently, a lot of people have retired and moved out here. And after about two or three years, if they happen to be people you like, you feel like you've known them and had them as friends all your life. So it's rather difficult to point out. Now there were one or two who started at UC—not UCLA, but University of California, Southern Branch—two or three boys I can remember whose families were able to send them to school. They didn't have to work. And you know they were bright, because I know one of them graduated from high school at fifteen. And I know two of them, especially, were highly intelligent. So it wasn't a case of being dull. And yet they got to fooling around and not studying and, I guess, too much partying, and eventually dropped out of school. And in reading one of the letters from Ralph Bunche, one of them went up to the University of Washington, and then

I think in one of the letters he said later that he either was thrown out of there or dropped out of the University of Washington. But generally speaking, that was unusual where they didn't have to work their way through and then still fooled around and didn't finish. So for the most part, all of them went ahead with their studies and graduated. I don't know that anybody except Ralph Bunche had cum laude. But generally they did well.

KELLEY

How long has Ralph Bunche been a friend of the family?

MATTHEWS

When he came here I think he was a ninth grader in junior high. I'm pretty certain it was about that time. And I didn't know him then. His junior high was John Adams. It wasn't until I was in the tenth grade at high school that I remember really getting to know him. And he was a very close friend of the family, my brother and my sister and all of us. As a matter of fact, in reading some of the letters when I was up in Berkeley [at U.C. Berkeley], he would take my sister [Ella] to the show or to a dance or something. And I remember one fellow writing me from Los Angeles and saying when he saw my sister with him [Ralph Bunche], and he said something about it, and my sister said she was just looking out for me. And this fellow said, "Well, what provision did you make for me?" It's kind of, you know, interesting when you think back, or just see in reading—I read some of the letters this morning—some of the things you've forgotten completely about, some of them strike you as a revelation at this late date because you had forgotten about it, and in other cases you knew in general about certain things, but you didn't remember certain details.

KELLEY

What do you remember about Ralph Bunche's leadership role or collegiate activities at the university?

MATTHEWS

Well, at UCLA, in spite of him having to work part-time to get through college, it's amazing how much energy he had doing athletics. In fact, in some of the letters I read recently, he said he had to go to bed because he was in training for basketball or something else. And then when he would go to a theater sometimes he would probably sleep through the whole movie. In fact, in one letter he went to this movie with my sister and he said, "I guess it was good, because all I got was the first two scenes. But Ella saw it." And then the fact that he not only was studying a number of subjects and getting those completed, he was marking papers for some of his professors, and I just really don't know how he found time to do all the things he did. And then get good grades too. Now it happened when I left Los Angeles that semester to go to [U.C.] Berkeley I had better grades than Ralph did. So he bet when I got up to [U.C.] Berkeley that I would continue that. But in [U.C.] Berkeley they had

these large classes. Now, fortunately, majoring in Spanish—and I had French as a minor—those language classes were reasonably small. And there that way, whenever I was in a small class and professors got to know me personally, I always did better than when you were just a cipher in a big classroom and it was just your midterm and your final that decided your grade. And I remember "A class," where I possibly may have even, you know, not done well on the final, but he knew that I probably wasn't feeling well that day for some reason, and I got an A just the same. So I was happy to have had the experience at UCLA, or Southern Branch, of a small school, because I got to know the professors first-hand and all of this, in contrast to [U.C.] Berkeley. But on the other hand, I was happy to be at [U.C.] Berkeley, number one, because I was away from home. When you're in town, it seems like a continuation of high school, living at home. But in [U.C.] Berkeley— And my parents, the first year, gave us enough money to last the whole year, in our checking account. And we had to manage it, you see, for the end of the year. So we got that training in terms of managing our money and making decisions of other kinds that we wouldn't have made by ourselves at home. And then, even with the larger classes and all of this, there was a certain atmosphere at [U.C.] Berkeley I liked. And one big thing was the weather. Now we started class in the middle of August, and it was fairly cool and pleasant up there. Now we did occasionally have an Indian summer, but it still wouldn't be real hot. Because you know when we get warm days here [in Los Angeles]—it's been 80 [degrees] the last couple of days—it doesn't feel like eighty in the summertime. And it was more stimulating from the standpoint of the weather. And before we knew it, here they were posting finals in April. And exams were over by the first of May, and graduation usually was the fifth or sixth of May. In L.A. before the semester's half over you're getting spring fever because it's so warm and everything; you don't feel like studying or doing anything. In fact, Ralph mentioned that in one of his letters. And he was saying, "Now here you are all through with finals, and I'm just busy, you know, facing all of this work and don't feel like it," because the weather was so pleasant you just want to laze the day away and do nothing. So, I'm happy I had both experiences of a small school and a larger school, and also the matter of being away from home, because I feel it developed my character a great deal and may have been a good thing for me in terms of my later life. Even though I made pretty good grades at [U.C.] Berkeley. But I didn't make as good grades as I did down here [at UCLA]. But I still got in the Spanish honor society, Sigma Delta Pi. I guess that was my senior year. And they gave us a gold key. And Ralph had gotten a gold basketball. He was going to trade me his basketball for my key. He said, "I have to have some gold around." [mutual laughter]

KELLEY

Obviously, there was a rather active social life among blacks at the university.

MATTHEWS

[U.C.] Berkeley or Los Angeles [UCLA]?

KELLEY

Well, actually, both.

MATTHEWS

Well, it was mainly the sororities and fraternities in terms of special events in terms of social life. And then, of course, there were times when individuals would have smaller parties at their home, maybe a small dinner party or just a small get together. It wouldn't necessarily have to be a real party, but it was frequent enough for interest, but, you know, you weren't just running all the time. I remember in one of the letters—in fact, I don't know whether it was that letter I showed you—I mentioned that there was nothing much going on and that I had not gone to the Mardi Gras Ball and that my brother [Charles Hearde Matthews] had gone and said it was good. The year before it wasn't very good, and so I said, "I would pick the wrong year to go." But we went sometimes, and sometimes we didn't, to certain things. I mean, it's pleasant enough not to be always just with your head in your books.

KELLEY

How important were the Greek letter organizations for blacks, the fraternities and sororities?

MATTHEWS

Well, most of them, I think, joined a fraternity or sorority. A few of them didn't. But nearly all of them, I think, belonged to a sorority or fraternity.

KELLEY

If you didn't join, were you ostracized?

MATTHEWS

Oh, no, no, it didn't have that effect if you didn't join.

KELLEY

Oh, that's different than today.

MATTHEWS

No, in fact, you know, a lot of times after you join, you wonder why in some cases. Well, partly depending on how it's run, you know, who was managing it and how they do it. Because sometimes they overdo certain things and under do the things that are more important, like working for scholarships and that sort of thing. And then also, too, trying to keep up a decent [grade] average [while] in the sorority or fraternity. I remember when I was Western Regional Director for the Deltas [Delta Sigma Theta], a girl flunked out of one school, then went to another college that had lower standards. There she was, a pledge when she was at [the] University of California, flunked out there, then went to another school. And I think it was just within the same year, they were presenting her

name as a pledge again, and I wouldn't approve it. And so they got mad at me and they thought that since I had been up at Berkeley—I was president of the Kappa Chapter when I was in [U.C.] Berkeley—that I was unduly harsh. But to me you don't leave some place, you know, flunking out, and then go to an easy school, and then get in. And the same thing occurred when I was Standards Committee Chairman for the national sorority [Delta Sigma Theta]. [I] went to Chicago for the convention and was making my report. And at that time they had "B class" schools in the South. Now normally those accrediting agencies for all over the country had no such thing. You were either accredited or you were not accredited. But just as a sort of token thing to black colleges, making them think, "Well, you're almost there, you're B." They would give them a B rating. So the people wanted to take in these colleges that hadn't really arrived yet. They didn't have the proper [inaudible], they didn't have the proper this and that and the other, and didn't have some of the other qualifications to be totally accredited. And so I made a recommendation that we wait for them to get their A rating before we had a chapter there. And, oh, did they get on the floor and just call me everything you can imagine. And they said, you know, because I came from California, I didn't know anything about the Southern schools. They didn't know all of my people came from there. My first sister-in-law [Clarissa L. Matthews] graduated [from] Fisk [University]. And her father [Reuben S. Lovinggood] founded Sam[uel] Huston [College] in [Austin] Texas. And so I had plenty of background about the South, and my sister-in-law was a first-class person, came to USC, got her French master's with honors. So I know that maybe a first-class person can come out fine in a "B class" school, but by the same token when you get special recognition, they're not going to recognize that if you don't have a second degree from somewhere else or that you aren't extraordinarily smart. And so I kept raising my hand and the president wouldn't recognize me. So after everyone had had their say, I had calmed down because of all the names they had called me, and so I just said, "It all resolves itself into whether you want an "A class" or a "B class" sorority." And I sat down. And it was voted down. And then I was nominated for first vice president when the elections came up. I declined, because I didn't feel like taking a national office, and all of those people from the South came to me and said, "Why didn't you run? I would have voted for you." They said they were delegated, I mean instructed, to vote the way they had to on the "B class" schools, but in anything else they thought I was fine.

KELLEY

Now, did you experience any racist incidents while you were at [U.C.] Berkeley? Or, in fact, throughout your whole undergraduate career?

MATTHEWS

In Los Angeles [UCLA] I had a Spanish teacher— Now, she had Ralph Bunche in a beginning Spanish class, and you know he had a wonderful personality, and she liked men—or the males in the classes. And she talked to some of those white girls in the class in such a way I never would have stood for it. And she never talked to me in any way, but she didn't give me the grade I should have had. And after the first semester with her, all of the people in the class, when they asked me what I got, and I said B, "Oh," they said. "If anybody deserves an A, you do." So the next semester I went to her early, and I said, "What are the chances of getting an A this semester?" Well, you know, she had papers from time to time. She didn't hand back any papers, so you had no way of knowing what you were doing or how you were doing, and gave me the same grade the second semester. I think that was the semester I was going up to [U.C.] Berkeley. Then when I was in [U.C.] Berkeley, and I think some of those people who were— Now, she was Spanish, but in Berkeley this man was Caucasian. He left my last semester, I'm sure in the middle or before the middle of the semester, to go to Spain. A man I had had the very first year for one of my Spanish courses took over his class, and he gave the final examination. And you know, usually you—I mean, I shouldn't say usually—but you may put a postcard in and your professor will send you your grade before your official card comes out with all the grades from the registrar. And the substitute professor gave me an A. Do you know that that man had the nerve to send grades from Spain. And when I got my official one, I didn't have an A. And here he had been gone and he didn't give the final examination or anything else. And I didn't bother to protest it because I was already in the honor society and so forth. But I knew it was just plain prejudice because I was a Negro. And especially, I had a pretty good accent. They think that maybe you'll try to be passing for Spanish or something. But some of them just don't want a Negro, I guess, whether it's Spanish or a language or something else. There are always a few of them around who have those little built-in prejudices.

KELLEY

Were those experiences common among black students?

MATTHEWS

I don't think so. As a matter of fact this man that I took that first semester I was there for a course, one black student said, "Oh, don't take him. He never gives a black students a good grade." And I couldn't change. There were two courses for that particular thing with another person teaching it, but because of my schedule I couldn't change to that other one. And he was the one who gave me an A, you know, when this other man went to Spain. And so you never know whether it's prejudice or whether the person didn't earn it. It could be either one or the other, I don't know. And then sometimes, I know, they'll be nice to one black student and not to another. Sometimes it's personality. Because I've

known of cases where, you know, they knew they were black and all of that. As a matter of fact, in the library [Los Angeles Public Library], there was a Branch Librarian who had preceded me at Vernon Branch [Library], not immediately, but I read the old reports. And when the Negroes first started moving in the neighborhood, she made some kind of little remark. It wasn't a bad remark, but it sort of made you kind of wonder whether she might be a little prejudiced. Well, later on she became a very close friend of mine and she chose me in preference to some of the other white Branch Librarians for certain things. And I don't know whether she said this to me or I overheard it. She said, "She doesn't like any race; she just likes people or individuals." And, of course, I tried to tell a lot of people, because I had some of them— The very first time I got my first permanent appointment, a Children's Librarian had to come and give me the key, because I was working Saturday morning alone as a professional that first morning, and to show me where the cash was and where everything was. And she made some remark about, you know— I don't know just how she put it. She liked Negroes all right, but she didn't care for the Japs. And I said, "Well, I don't appreciate anyone lumping everybody together." And then I said, "And Japs is not a proper term. They're Japanese." And I said, "And I think if they dislike one minority they may dislike me too behind my back." And we became good friends. But I never let people speak about any minority. Even a matter of saying— Well, of course, this woman didn't say it in a way that she disliked Negroes. She just meant she liked individuals, and I can appreciate that because I don't like all Negroes. Do you? There are good ones and bad ones in every race and every nationality and every ethnic group. And that's what I try to tell people, you know. Meet people where they are and treat them for what they are.

KELLEY

What about your experiences in library school at [U.C.] Berkeley?

MATTHEWS

The only thing— All of the people were very nice. We each had our desk. There were thirty desks in the room, and we all exchanged assignments if somebody didn't get it or if they had a question and thought this person might do it and save them going to look it up. We were like one big family. The only thing that I can recall about library school, in terms of the teachers or the students, when we went on a field trip to Sacramento, we went on a train. We went to the [California] State Library. When we were going, the train was crowded, so we couldn't sit together. But coming back we got on an empty train at the end of the line, and there was an uneven number. And so nobody sat with me. So the teachers one by one would come and sit with me, because they were all sitting together. I'm trying to remember how many went, you know, of the teachers, whether there were two or three or whether they were an even number

or not. But one by one they would sit with me for a while, because I don't think the train ever got crowded going back. And as I say, we got on an empty train. So that was the only thing in terms of being out somewhere that they didn't choose to sit by me. [mutual laughter]

KELLEY

But within the school itself, it was a pleasant experience?

MATTHEWS

Oh, yes. I had no problems at all. And I don't know whether I had mentioned to you earlier that Miss Helen Spots, who was the Branch Librarian at Jefferson Branch [Library], and that's where I had my first substitute work— I substituted for her when she went on vacation for a month, then I went to Vermont Square [Branch Library] for two weeks, then I came back for four weeks to Jefferson Branch [Library], to substitute for the librarian. And she [Miss Spots] was very impressed with the work I did. I wrote book reviews. I forgot to mention this branch was white. It was on Arlington and Jefferson, but at that time the little enclave of Negro residents in what they call the West Jefferson district, those people never went beyond Western, going west. If they were going anywhere, they'd always go east. So if they stopped at another branch, it would be University Branch [Library], going towards town, which was right off of Jefferson. Or they would go clear downtown if they were going to work in that direction. So she [Miss Spots] had me write some reviews for the—I think we had two or three black newspapers then—for the newspapers. Then I think I even did a little ringing of doorbells in that neighborhood to let people know that if they went a few blocks that way they would be closer to a branch. And so she said one of her white patrons came to her one day and said he didn't want her advertising in those "nigger papers." [mutual laughter]

1.3. TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (October 11, 1985)

KELLEY

What was required of you in library school at the University [of California] at Berkeley?

MATTHEWS

Well, during the first semester we had courses in various subjects: book selection, reference work, history of books, and a number of— There were certain subjects that were required and there were a few we could make selections in terms of whether we preferred to specialize in public library administration or county libraries, university libraries or that kind of thing. But generally speaking, the course was tailored so a person could graduate from that and go into any kind of a library, with only a little specialty of one or two courses that you might take if you thought you were going to be in university or

public library field. But the first semester they gave you a lot of work. I didn't think it was difficult, but I felt that they gave you too much. The volume was too great. The need wasn't there. You know, for example, if you had a particular type of thing that you needed to learn, you wouldn't have to do it a hundred times to learn it, maybe twenty times would be enough. And so I thought they worked us to death. Well, when I came home at Christmas, or at least prior to coming home at Christmas, I decided it would be a good idea to get some practice work in during the month's vacation we had off between semesters. And I asked one of the professors to write to Los Angeles Public Library and set it up. And she had to tell them that I was a Negro, and they sent me to Helen Hunt Jackson Branch[Library], because it had perhaps a larger Negro population than any of the others, even though it was still less than half Negro. But it was a small branch, and Christmas is a slow time, because a lot of people are so busy shopping for Christmas, they don't do their regular reading. And I would have done much more reference work or had more practice doing reference work at the Vernon Branch, which wasn't too far away. When I arrived at Helen Hunt Jackson Branch, the Branch Librarian, Mrs. Hortense Mitchell, was very gracious and very kind to me, and went out of her way to give me some indoctrination in things I possibly wouldn't have gotten at the larger branch, even though I might have done a few more reference questions. She told me about the book ordering, even took me downtown [Los Angeles] to the book order meeting and introduced me to a number of the Branch Librarians and was a real good mentor and guide. Also, when she happened to be at a book order meeting, the City Librarian came by—and I don't know why she'd come by Helen Hunt Jackson Branch, such a small branch—with some visitors from out of town. And she saw that the branch was overloaded with books, because it was Christmas, and she asked me how come the shelves were so crowded. And I told her Christmas is for shopping and a lot of people are not doing their regular reading, especially those who just read for recreation. And when the Branch Librarian came back and I told her that she had been there and what questions she had asked—she may have asked me some other question, but that's the one I remember—she said, "Splendid." You know, the answer I gave. The children's librarian, I don't know why she should have been that way, but she said, "I don't know what she's doing asking you." Of course, I wondered why she was asking me too, because here I was a student just doing some practice work. [mutual laughter] But I didn't say, "I don't know." I did make an answer, and the Branch Librarian was very satisfied. And when I finally came home after finishing library school, it was she who suggested to me that I go to see the second Assistant City Librarian to get on doing practice work. Now, I had already been downtown and had a conversation with the first Assistant City Librarian, and she hadn't even told me

that they had people doing practice work. And then after that, I happened to go into the history department [of the Central Library] and here's one of the girls from my class who lived in San Francisco. She's all the way from San Francisco, already had a job doing substitute work in Los Angeles. But when I went to my first position— Well, I guess I should go back in terms of [University of California, Berkeley] library school, because after my practice work in Los Angeles at Christmastime, the second semester was so easy for me because I could see the application of all of the facts we were learning. Everything, you know, was so easy for me, and I could do my lessons without any difficulty. And it happened too, while I was in library school, I kept saying to the instructors, "If I don't like this, I'll be back to the university to take something else." And three years after I was working, I happened to be in Berkeley and stopped over to see the people on campus, and one of them said, "Well, Miss Matthews, have you decided to come back to us?" she said—but she meant the [U.C. Berkeley] University. And I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "We never had a student in all of our years who kept saying all through the year, 'If I don't like this I'll be back to take something else.'" And I said, "I've forgotten I ever said it." I said, "It's just been perfect. It's just so ideal, I push the clock back so the day won't go so fast." But to go back to Mrs. Mitchell, who was the Branch Librarian at Helen Hunt Jackson Branch, her suggestions and her interest meant far more, I learned later, than having a little busier branch to do the substitute work for. Oh, and then my second semester at [U.C.] Berkeley they gave us Tuesdays to do our practice work the whole semester, and we could choose whichever-type library we wished: public library, county library, school library, college library. So I did all of mine at the university library, partly in the reference department and partly in the order department and so that gave me a rounded background. And it happened that the course at [U.C.] Berkeley, and I think most of the library schools in that era, were giving you well-rounded courses so that you could go into any field of library work. The only specialization would be one or two elective courses, a couple of units that you could choose public library or one other specialty. But generally speaking, you were supposed to be well-equipped for any type of library work after finishing the course at [U.C.] Berkeley.

KELLEY

So as soon as you received your certificate, you came back to Los Angeles to look for a job?

MATTHEWS

Uh-huh. We went on a trip—the family always came up for graduations—and when I finished with my A.B. we went up to Canada and back and stopped in Portland and Seattle. Then after the graduation— My brother, by the way, received his A.B. degree at the same time I received my library certificate. And

we stopped at Yosemite on our way home this time. And it happened on our way out of Yosemite, you know the roads are steep, and a certain turn we made a certain way, broke off one of the four blades of the— What is the thing that spins around?

KELLEY

Oh, the— I don't know.

MATTHEWS

Well, at any rate, the fan belt goes around it. So I guess it was the fan. And, of course, it made a horrible noise. So we had to go slowly, because the faster we went the more sound came. And we didn't know what was wrong. So we didn't want to have it break down on that mountainous road. When we got to the first city, I guess it must have been Fresno, big city, we arrived fairly early and had to wait for a place to open, and then they didn't have the part. But this man looked inside, and he said, "Oh, you just lost a blade off the fan." You see, apparently the fan belt was kind of loose, and when we went around a curve it leaned over in such a way the fan belt caught one of the blades. So he broke off the blade, there were four blades, the blade opposite that one; [we] came clear to Los Angeles, didn't have to have it fixed till we got home. And then we rode around Los Angeles a long time before we got a new fan. But it was a wonderful trip. And we arrived in May, and I was surprised. The snow wasn't fully melted on the falls, and we were lucky that we had some wool things and topcoats with us, because it was really cold, almost freezing in the place. And we thought by May, you know, that— Because of the enclosure, it's kind of like a valley as well as the mountains there, and so we were very happy that we were comfortable in terms of what we had with us to wear.

KELLEY

When you arrived in Los Angeles, now you're looking for a job. What happened?

MATTHEWS

Well, immediately, I don't remember whether it was the very first day, I went down to Central Library and asked to see the Assistant City Librarian and told her I'd finished the course and was looking for a job. And she told me, you know, you'd have to take the Civil Service [Examination]. Oh no, she didn't say that right away. She took me around to all the third floor departments, which are nonpublic departments and explained about things and was very gracious and spent quite a little while with me. I'm sure it was almost an hour. Then when I was about to leave she asked me if I planned to take the Civil Service Exam. And I said, "Oh yes." She said it's usually given in June, gave me a post card to address to myself, and said it would save me going over to the branch to look, because they always had such a stack of announcements posted on the bulletin board and you'd take an hour maybe to wade through them all to see if

the library one was there. And see, the staff might not immediately weed out all the ones that had expired, because they possibly would do it once a week. She said that would save me, so they would notify me as soon as the announcements were out. Well, the reason she was doing it that way was because the announcements were already out and she didn't want me to go to the branch and discover that it was almost time for the filing to close. And I'm sure it wasn't more than a week, might even have been shorter than a week, I was going downtown to shop. I was going to shop in the morning, have my lunch, and go to a movie in the afternoon, so I would have been gone all day. Naturally, my mother wouldn't have known where I was and certainly wouldn't have been able to contact me by telephone. And just five minutes before I left the house, our family physician called and asked my mother—she happened to answer the phone—if I had planned to take the Civil Service [Exam] for the public library. And she said, "Yes, but it's not given until June." He said, "I'm reading my morning paper, and this is the last day to file." And we got the evening paper at home, and then I'm not sure whether they ran those Civil Service ads in the evening paper. So I went downtown to Civil Service and filled out the application form. And normally I would have gotten the form, brought it home, and filled it out, but I had to fill it out and leave it. And you had to give a couple of references, so I had to look up their names, I mean their telephones and addresses in the telephone book. So then they didn't know I knew about the exam and that I was going to take it. Because normally the practice had been for them to notify the oral board, to flunk you on the oral. And then, see, if you didn't pass, they didn't have to worry about not giving you a job. And when I went in, I must have passed the written, because I don't think they let you take the oral unless you did pass the written. The girls who were sitting out—you know, they gave you appointments—outside in the waiting room, were all just trembling and nervous and so afraid. And finally when I got in, the woman—they only had one person; later they had three people on the oral boards—she said, "You're not afraid of me, are you?" And I said, "No, should I be?" And she said, "Well, all the others have come in here in fear and trembling." And so, I guess that might have been a point to my credit too. And, you know, it's surprising, when I think back about the way I responded in certain situations when I was younger, even though I was kind of a retiring person all through my childhood and even partly through college, I just was very matter-of-fact. So then, she asked me a number of questions, and then she asked me what I thought of the exam. And I told her I thought it was very poorly organized, because here were ten questions, each of them counting ten points. For cataloging, they had three or four pages of things you had to give the proper number for; for the classics, you had to match up authors and titles. There were about four things that were big assignments that they had several

pages that you went through. Or else, let's see, yes. And the other two I think were essay type. Here they ask, counting a tenth, for you to name five titles written by Stewart Edward White, who was a California author. He wrote westerns, but of the historical type, not, you know, the entertainment type. And then give the plots of two. The other question was, [Robert] Burns Mantle every year took the plays on Broadway and selected the ten best, and he published a book on the ten best. Well, they always emphasize both those people in the course at [Library School] Los Angeles Public Library. [U.C.] Berkeley didn't even mention Burns Mantle. And as a matter of fact, when I took my book selection, a woman from the Los Angeles Public Library School came up, because the director was on a sabbatical leave, and they had different people piecemeal to do the classes that he would have taught. And so apparently, she didn't mention Burns Mantle, although I think more than one person taught book selection. I think a woman came from New York to teach part of it, so maybe it didn't come into her part. So I told her I knew I didn't know either one of them. She said, "What did you do?" I said I gave a substitute answer. I always went to all the plays. In fact, when we were very young, my mother always took us to the legitimate theater. And so I said, I gave the names of five plays I had seen the previous year and the plots of two; but Broadway plays didn't reach California for a couple of years, especially if they were popular. And for the other one, I guess I substituted some other author. I knew, you know, who this man was, I hadn't read any books by him. She said, "Well, you would get 50 percent if you gave a good substitute answer." So I guess that's— And I knew all the other stuff was stuff I had just finished studying. So I knew the Dewey decimal and the cataloging and the classics and all the others. The others didn't bother me at all, those real heavy questions. So I don't know whether I got a breakdown of the oral and the written, so I don't know how it worked out that way, but when I— By the time this Branch Librarian said go and ask this assistant—second Assistant City Librarian—for a substitute job, I had already had my oral, you see. But they hadn't processed them, so we didn't know where we stood and what the grade was. And this woman said, when I walked into her office, "We see you've taken the Civil Service Exam." And under my breath I said, "No thanks to you." You know, because they wanted me to miss it. And I guess they were surprised that I was— They didn't know how I found out, but I could have just accidentally been over to that branch where that Branch Librarian was, and she might have mentioned, "Are you signed up for the exam for next week?" You see, if I had— But I possibly, you know, happened not to have been over there in this short time between my interview with the woman downtown and the time my physician called. And so then she told me that they were going to, they had to— Let's see, was it twenty-six? I think they had twenty-six graduates from

their library school, the LAPL [Los Angeles Public Library]. And she said, "Of course, you know we're going to have to appoint our people first." I said, "I thought this was a Civil Service Examination. I expect to be appointed where I appear on the list." And even then I didn't know how well I had done and where I would appear on the list. And I said "Now, the mere fact I went to Berkeley to school didn't remove my residence from Los Angeles." And I said, "And even if it did, I still was eligible to take the Civil Service Examination." And so then she said—let's see, what did she say after that? Oh! "Well, what if you're not high enough on the list." They expected to have eighteen appointments, and, see, they had twenty-six in their class. And, of course, when she said they have to appoint their twenty-six, they couldn't appoint their twenty-six even. And I said, "Well, I'll go back to Berkeley and get my master's." It took two years to get your master's. She immediately sent me out to start doing practice work, because nobody, even the City Librarian, had a master's in library science. And so they weren't about to have me have a master's degree. Jefferson was the first branch, but— Oh, I know. It was when she went to write my phone number. The numbers, the exchange for the ones that were very far east was Humboldt. And so she already had the "H-U-" written down before I gave her the number. And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry, that's not correct." And I'm trying to remember now what our exchange was, but it was an exchange that went across to the Westside. And then something else. Oh, she said about how I would get there. And then she thought I would take the Hooper Avenue car which was very far east. That's well beyond Central Avenue. And I said, "No, I take the San Pedro Street car." And so she was sort of buffaloed every step of the way. But before we got to that point though, she asked me why I didn't go South to do some "pioneer work for my people." And I said, "If I wish to do any pioneer work, I would need some experience first." Because, usually, you know, they didn't have all the equipment and everything else that one would need and maybe might have to even set up a library. And I said, "If I wish to do any pioneer work for my people, I would need some experience first, and I can think of no better place to get it than right here at home." And so I ran into several things with her, but I was polite about it. Then when I told you I went to that first place to practice, it's a wonder they sent me to Jefferson Branch, where there were no Negro patrons, and then to Vermont Square. Later on, I was finally sent to Helen Hunt Jackson; that was my second branch. The first branch where I was, Robert Lewis Stevenson Branch [Library], was strictly WASP. There was one little pocket of Mexicans who lived way on the edge of the city, and only the children came with some of the school classes. And I think the school classes got there once or twice a semester. And they did borrow a few Spanish books—and most of the parents didn't speak English—they did borrow a few Spanish books from the foreign department, and then we would let children

take adult books like that, because we'd know they would be too difficult for them to read, if their parents wanted a book in Spanish. And so, strictly, it was a white, middle-class community. Beyond that, there were several patrons. There was a retired physician and his wife, who belonged to every literary club in the city. I didn't even know there were so many. There was a Shakespeare Club, a Browning Club, a this and a that and the other. So they were inveterate readers and good readers. They wouldn't let anybody wait on them but me. There was an Episcopal minister. He wouldn't let anybody wait on him but me. So if I was in the office doing my busywork, they would always have the person at the desk ring for me to come out. And after I left the branch to go to Helen Hunt Jackson Branch, I don't remember how long afterwards I went, but the girl who succeeded me and was the first assistant, shortly after she came there, she was standing in the safety zone for the street car a block away from the library, and a car came and knocked her down in the safety zone. And she was in the hospital unconscious for a long time. They didn't even know at first whether she would live. So it must have been at least a year later I went to visit the book club, and when I arrived it was kind of early and a few people were already in the auditorium. And when I went in, a woman ran and grabbed me and hugged me and said, "Oh, my dear, how are you?" And I said, "I'm fine," and I had no idea that she had any notion I had had an accident. But you see, what they used to say, they'd call them by "Branch Librarian," the "senior librarian," the "children's librarian," and so somebody must have said that they didn't see me there and they didn't ask for Miss Matthews. Now those other people I was telling you about would have asked for me by name, but she probably didn't ask for me by name: "Where's the senior librarian?" And then they said, "Oh, didn't you know she was knocked down by this automobile in the safety zone?" So she told me when she was saying, "How are you?" "I prayed for you every night," and then found out she meant the other girl. I had heard about that other person having this accident, and I said, "Oh, that was somebody who took my place, and she was hurt right after she came on the staff, so you probably hadn't gotten a chance to see her." And when I went home and told my mother, because— Oh, I forgot to tell you. This woman had a retarded daughter who must have been in her twenties and possibly had an IQ of an eight-year-old. And the thing that everybody on the staff disliked about them—they must have had a room to rent, but no decent place to stay—they came to the library every day and stayed all day. And we had to put them out at nine o'clock at night. So one night it had started raining and they had to walk some blocks, and they went around and asked everybody on the staff if they had a ride, if they could take them home. And I told them that my family picked me up and it would depend on whether they brought the small car or the large one, because if they brought the coupe— Usually two people came, and

only three of us could sit in the front, and they brought the big car, of course. And you know how young people are; I was silly enough to hope they'd bring the small car that night. And they were standing right under the little awning outside the door with newspaper over their heads, and I went down to the car and I told my mother that they wanted a ride. She said, "Of course. Tell them to come on." And so they came, and they wanted us to let them off at the corner, and my mother took them right to the door. And then when I told my mother about them praying, she said, "Nobody's prayers ever hurt anybody." And she also, you know, was giving me the lesson that you help anybody, even if they are a nuisance.

KELLEY

You know, in 1929, I guess this is after you worked at Jefferson Branch and Vermont Branch—?

MATTHEWS

Now wait, that was substituting.

KELLEY

That was substituting—

MATTHEWS

The first summer. I started on July the eighth and I finished substituting the middle of September, just two weeks before the permanent appointments were made. Then I secured my permanent appointment. And then the fact that this woman [the second Assistant City Librarian] was telling me they'd have to appoint all their people first— And it happened in those days if you were absent one day they sent a substitute. So every time somebody was sick—I didn't miss a day for twenty-four years, and then I wasn't sick; I had an accident—every time a substitute came out, it showed you how much they thought about me, because why would they tell each substitute coming out all about me. And so they would say sometime during the day, "You finished at [U.C.] Berkeley, didn't you?" And you see, that showed that they thought a lot about a university credential rather than just the LAPL [Los Angeles Public Library school]. Practically everybody else in the system had finished at Los Angeles Public Library [school] except for one or two. Now, one other girl had finished from Berkeley. I don't know whether she finished before or after I did. And one or two who came from the East might have finished somewhere in a university library. But generally speaking, practically the whole staff had finished at Los Angeles Public Library.

KELLEY

I see, but in '29 you began to review books on the radio?

MATTHEWS

Oh, yes. When I went to Helen Hunt Jackson Branch is when I started doing the book reviews. Now they had a public relations person and they made all of

the contacts with the radio stations. I don't know whether that woman selected me or whether one of the other heads had suggested me. I don't know how they happened to ask me to do this, but I was selected, and I don't know how many they had. And we didn't do it, you know, maybe more often than every two months, something like that, but I did it for about five years. And I didn't just review Negro books. In fact, when I went to Helen Hunt Jackson [Branch], they had a small Negro collection. That's the first I ever knew anything about Negro history or anything else. But when I did my reviews, occasionally I did, you know, do a book on the Negro. And I remember the first one I did. Isn't it funny how one thing sticks in your mind? It was a half hour program, and I think I did six books. I remember Europe in Zigzags, which was a travel book that was very interesting and so forth. My father was working in a home where the people were living—it wasn't a new house—and he asked them to turn on the radio so he could hear me. And they sat and listened too, and, oh, were they impressed. They didn't know I was reading it. And it happened that first time—You know, when you practice at home to see whether it will fill the half hour, just before I left I read it, and it seemed that I had too much. So instead of taking it with me, I left one book at home. And when I did it on the air, I did it more rapidly than I did at home and I had five minutes left when the program ended, so he had to play a record. Well, later on, on one of the stations, we had only fifteen minutes, and usually I'd have three books, with the third one a short one. And, I don't whether it was the first time I had the fifteen minute one or later, but he put up a two-minute sign from the booth and then a one-minute sign to let you know, because, you know, you have to cut off exactly. And I don't know whether it was the two-minute sign or the one-minute sign, and I said, "My third book." And I could see him practically fall through the floor there thinking that I should have stopped right then and there. And I had three pages, they were half pages, typed, like this, and I picked one sentence from each of these three pages, not knowing in advance I'm going to have to do this. And they summed up the book very well, and I finished right on time, and he did this— Also, sometimes when I was going up the elevator to this, somebody saw me and they said, "Are you performing?" or something. And I said, "Yes." And I don't know, they said, "What are you singing? or "What instrument do you play?" I said, "Oh, I'm giving book reviews for the library." And they looked so surprised. Another time when I had an opportunity to do a program, I think it was sponsored by some organization, and this man didn't know I'd had some experience with radio and so forth. And, I'm trying to think what happened then that, whether it was during my performance or afterwards or whether he was trying to tell me ahead of time what to do. And then after I performed, he was very surprised and let me know, you know, that he hadn't expected [it]. And then I was surprised, too, after the station stopped giving the

library this free time, the head of the Department of Work With Children called me up one day and said she had written a script for children's work and wanted me to do it on the air. They had gotten the spot, just a one-time spot, and I thought, with all the children's librarians she had to draw from, why would she call me? And I said something to her, I don't know what I said, but she said, "Well, everybody knows that you have the best voice for radio in the library." And I was so amazed because that was the first time anybody had ever said anything. Then when I finished it and she called to thank me, she said, "I didn't realize I had so many S's in there, and you didn't hiss once." You know, because a lot of times people make a hissing sound with the S's. And I forgot to say, when they were cutting back on the number of people doing the reviews, this woman who was head of public relations—I kind of thought she was a little prejudiced—she said, "Just bring a book and just read a paragraph." They were testing people, and the man in the booth was not going to look at anybody. She would just introduce, this is Miss Smith, and this is Miss so-and-so, and then we would do our little paragraph, and then he would be jotting down his notes. Well, I'll be willing to bet, because most people brought something they had done already before, that I was the only one she said to bring a book and read a paragraph, just any book, any paragraph. But this is the other thing: there were two men and all the rest were women. And she said, "We'll have the two men last." She said, "I'll come to you"—you see, we were all in one little room there and we had to be quiet, naturally—"and tell you when you're going to be next." And then, of course, you just step up there, and then she would say this is Miss so-and-so. Well, she told me I was going to be next—I don't know at what point—then she got up there and introduced somebody else and did that all the way through the two men. And then she was telling the man this is all. And then everybody yelled out, "No, Miss Matthews!" So then she thought I'd be so upset that I'd do a bad job. And the only thing— My only fault was the paragraph that I chose didn't have a great deal of interest to it. But the man selected me. And the one person she was pushing was an eighteen-year-old clerk typist. I don't think she had done it before, but she was so friendly with her and she wanted her to get it. His comment on her was: "an old, tired voice." And the only criticism of mine was, "It was a little monotonous." And it was because of what I was reading rather than the fact that I normally was monotonous. But I got on anyway, you know, among the ones who were selected, and she didn't do the selecting. But wasn't that a dirty trick?

KELLEY

Yeah, that's ridiculous. As you began working in the library system, especially at the Helen Hunt Jackson [Branch] library, because it was more connected to the black community, did you begin to come into contact with sort of black professionals or black intellectuals in Los Angeles who—

MATTHEWS

Well, of course, I knew people normally. Earlier I think I may have talked to you informally once and said that in the beginning the population was so small you practically knew everyone. But eventually it got larger. You still knew a lot of people, and naturally I knew all the professional people at that time, because they didn't have so many. Of course, now there are so many doctors and lawyers and this, that, and the other, that I am always hearing a new name. And they come so frequently that in a couple of years they think they're old-timers. In fact, I went to a party one time, and I don't know whether I was introduced to this woman or whether we introduced ourselves. And she said, "Are you new here?" To me! And I said, "No, I was practically born here." I said, "When did you come?" And she'd been here a couple of years, thought she was an old-timer. And so the city had gotten to the point where you just couldn't know everyone.

KELLEY

So—

MATTHEWS

Oh, and then I organized a book club when I went to Helen Hunt Jackson Branch, I think, let me see, possibly almost immediately. The first meeting I sent out letters and had them mimeographed downtown and then advertised in the newspapers. I don't know whether I— There wasn't any local white neighborhood newspaper. And at that time you didn't run things generally for local things in the [Los Angeles] Times or one of the metropolitan newspapers; in fact, there were several metropolitan newspapers at that time: [Los Angeles] Herald Express. You see, the Express was one paper and the Herald was another, and then eventually they combined. And there was a [Los Angeles] Daily News, and a number of papers. In fact, a lot of those papers that died were the more liberal ones. A long time ago, oh, the Times was just so conservative. You couldn't find anything in there about a black unless it was a criminal. And so—going back to the book club—the auditorium was overrunning. They had to stay out in the children's room and listen. And, fortunately, I had the people speaking from the front of the room, so, of course, they could hear them very easily from the next room. And at the time it began, at eight o'clock, business was not quite as busy—I mean, it wasn't quite as busy generally that it would disturb the other people in the library. The adult side was way over the other side of the building. And the Assistant City Librarian and one other person from Central Library came to the first meeting, and they went back to Central Library and told the City Librarian, who was a man—Everett Parry was the City Librarian when I went there, and I don't think he was prejudiced—and told him about, you know, how successful it was and how well the program was run. Then he wrote me a letter congratulating me and

asking to be notified about the next meeting, but he never did come. But see, it might not have been a convenient time. But maybe he just wanted to let me know in that way that he was very interested. And I had different people in the community to do the reviews. There was one young fellow whose name was Bruce Forsythe. I'm trying to remember, he had another name too. It was Harold, I believe, and he used both names. But I think Bruce was his given name. And, oh, he was an avid reader. And he could write well, too. He wrote for the newspapers, sometimes just some comments. I don't think it was a regular column. But a very astute and verbal person.

KELLEY

He's black, right?

MATTHEWS

Oh, yes. In fact, I'm trying to recall, I don't believe I had any but black people to do the reviewing except for the one woman, Miss Helen Haines, who was a lecturer at Central Library. And any branch with a book club could request her services once a year. So I invited her, I don't know how soon after I went there, and had a huge crowd then. I always did special calling upon people and everything to be sure there would be a big crowd then. And she lived in Pasadena, and after the meeting— In fact, I think they told me in the beginning that we had to provide transportation back to Pasadena, because she couldn't go home that late after nine thirty or ten o'clock by herself and get to the streetcar and all of that. So my brother and I drove her to Pasadena, and we chatted all the way. So later I stopped asking for her, because I always had to do [more than] what I thought I had to do, to be sure I'd have a huge crowd that time. In the Vernon Branch, which was a big branch, and I don't know whether they had a regular book club or whether they just asked for her once a year, they were asking for her for the year I had planned not to ask for her. And then she said no, she wouldn't go back there; they didn't have enough of a crowd. So then she asked to come to Helen Hunt Jackson [Branch]. So I had to have her whether I would or not, because she wanted to come. And I think that's when she became better acquainted with me. Because when she taught for, let's see, I think it was five weeks— You know, I told you the director of the Library School [LAPL] was on sabbatical, and she was the person who taught book selection in Los Angeles [LAPL school]. And Los Angeles [LAPL school] began in September, maybe after the middle of September, and [U.C.] Berkeley [library school] began in the middle of August. So she had four or five weeks to give Berkeley. But they had us doing it [attending class] six days a week. Normally, we didn't even have classes on Saturday, but she had us for two hours every day, six days a week in order to cram into five weeks what would normally go into a whole semester. And they had sent us a book list to read during the summer, because you see, that was the worst course of all to have consolidated since you had a

lot of books to read. We had a whole catalog drawer full of reviews we had to write, you know, of these various books. And so it really put the pressure on. And I don't recall having any special personal association with her, just listening to her talk and have her correct my work, you know, afterwards. And so I feel it was possibly when she came to Helen Hunt Jackson Branch to do those reviews and when we talked on the way to her home, that she became better acquainted with me.

1.4. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (October 26, 1985)

KELLEY

During the 1930's you were involved in a number of local organizations and committees. One of these organizations was the Community Coordinating Council. Now, I was wondering if you could comment on the activities of the council and your participation in it?

MATTHEWS

The Community Coordinating Councils were organized in various local communities, not separate cities, but various sections of Los Angeles and throughout Los Angeles County. There was an overall body called the Federation of Community Coordinating Councils, which met once a month, and the local councils sent a delegate to the monthly meetings. Once a year there would be a large meeting, annual meeting, where many people would go in addition to the regular delegate. In 1935— I should say I joined the Coordinating Council in 1934 when I first went to the Vernon Branch, and belonged to Coordinating Councils in that area, the Watts area and the Exposition area, from 1934 to 1960 when I retired. So I gave a lot of time to this organization, which was organized to have a community discover and meet its needs. It provides the common ground on which citizens express their concerns and use administrative authority to meet and achieve action. The councils were composed of interested citizens, representatives of all public and private agencies, civic, religious, fraternal, business, labor, service and other groups. It was a co-operative process which made possible many community accomplishments which individual organizations and citizens could not have achieved alone. In the beginning I served on what they call the Environment Committee on the—when I was at the Vernon Branch. And the Vernon Branch served not always as a meeting place, because they met sometimes at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and various other places. But we prepared book lists. We had certain special activities at the Vernon Branch Library in the auditorium, certain types of classes that were for either young people or parents or older people. And in many ways we were a focal point for many of the activities. In 1935 when they had the annual meeting of the

Federation of Community Coordinating Councils, I was selected to appear on a panel discussing what had been accomplished in our particular area, and I was the youngest person on the panel and really was in awe of these older people who had such a long experience and exposure to the media and all of that. And I was very surprised after we had made our individual presentations that most of the questions were directed to me. I had told about some of the activities we had at the library and how we handle some of the children who just came to the library to socialize rather than to study. And so when they were giving questions, one person said, "Well, what do you do for them after nine o'clock when the library closes?" And I said, "We put them in the hands of their parents." I guess he was expecting us to stay with them all night.

KELLEY

What was sort of the racial make-up of these organizations, the Community Coordinating Councils? Because the communities at that time were—

MATTHEWS

Well, they were a reflection of the local community, and so there would be people of all races. For a long time in all of them you find that most of the people representing social agencies were white. There were very few [blacks] who had jobs in the police department, or if there were one or two, they weren't the ones sent to represent the police department at the Coordinating Council—and with the social workers and many others. So in many cases, there were very few blacks, in terms of those representing agencies. Now, in terms of individual parents or citizens who were interested, there would be more of them [blacks], but still not an enormous number in the early days of the Coordinating Council, as I recall it.

KELLEY

How effective would you say these Coordinating Councils were in trying to implement their programs?

MATTHEWS

I thought the ones that I had contact with did a very good job. And there were many times certain problems were brought up and they would appoint a committee and find a solution.

KELLEY

Do you remember some these problems specifically?

MATTHEWS

Well, in some cases it might have to do with children who were naughty. I remember there was a time when after school, the children, there was a large lawn behind the Vernon Branch Library, and they would come back there to have their fights. And one day it happened a fight started when a man who was a probation officer happened to be in the library, and he went out there and quietly settled it, talked with the school and arranged it so that [there] never

[would be] people coming directly from school, finding a place to start a fight and then with a large crowd to egg them on. There were other things that were, of course, more pressing in terms of a long-range plan. There were special classes. I remember we had a physician and a psychologist to come and talk to young girls in the evening, but they had to be accompanied by an adult. Now their parents did not have to come, but if there was one mother in a block she could bring all the girls in her block. And the reason they wanted them accompanied by an adult was because they wanted someone to see what type of information they were getting. And this was early, before there was so much information available on TV and various other ways. And the physician who presided and the psychologist and the parents were very much amazed at the questions the girls asked. And it happened they were planned for girls from fourteen to eighteen, and they had girls from eleven to fourteen. And they were what you might term very sophisticated questions. Some of the parents just possibly would have been so amazed they wouldn't have been able to answer. And then in some cases, parents don't know how to explain it simply and scientifically. So we felt that was a very good service, and the fact that it attracted these very young girls showed it was needed. Because, see, they pick this up at school and get misinformation. Then we also had Arna Bontemps, who was an outstanding author, to start a little theater group. They began by just having those who were interested read plays and read different parts. I've forgotten how long that lasted but he didn't stay here on a permanent basis. His father lived here and at one time he had lived here. But he was back and forth. So he might have been here for a number of months and got something started, but I think once he left it fell apart. And then later on, I think it was in '39, Langston Hughes tried to get a Negro theater started. But his was not in connection with the library. They got a small theater somewhere and had performances I think Thursday, Friday and Saturday. And they had one series of plays, Don't You Want to be Free? by Langston Hughes, and two short skits. I believe those were by Langston Hughes as well. And it ran all through the spring. And then they were planning for a fall series and the fall series never occurred. So the sponsoring group for that little Negro theater reorganized and enlarged its membership and became the League of Allied Arts, which is still in existence today. And they have supported all types of arts: the theater, artists, music. And they've helped young people get scholarships, they've put on programs, they've introduced outstanding individuals who've come to the city for a brief time, and then they've had annual affairs to raise funds and have been very productive throughout this period.

KELLEY

So do you recall any of the participants in Arna Bontemps's theater?

MATTHEWS

You mean the children?

KELLEY

Yes.

MATTHEWS

Oh, they were just high school kids.

KELLEY

Ah, high school kids.

MATTHEWS

So, no, none of them were outstanding people. They were just trying to get the young people going. And as I say, he didn't really stay long enough, and there was no one—I don't recall whether he tried to get someone to take over the leadership after he left. There was one person I know who was fairly young at the time who was interested in the arts. She wasn't and I don't believe, a professional actress or anything, and she may have taken over for a little while, but it could be that the majority of the group lost interest for some reason.

KELLEY

Back to the Coordinating Council. You know, you're looking at three different communities: Watts, Exposition and [pause]—

MATTHEWS

South Central.

KELLEY

South Central.

MATTHEWS

See, the Vernon Branch was a South Central Community Coordinating Council.

KELLEY

In each respective community, what would you say was the level of community participation?

MATTHEWS

I would say most of the participation, in terms of action, came from the people representing the agencies, the public agencies. But parents, you know, would follow through in some cases if special classes or something were organized. I remember they had some at the YMCA so that parents would know how to handle certain problems if they occurred in terms of their own children. So they were trying to educate all levels in various ways.

KELLEY

Okay. Other than the libraries, what were some of the other public agencies represented?

MATTHEWS

Oh, the police departments, social workers, schools. And the schools, especially the principals, and in some cases the principals were the ones who

represented the schools. It was very important, because then if you felt they [the children] weren't getting the proper training in the schools or if their department wasn't good going to and from the school or on the school grounds, then you could get right at it with the administrator.

KELLEY

Do you recall some of the names of the major participants—?

MATTHEWS

Oh, and the PTA's [Parent-Teacher Association] too were involved, I forgot to say.

KELLEY

PTA's, Okay. So that's bringing in the parents.

MATTHEWS

Yes.

KELLEY

Do you recall some of the names of the major participants in the councils?

MATTHEWS

Too long ago.

KELLEY

Okay. Well, we can turn to—

MATTHEWS

Oh, and I forgot to say, in terms of the councils, when I was in Watts I was in charge of programs for the PTA and programs for the council, too. And I recall one time when, I forget exactly how the subject was stated, but I made the comment that we should give the children a chance to express themselves in our organizations where there were adults and children, and give their side of the question. And some of the parents were horrified. "You mean to let them talk on an equal basis with us?" And I said, "Yes, why not?" I said, "They're adults now, or young adults, and if they can't do it now, when will they be able to do it? And they might be able to open your eyes." Because maybe the parents are looking at it from the wrong angle. And then when I went to Exposition Community Coordinating Council—I was at the Vermont Square Branch [Library] as regional supervisor, and I started out as president, and then eventually served as vice president, treasurer and was always on the executive board of all these councils and had a lot of valuable experience there—I was very surprised: there still weren't very many blacks attending meetings regularly. One person I had worked with for a long time, she was the wife of a professor from USC and she taught adult evening school herself. We had some type of a little meeting on race, and I said, "It's too bad there are only three Negroes here today." And after that meeting this woman told me she didn't know I was a Negro after all that long exposure to me. And, you know, the way I had talked generally, I would have thought, even if she hadn't thought I

looked like one, that she would have realized that. And so you're very surprised that some people are so blind. And then I realized that in some cases they just wouldn't have expected a black to be a regional librarian. So, occasionally, it's because of the position you occupy. Also, many people have felt that, you know, I act natural in any situation, whereas, in some cases they feel, especially earlier, that some blacks had, I suppose, a feeling of inferiority, I don't know what. But I couldn't see—I was just acting like an individual and a person who represented a particular agency. And whatever I had to say was of value no matter who was saying it, and in many cases, as I mentioned before, had nothing to do with race. It would just be problems, general problems, that would affect any person of any race, whether it was a young person or an old person.

KELLEY

You finally left the council in 1960, I believe?

MATTHEWS

Community Coordinating Council, yes, 1960, when I retired. That's when I left. And I received a certificate from the Los Angeles County [Board of] Supervisors.

KELLEY

How would you assess the council's overall accomplishments during this span of time?

MATTHEWS

Well, I'm not even certain the councils still exist, because I haven't been in touch. I know for several years after I retired, occasionally I would go to meeting, and Exposition Community Coordinating Council gave me a little plaque or a cup or something a few years after I had retired. But I haven't heard much about it in recent years or read anything in the newspapers about it, so it could be that it's no longer in existence.

KELLEY

It seemed like a good organization. You were also involved in various youth organizations: one, the Youth Commission of Los Angeles County, I believe?

MATTHEWS

Yes, I was appointed to the Los Angeles County Youth Commission, which was organized in 1938. Supervisor MacDonna was the supervisor in my district who appointed me. He had heard me speak at some meeting for my name and address and sent me the letter inviting me to become a member of the Commission. And he felt the way I felt when I said a few minutes ago that young people should express themselves and let people know how they feel about certain problems and how they think they should be handled. He felt that the [Los Angeles county] Supervisors needed that input from young people, and that was why they organized it. And I served two years. When I went to

New York in 1940, I left it, and when I came back, I didn't rejoin it. I don't recall, you know, taking any formal leave of absence or anything. It just was one of those things; when I came back from New York I was so busy and all, I didn't make any contacts. So I sort of just faded out of the picture. I don't recall any official letter of resignation or anything of that kind.

KELLEY

Do you remember when the organization came into being? Was it also 1938?

MATTHEWS

The Youth Commission? 1938, yes. I was one of the first members.

KELLEY

I see.

MATTHEWS

And during the time I was serving, one time there was a large meeting in an auditorium, and the person who was the president or the chairman had to leave for some reason and put me in the chair without giving me an opportunity to say no. So I was on the spot. And I was rather surprised, in view of my being the only black on the Commission, that he selected me to take the chair when he had to leave.

KELLEY

What were some of the specific goals and accomplishments of the Youth Commission?

MATTHEWS

Well, I do have some material, but I don't have it at hand at the moment. But we did all of the things that the Coordinating Councils were working on: programs that would improve the leisure time of the young people, because that's the time when they usually get into trouble, when they are free from school and there's nothing to keep them busy or entertained, and then various problems dealing with delinquency as well and having tie-ins with the schools and Boy Scouts [of America] and organizations that help character building and that kind of thing. And I don't remember all of the details. I do remember while I was serving on there I was also serving on the National Youth Administration [NYA] Committee for Los Angeles County. And all of these people focused on conditions that would help improve the future of our young people and make them better citizens.

KELLEY

Mary [Jane] McLeod Bethune was, I guess, the national—?

MATTHEWS

She was, yes. I don't recall whether she was the national head of the National Youth Administration dealing with blacks. I think that was the title that she had. I've forgotten exactly how it was. She wasn't head of the whole National Youth Administration.

KELLEY

But it was a New Deal agency, and they did have federal funding.

MATTHEWS

That's right. And, of course, she was very close with the [U.S.] President.

KELLEY

Yes, definitely. How effective was the NYA? I don't know how much activity—?

MATTHEWS

Well, I do remember during the time it was in existence, we had NYA young people working at the libraries—non-professional, of course, clerical jobs, usually pages for the most part. We eventually called them messenger clerks, those who shelved the books. But in some cases they might have done other clerical work. But the pay, naturally, was small, because it was during the time when all the salaries, even of the people who were on civil service lists, were small. But it gave them some training and some discipline, and several of the people that served as NYA pages now are doing very fine things. One of them is Albert MacNiel, who has the Gospel—I don't think he calls it Gospel Chorus. But he has a choir. He has been a choir director of several churches. He also has taught in the secondary schools in Los Angeles. And this choir that he has has traveled all over Europe and the Middle East in the summertime, and is quite renowned. And so we're very proud of how he turned out.

KELLEY

Do you remember anybody else who came through NYA?

MATTHEWS

Well, not in terms of who served as NYA, because you know in some cases you don't hear about them later unless they stay around and then did things like Albert did.

KELLEY

I'm curious, on a local level, how pervasive was the NYA in Los Angeles? If you were to sort of give a real basic estimate of the percentage of youth who at least had some sort of connection with the NYA at one time, would you—?

MATTHEWS

That would be impossible for me to comment on. [mutual laughter] Too far away. And as I mentioned, since I've been going through a number of my papers and unfortunately have not had an opportunity to read letters and other things, I find many surprises when I have come across certain information, because my memory, even though it's still, you know, reasonably good—and that's true with anyone, after a certain length of time, and if you've been busy in doing a number of things through the years—I've been very surprised when I've read a letter or a few comments in a little book I call the diary, but it's just, you know, something that you jotted down at a certain time. And one of the things I

discovered, that I had made a comment earlier that blacks didn't go to the proms in those early years when I was coming along. And I happened to find a little book when I was graduating from high school, and it said we went to the Star and Crescent Society meeting, which is an organization that all seniors are inducted into at Los Angeles High School. It's strictly an organization for Los Angeles High School. And they give you a little pin with a star and crescent on it. Then I said, "After the Star and Crescent Society Meeting, we went to the prom and it was terribly crowded." You see, I was just doing little jottings. And so that was a real surprise to me, because that was the one thing I felt, that even when they had the proms that the blacks didn't participate. Now I'm pretty sure this must have happened in the afternoon, because the Star and Crescent Society meeting would have been in the daytime, and so it probably was after school in the gym. And there's no business of having an escort or anything like that. You just went on over there. And later on, they began having the proms off campus at hotels, and then with the hotels not accepting everybody, that was one of the things that cut out some of the blacks from going, until later when they had to break down those barriers.

KELLEY

I see. Were you involved in any other youth organizations during this time?

MATTHEWS

Yes, after I graduated from college, I was a member of the National Intercollegiate Christian Council, which is composed of the YMCA's and YWCA's on campuses. And I was serving on the [inaudible] area, which covered the western states. And I also was chairman of the Interracial Committee. And it was a very interesting experience. And I found some of the people were very open and very unprejudiced, shall we say.

KELLEY

Now this is the Interracial Committee?

MATTHEWS

No, no. I'm speaking of the whole organization.

KELLEY

Oh, the whole organization, I see.

MATTHEWS

And as it happened, the Southern California section would go up to the north and have a meeting, and then the north would come south and have a meeting. And we would drive up in cars for wherever. We often met at lodges, not at a regular hotel. And the woman who was head of the Y[WCA] at UCLA at the time was a Southerner. I've forgotten which state she came from and how long she had been in California, but sometimes it never wears off. And one time when we drove up north, I was in the car with a certain group— And you know how it is, you talk and get pretty well acquainted. And then the next time we

went up she happened to be in the car, and she was sitting in the front seat and was supposed to be trying to do some committee business on the way, with I think two people sitting up front in addition to the driver. And this same person was in the back seat, and we got to talking about some things: he was going to study law and my brother was a lawyer, and we had talked about that the other time. It was not anything personal at all. She happened to overhear some of this and it sounded like we knew each other pretty well and all of this. She couldn't do her committee meeting [business] up front for turning around interrupting our conversation the whole trip up north. And then when we were coming back, it happened I was going to be the last one for this fellow to drive me home, and I could see that just worried her to death. We were at her house. She invited us in when we got to her house to have a bite to eat. And I think there were probably three people at the time. Maybe there would be two fellows, and one of them would be dropped off pretty soon, and I would be the last one to be dropped off. And I don't know what she thought could happen, but I saw she was so worried and so concerned, I called my father up from her house and had him come get me—she lived in West L.A.—and take me home. But I couldn't imagine any person being that concerned, you know, about grown-up people, and the kind of organization it was, and she could see the kind of person I was. Then another time, it wasn't the Intercollegiate Council, but it was under the YW[CA], I was invited to Santa Barbara to give a speech at a large conference, and I was amazed at how open and broad all of the people I met there were. And it happened my subject was "What the Negro Wants." And, oh, all over everywhere after I gave the talk, people came up to talk with me about it and say how impressed they were and how much, you know, more we needed to do to help Negroes have everything they should have. And I had an entirely different feeling about the whole organization after that experience with this one person who was in the Y[WCA].

KELLEY

So the Interracial Committee was part of the Intercollegiate Council?

MATTHEWS

Yes, they had committees, you know; many of the organizations have committees to do various parts of the work, because it simplifies everything to not have all the things thrashed out in the general meetings.

KELLEY

So what exactly what was the purpose of this particular committee, the Interracial Committee?

MATTHEWS

Well, just to improve race relations.

KELLEY

They would meet and have presentations and—?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't remember that we had very many presentations, because this other one that I spoke of, this meeting in Santa Barbara, had no connection with the Intercollegiate Christian Council. But since the Intercollegiate Christian Council was composed of the YM[CA] and YW[CA] of the universities, this other was the general YWCA that sponsored that particular meeting. And then, of course, I had no fault to find with the other people in the organization, the Intercollegiate Council. It was just this one woman but the fact that she was the secretary of the Y[WCA] at UCLA made it so pointed, that she was a person who was in authority and then was acting like that.

KELLEY

Yes, I mention this, because in Pasadena they had Interracial Committee meetings every week at the library.

MATTHEWS

Oh, just to get acquainted.

KELLEY

They would have presentations by various scholars on race relations or cultural manifestations, things like that. And I was curious if there was anything like that in Los Angeles?

MATTHEWS

I don't recall that this particular committee— Now, I personally went to universities and various places, but not representing the Intercollegiate Christian Council, and gave talks on black history or some similar subjects, and in that way was, you know, doing something to improve race relations. But I don't remember doing anything— See, now one thing, we were representing the whole West Coast, and so I imagine most of the things we did were written reports and maybe suggestions for reading.

KELLEY

I see. So you were invited to various universities to give lectures on black history and things like that?

MATTHEWS

Long time ago.

KELLEY

Do you recall any of those?

MATTHEWS

You mean the particular ones?

KELLEY

Not so much the presentations as much as some of the places you went and who you represented.

MATTHEWS

Oh, I was just representing myself.

KELLEY

So people knew you because of the radio shows, the radio book reviews.

MATTHEWS

Well, I'm not sure that many of them heard those, because they were during the work day in the afternoon. So I don't know whether it's more the people who were at home who happened to hear those.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

I remember the first one I did, my father was working at a home that was occupied and he asked the lady of the house if he could come in at a certain time to hear me, and she and some other members of her family sat and listened. And, oh, they were so impressed. They didn't know I was reading it; they thought I was doing it. And I guess that's something too, to be able to read it so they didn't realize you were reading it.

KELLEY

Exactly. That is something. So you represented— You were basically going as a librarian.

MATTHEWS

Yes, just representing the library and reviewing books. And I didn't review— In fact, there weren't enough actually at that time of new black books; you see, usually you were reviewing new books—to review black books all the time, and so I did them now and then. And sometimes there would be some I wouldn't want to review, that I wouldn't be so impressed with. But I did review them from time to time. And in the beginning we had a half hour program, so I would review as many as six books at one time. When they cut us down to fifteen minutes, then I could only do three. And I recall one time the man in the glass booth would put up a sign, two minutes, and then another sign, one minute. And I've forgotten whether it was the two-minute sign that he had put up, and I said, "And my third book is." And he looked like he was going to fall through the floor. And I had three pages, three half-typed pages. And without knowing I was going to have to do this, I picked one sentence from each of those three pages which pretty well summarized the book, and finished on time, and then he shook his hands together, sort of in congratulations that I finished on time.

KELLEY

Oh, that's amazing. Okay. In addition to your work with youth, I understand you were involved in the Los Angeles City Education Advisory Council from 1935 to '36.

MATTHEWS

That was a special committee that was appointed by—I don't think it was appointed by the school board—I think by the administration, to do a bibliography and plan an outline on blacks for the tenth and eleventh grade social studies courses, because the textbooks didn't take it into consideration. When the children would ask the teacher questions, she wasn't equipped to handle it. And they felt that, oh, a few of them might have read enough to be able to do something about it. But they felt that it would be advisable to have something that all of the teachers could refer to, and not only read some of the books on the lists themselves, but know which ones to refer the children to if they were especially interested in any particular phase of it. And I was surprised. One of the teachers—all of them were white except me, and I was the only non-teacher on the committee—and one of the teachers— After our meeting was over we were chatting, and I don't know how it came up about housing, and she said, "Oh," she thought, " You'd like to live near your friends." Well, I said, "Well, I'm not a friend of all the Negroes in the city." And I said, "Do you want to live right next door to your friends so that you're bouncing in and out of your houses all of the time? When you want to go visit them, you want to make a point of going to visit them." And I said, "We would be just as comfortable living next door to white people or anybody else." And then, as I say, all of the black people aren't our friends.

KELLEY

So I'm curious, why did she even raise that point?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't remember what we were talking about, but it came up in just casual conversation after the meeting. And I don't know whether somebody had mentioned housing or something. Or maybe she might have even asked me where I lived. [mutual laughter] I don't know.

KELLEY

Oh, I see.

MATTHEWS

But whenever, however it came up, she thought that, you know, it was natural for us to live next door to each other.

KELLEY

Was there any segregation in housing in Los Angeles during this time?

MATTHEWS

Oh, goodness, surely. Just like everywhere when you get certain numbers [of blacks]. Now in the very early days, from some of the things I've read, even though there were certain areas where there was a reasonable concentration of blacks, they still had whites too. And in the so-called "downtown" area now, around First Street and Spring and Broadway and along Main and so forth, they had a few Negro businesses there. But they [blacks] were fairly well

scattered—and some in various parts of the city. But the minute they start picking up in numbers then the general population begins to be aware of them and tries to hem them in. And then when they [blacks] grow in great numbers and they [whites] have the restricted area, then of course they're [blacks] overcrowded. And I have a map in my picture file showing an area in the Avalon community, and it shows where the Negroes already were on the map. I forget just how they indicated it. Then they have a certain area set: "Keep it white." And so then began the restrictive covenants and that kind of thing so that they [whites] could keep them [blacks] from— If they bought the place— See, now you could buy the land or the house, but you couldn't occupy it. It could be occupied only by a person of the Caucasian race. And they [whites] even used that against Indians and Mexicans too for a while. And I think it was in the forties when a group, not a group but some Negroes, moved into an area they called Sugar Hill, between West Adams and Washington and Western, about three blocks east of Western. And they [whites] went to court about it, and the judge happened to be somebody who graduated from L.A. High at the time I did. They [whites] had quite a few children of prominent families at L.A. High at the time we attended there. In fact, it was supposed to be the elite high school. And he went out there. I don't think it was a jury trial. And he said, "Well, it seems to me, all of the houses where Negroes have bought look better, from the outside, anyway, than the others." The yards were better kept and maybe the houses were better painted. And he ruled against them [whites]. And then eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that they couldn't uphold the restrictive covenants in the courts. Then the real estate people began doing it by what they called— There was some special name for it. But they would, you know, just show certain houses to blacks and show others to whites. Now, one example, in Torrance and Carson they [real estate people] would not show blacks the houses in Torrance. See, they were adjacent, but they'd show them to them in Carson. And so, just that way they would be— Oh, "steering" is what they called it, what the real estate people did—steering the people to certain areas. And if they [real estate people] didn't show them [houses] to them [blacks], then of course they [blacks] didn't buy them.

1.5. TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (October 26, 1985)

KELLEY

During the 1930's what organizations were working to combat the segregation that was taking place in Los Angeles?

MATTHEWS

Well, I would say, from what I can remember, it possibly was the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and to some

extent the [Los Angeles] Urban League. Those were our two major organizations through the early years. As a matter of fact, we had a junior branch of the NAACP back in the twenties [1920's] in Los Angeles during our college years and immediately after. They [the members] were a little older than the average person in junior branches in other cities and caused a little friction with the adult branch, because they felt they were going ahead and doing things that they wanted to do. I think I may have mentioned on the other tape about the pageant.

KELLEY

Yes, exactly, you mentioned that. Now, I have listed here that you were on the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

MATTHEWS

And educational fund. Well, of course, the NAACP founded the Legal Defense and Educational Fund. I'm not sure what the beginning year was, but I believe it was late thirties [1930's], possibly '38, to have a tax-exempt arm to carry on their work. Whereas, at the time, as a civil rights organization, the main body was not tax exempt. That is, the people made contributions. But now I think that's changed. I believe that the NAACP can get tax exemptions—or the people who make donations to it. But at any rate the law at that time would not permit them to even have a bi-partisan board. But they couldn't have some people serving on both the board of the NAACP and the [NAACP] Legal Defense and Educational Fund. And so it became completely separate. And in very recent years, since Roy Wilkins left the helm, they have tried to get the Legal Defense Fund to drop the NAACP [name]. But since they were organized by the NAACP, and the law at that time made them separate from the NAACP, and they had legal right to the name, they saw no reason why they should drop it, because it's been on there for so many years. I mean, they've been operating that way. So they do put a note on all of their announcements and invitations and that kind of thing, and they say, "Please note the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund is not a part of its parent body which founded it." I don't think they say "parent body," but the organization which founded it. And so they said it has its own officers, board, budget and all the rest, but that they're following through with the same type of activities that the NAACP does. So if you're helping them, you're helping the cause of better race relations.

KELLEY

I see. When were you active with the [NAACP] Legal Defense Fund?

MATTHEWS

They started a business and professional—I've forgotten now what the exact title was—group to help the Legal Defense Fund nationally in 1968, I believe it was. And they were asking all the persons who joined to give \$1,000 a year.

And they figured if they had a certain number to do that, there would be big budget immediately and would have to put on benefits and that kind of thing to get a lot of people involved in giving \$100 or \$200. And that eventually became the Southern California Steering Committee for the [NAACP] Legal Defense and Educational Fund. And I don't believe there are very many people left who were on that original board. Some of them, in fact, a number of them, are dead, like Norman [O.] Houston and Merle Grant , and a number of individuals who are well-known in the business world. And I have, if I haven't given the whole table— Of course, now the prices have gone up. It was \$100 a plate when we first started having benefits, and now it's \$200 a plate. But at least I would have a table and sometimes even more than a table. But now it's getting harder and harder, because there are so many competing organizations giving these expensive dinners. And it seems that there should be some kind of a limit to the amount; because I think it's better to reach more people at \$100 or less and have a big house, than it is to have it up higher and have a smaller house. And so you're not making any more.

KELLEY

Yes, exactly.

MATTHEWS

And the only thing I think they should do is to try to get some of the large corporations with foundations to donate the large sums that would make, you know, the budget what they need.

KELLEY

So what years were you active in support of the [NAACP] Legal Defense Fund?

MATTHEWS

I'm still active.

KELLEY

When did you begin?

MATTHEWS

'Sixty-eight [1968].

KELLEY

'Sixty-eight, I see. So this is much later.

MATTHEWS

And I'm one of the few who started in '68, and even of the people who started later, they don't come to meetings. And I bet you they don't even get a table.

KELLEY

That's true.

MATTHEWS

And in some cases, I remember in the fairly early years, the people who were in charge of the office would call me and they'd say, "Do you know so-and-so

well enough to call him or her on the committee?" Here it is almost time for the dinner, and they haven't gotten a ticket even from them. They haven't even paid for a ticket for themselves, let alone get any for anybody else. And I called a person, and he said, no, he didn't think he was coming. I said, "Look, your name's on that list as a member of the steering committee, and it's not there just for show. And so you at least get here and bring your wife." He only bought one ticket, didn't even bring his wife, and that's when it was only \$100. And so even early, that was a kind of thing. So I'm sure now that they have a much longer list; see, the list was smaller in those early days. Now there must be over sixty on that list. And the general meetings to plan these things, I don't think we've ever had more than twelve or fifteen.

KELLEY

I see. In the 1930s, did the NAACP do similar types of things, in terms of protecting legal rights, preparing legal defense for—?

MATTHEWS

Oh, yes, they in some cases went to court about certain things and did things on the kind of basis that the situation demanded.

KELLEY

I see. Do you remember some of the activities that the Los Angeles chapter was involved in during the thirties [1930's]?

MATTHEWS

Well, some of the same things come up again and again, and they still go on. This matter of discrimination is not ended. We think that because they had the—I'm trying to think of the executive order that [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt signed.

KELLEY

Oh, yes, right.

MATTHEWS

That they should be employed wherever government funds, at any rate, are involved. And even though now we see black faces a number of places and in positions we never saw them before, but they're still not always getting promoted when they should. Or they have just what we call "tokens."

KELLEY

That was the Fair Employment and Practices Act, I think it was.

MATTHEWS

Yes, that's right. And so we've made some progress. And then, of course, after making a good bit of progress, with [President Richard M.] Nixon and [President Ronald W.] Reagan we're going backwards again. And it's just amazing how they can do these things after all of this. And then also for him to appoint that man who was the president of the NAACP in San Diego who talks like a white man, in terms of, "We shouldn't have any special consideration

because we had all those years of discrimination." Yet they're going to still continue to give special consideration to the white man.

KELLEY

Do you recall any specific cases? One that comes to mind, you know, the L.A. chapter was very much involved in the Brookside Pool Case in Pasadena, when they discriminated against blacks, Mexicans, and—

MATTHEWS

There were several organizations involved. I think the Women's Political Study Club and some others. And I have a little article from Flash Magazine which was published in the late twenties [1920's], I believe—or was it in the thirties [1930's]? And a private individual entered a [law] suit to open up the municipal swimming pools in Los Angeles. Of course, Brookside is in Pasadena and not directly Los Angeles. And it happened every year there was a large picnic in Brookside Park and it involved a lot of Los Angeles people. And at first, they [blacks] couldn't even go in the pool at all. Eventually, they got to go in the pool, but the blacks would have one day a week that they would let blacks and Mexicans and some other—

KELLEY

Asians too.

MATTHEWS

Yes, I mean minorities was what I was trying to say—go in. Although, in those days I don't think the Asians were so noticeable in terms of there being that many of them. Of course, now the big influx of the Asians has been in very recent years after all of the wars and everything overseas.

KELLEY

Do you remember some of the details of the suit against the municipal pools in Los Angeles?

MATTHEWS

Well, Mrs. Priolo I remember was—I can't think of her first name—and I think her husband was a retired army man, officer, as a matter of fact. She was the one who entered the suit, and I think it involved Exposition Park. I think some of her children were not permitted to go in. And I know she won the suit, and I'm pretty sure won it as an individual, not with the backing, as I recall, of any other organization. Now there could have been, what do you call it, the "friend of the court," that type of letter or business that different organizations sometimes do. When a suit is being tried and they want to reinforce the standing of the person who's entering the suit they write these—I call it a letter, but it's probably some type of special thing: *amicus curiae*, which tells them that they believe too that this case has merit and that it should be done. That often is a deciding factor with some judges, depending upon whether it's a judge or jury trial. I don't remember that this was a jury trial.

KELLEY

Do you remember the Scottsboro case, which had national fame during the early 1930's? And do you also remember how the black community in Los Angeles responded to the Scottsboro case?

MATTHEWS

I remember it, and I'm sure a lot of people in Los Angeles did. And as I recall, when I've been going through papers, they had some rallies and meetings here in Los Angeles. I'm not certain whether they were sponsored by some of the recognized or older organizations or whether it was a special group that got together. Because, you know, often when some particular "cause célèbre" occurs, they just organize a group and send out a call and have a big rally. So I don't recall how it happened, but it did attract a lot of attention here.

KELLEY

As a librarian, were a lot of patrons actually asking about the case? Say, either, if it's not Scottsboro, there is also Angela Herndon, which is also a national case which took place at that time. Were patrons asking for information?

MATTHEWS

Well, if there were books written that they were aware of, they might be asking for it that way. And then the black magazines, periodicals—of course, mainly *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity* magazine were the early ones that gave articles on various subjects—would be in use for subjects of that nature.

KELLEY

Let's turn to 1935. You won the Los Angeles Fellowship League Service Award. I was wondering if you could tell me for what reason you won this award and who exactly was the L.A. Fellowship League?

MATTHEWS

Well, the Fellowship League had a Sunday morning breakfast club, composed entirely of men. Unfortunately, I haven't read their constitution bylaws, which I own, recently. But they were mainly interested in improving conditions, and their main purpose was educational. They would have a good speaker, as a rule, on their program each time. And I don't recall whether they met once or twice a month but not every Sunday. And breakfast was nominal. I recall having reviewed one of Dr. Du Bois' books at one of their meetings. And their main speaker was a white Legionnaire. And I don't recall which book it was, but you know, he emphasized the fact that blacks were in a majority in the world and how they had been treated and that eventually they were going to rise up and overcome all of these obstacles that had been placed in their path. And, of course, I was just expressing what Du Bois had—I was just saying what he said in the book. And this man, when his turn came, didn't give his speech. He spent the whole time berating me and Dr. Du Bois for being un-American. And I don't remember how the club reacted to it, the Fellowship Club, but it was

composed of a number of people. I think Dr. A.J. Booker was the president for a good while. And I know Titus Alexander was quite active; he may have been an officer as well. And there were quite a few people, you know, of some standing who were in the club. And I wish I had read, you know, their constitution by-laws recently, but they, you know, did have some effect on the community.

KELLEY

I see. Was this the award for your community service?

MATTHEWS

Oh, just for my general service, the library and all the things I had done up to that point.

KELLEY

That was funny—un-American.

MATTHEWS

Oh, yes. Oh, he was horrified. And it's amazing about white people. What they think about as being un-American. You should never criticize the government. You should never criticize this one or that one or the other. And many of them [whites], even the ones who are not prejudiced, but just haven't had any experience with black people and their problems, they just are totally unaware what we're suffering and have suffered. I don't know whether I mentioned this already, but there was a white person on my staff at Vernon [Branch Library] who came because the children's librarian had told her I was a nice person to work for. And after she came—she was a person that I think was totally unprejudiced, in a sense, but uninformed—and she began reading *The Crisis* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the local black newspapers. And whenever it was lunchtime or something when she could get me when I wasn't too busy, she'd say, "Miss Matthews, I read so-and-so-and-so-and-so." They were still lynching people at this time. "Is that really true?" And I said, "They couldn't publish it if it were not true." And she said— And then she didn't even know that we couldn't go to hotels and restaurants generally in Los Angeles at that time. She said, "I don't see how any American Negro can be happy one single minute." Now that's the way she reacted to it. And when she went to parties and things and people started talking about things—I think one time they said that any Negroes who had achieved anything, it was the white blood in them— And she said—at that time Robert Roussou Motton was head of the Tuskegee—"What about Robert Roussou Motton? What about so-and-so-and-so-and-so?" So she called off a whole list of names. And most of my staff was white at Vernon [Branch] for a long time. And those people, when they transferred from my place to some other—having had the experience of looking up some things on blacks and knowing how to find them in general reference books if they were prominent enough—they went somewhere else, and

somebody would ask a question— The other members of the staff wouldn't even make any attempt, because they wouldn't know where to start looking. They'd say, "Go to Central Library, where they have a bigger collection." And they were always so proud that they could find enough little material here and there in reference books to satisfy the patron. And I wrote in one of my reports during that time, that "this was an education for people, generally, at Vernon Branch." You know, the people who came on the staff, and I don't remember what other term I used. And I know that downtown [at Central Library] one particular person probably didn't care too much for my remark, but I made it anyway.

KELLEY

Did you have any direct experiences at hotels and restaurants in Los Angeles where you were discriminated against?

MATTHEWS

Yes, I can remember one in particular. And it's a place you wouldn't have expected: down at Olvera Street. And this was in '35, when the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority had its national convention in Los Angeles. A half a dozen of us, and we were all dressed up because we were going to a reception after having dinner, and we were early to eat dinner so we would get to the reception on time. When we went into this one— There were two restaurants that were considered the best ones in the Olvera Street area. And the man said he didn't have any places, everything was reserved. Here's the whole big restaurant, about two people eating—or two tables with anybody eating. And we said, "You mean this whole restaurant is reserved?" And he said, "Yes." And then we said, "Where's the manager? We'd like to speak with the manager." "Oh, he's not here." And then, I don't know, we asked who was in charge. And I think he was supposed to be in charge at the time. And they said, "You mean you're not seating us because we're colored?" And he said, "Oh no, no, no. The seats are reserved." And we said that we were going to get some white people to come in after something like that happened. You know, have some colored people go in and be refused and then have some white people come and be seated without reservations, and people we knew. And then sue them. You see, that would be the only way you catch them at it, because they wouldn't admit that they weren't seating you because you're black. But we were dumbfounded. Most of the people were from Chicago, and they had problems there. Some of them were the ones who spoke up, too, about "you're not seating us because we're colored." And, you know how it is, you put it off. We never did get together with some white friends and try to test them out. But that was a place we certainly didn't expect to be turned down. Let's see, that was definitely 1935. And then the fact that we looked so nice; see, all dressed up. In fact, maybe that annoyed them too.

KELLEY

Do you have any other experiences, especially during that period?

MATTHEWS

Well, from time to time. Finally, if you're living in a place, you usually don't go to the places you think you're going to be turned down. One thing that occurred in 1930 when my sister and I went East, and we weren't aware at that time of the capital [Washington D.C.] being completely segregated. That was a complete surprise to us. I guess they hadn't written it up a lot in the black press at that time. And my sister and I, when we arrived, the first evening some friends took us to a black restaurant. Well, we used to have one, and a lot of times they didn't last too long. So it was nice. If a visitor came to town, we wanted to show them what our people are doing. And so that was what we just thought, they were going to show us what a nice restaurant this person had. And the next day— My sister and I were about halfway of the trip. We were running out of cosmetics and things so I went— We were staying at Mary Church Terrell's home. You know, you had to stay in a private home. And she lived around the corner from Embassy Row. And we asked her where is the nearest drugstore, and she told me which apartment building to go in. And I went into the drugstore and bought all the things we needed and spent quite a little money. And I don't know whether these were connected at all; I went right across the hall—I was alone—to a sweet shop. It was real warm. Of course, you know how it is in Washington in the summertime. And I sat down at one of the tables. As I recall, there was only the one man sitting at the fountain. And the one girl called over to the table, asked me what I wanted. And I said, "A strawberry ice cream soda." And then she came over to the table and said, "Do you want to take it out?" I said, "Who ever heard of taking an ice cream soda out?" I said, "It wouldn't be any good by the time I got home." All the fizz would be gone. I didn't say all of that. I just said, "Who ever heard of taking ice cream soda out?" And then she said, "I'm sorry, but we don't serve colored at the tables." Of course, they weren't serving them at all, but she just said it that way. And you know, isn't it funny how you react to things? I wasn't expecting this or anything, and I said, "Do I have to come all the way from California to be insulted?" And she rushed over there and fixed that ice cream soda and brought it to me. And I remembered afterwards, when I was telling my friends about this, that a man said, "She must be from New York." I had no idea he was talking about me, because, you see, he was chatting with a girl and I just happened to remember hearing that remark. And I guess because I came in and sat down like I expected to be waited on— And we could go to little sweet shops and things here. And so I was so mad, you know, by the time she brought the soda, I probably took a sip or two and paid her and left. And so my friend said, "You mean you didn't know that Washington's completely segregated?"

One legitimate theater; Negroes couldn't go anywhere in that theater unless they were "passing" [passing themselves off as white].

KELLEY

That's amazing.

MATTHEWS

And they couldn't try on clothes in the department stores. They could buy things, but couldn't try them on. And let's see, this was 1930 when the suntan craze had begun. And so they said that they even had special meetings of their employees at this time to be sure to tell them if [a customer was] refused to try something on to be sure they weren't white people with a suntan. Because they had made a mistake and had a suit in some cases. And so then they told me that maybe this girl thought that she had made a mistake, and, of course, at that time I had been in Baltimore at a friend's home at the beach. And you know how it is, you get all burnt up. And then my hair needed doing, and all of that. And so she was— Of course, my hair wasn't ever really kinky; but then if you go in the water a lot, it's not like it would be, and then especially if you need to have it done. And so they were surprised that she served me, but said maybe she thought she had made a mistake, since I said, "Do I have to come from California to be insulted?" But isn't it funny I should have used those words?

KELLEY

That's amazing. What were you in Washington [D.C.] for in 1930?

MATTHEWS

Oh, we just went on a trip.

KELLEY

Oh, you just went on a trip. This is after you graduated?

MATTHEWS

We were on a trip, I think it was six or eight weeks, and we went to a number of places, mainly East Coast; but we stopped in Chicago and Kansas City, those are the other two, because we had relatives there. But we went up and down the East Coast, from New York on down to, let me see, I guess to Washington. We didn't stop in Baltimore that time, but on other trips I had stopped in Baltimore.

KELLEY

But you knew Mary Church Terrell?

MATTHEWS

But it was just a vacation.

KELLEY

Oh, I see. You knew Mary Church Terrell, though?

MATTHEWS

We didn't know her. Some friends of ours— You see, there are certain people who have large homes and they will take a nice person in, but they have to know somebody who knows her. And I don't remember which friend of ours

we wrote to, and she was the one who introduced us to Mrs. Terrell, and so we stayed at her home.

KELLEY

So that was a common practice among black people.

MATTHEWS

Oh, same thing here. They built the Dunbar Hotel in 1928, because, generally, when a convention was coming they couldn't put those people in hotels. Now, maybe one or two of them might get in a hotel, but not generally. And so Dr. Summerville built the Dunbar Hotel. Of course, it was called Hotel Summerville in the beginning, because the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was meeting here, the national convention, for the first time in Los Angeles. And so they had this nice, I think it's five-, six-story hotel available for them. But prior to that, anytime anybody was coming out, we had friends to write who said, "I have a good friend who's coming." I think they may have known that our family, you know, used up all of our bedrooms. "Can you find her a good place to stay?" And so we would call our good friends who had enough room and find a place for them to stay. That was general practice. And they had a special hospitality committee for conventions that had to work months ahead to find enough space for people when a convention met here.

KELLEY

I see. Okay. That's real interesting. Back to your organization activities, you—let's see, did I cover everything? Let's see, you were involved in—

MATTHEWS

Oh, in terms of organizations? Well, the early ones, these others, now, you mentioned the Fellowship League, and oh, the St. Philips Episcopal Church Young People's Fellowship League. I was selected president. They were just beginning this organization. I don't recall the exact years, but it was after I came back from finishing my library course in 1927. So I would judge it was '27 or '28 when they formed it. And when the minister, who was Father W. T. Cleghorn, found out they had elected me president, he was very disappointed, both because I was young and a woman. And after the organization was, well, I don't know if it was very old at all, whether it was a year old, he was very surprised that the programs were interesting and attracted quite a crowd. You didn't have to belong to the church to come, although a lot of the churches do it, especially for their own young people. But in this case, we had as many outside the church as inside the church and even attracted some adults. And one of my friends, I think he used to go with my sister, said, you know, he felt I handled the people, especially in the discussion period, very expertly; you know, I didn't let some of those ramble on who didn't have anything to say, and in some cases didn't even recognize them when a lot of people would be raising their hands

when the question period began. And I even went to the trouble to get some people primed to jump to their feet and gave them a special question to ask so that it would be directed. I mean, the discussion would be directed in a sensible area, and one that would be of interest to everybody.

KELLEY

I see.

MATTHEWS

And I don't remember how long it lasted, because the Los Angeles Civic League was organized in '28—I think it was '28—and I was one of the founders of that particular organization. It met at the YMCA, the Twenty-eighth Street YMCA. As a matter of fact, the Twenty-eighth Street YMCA was built in 1926 and was designed by Paul Williams and became a regular community center for the whole community, not just for men. So they had a number of meetings there and because there was no YW[CA] that had a pool and gymnasium and so forth, they even had nights when women could use the facilities that way too. As a matter of fact, we had a gym club, a small group, I think about twelve or sixteen at the most, that met once a week. We had met at some of the schools—I've forgotten where else we had met—and we had, I think, even met at the YMCA. But we decided we were members of the YWCA, so we went downtown to their headquarters and asked for a night for our class. And they hemmed and hawed and made all kinds of excuses and said why don't we go the YM[CA]. I said, "We're not members of the YMCA, we're members of the YWCA." And I don't remember how it turned out. We didn't get it right away. But when we were coming through one time, they had an Oriental class there, but then still didn't want Negroes coming. And see, your membership is for the whole "Y", not just for any one particular branch. And so we did at different times speak our peace, and sometimes it bore fruit and sometimes not, but eventually they got a black person on the city-wide board, and then they began getting some of the things worked out. Now eventually, they had a— Well, I'm not sure whether, when they went to Woodlawn, whether they had a gym. They had more rooms and may have had rooms for people to rent, but I don't recall that they had a gym there. If they did, it was after the time when we were doing gym and so I'm not sure.

KELLEY

How long were you active with the L.A. Civic League?

MATTHEWS

I'm not certain exactly how long it lasted, but I do remember going at least in the early thirties. And they had very prominent speakers, both white and some Asian, various nationalities, but principally black. They had meetings twice a month on Sunday afternoon, and it was really a very good organization and very well handled. James McGregor, who eventually became an attorney, I'm

not sure he had finished his course then, because he received an A.B. degree and married, and I think he even had children. And then while he was working for the city or county in some capacity, he eventually finished his law course and then became a lawyer. And he also was a journalist as well. So he was very excellent in terms of presiding and had been president of that junior branch of the NAACP earlier that I spoke of.

KELLEY

What was the function of the Civic League?

MATTHEWS

Oh, just to have people to give worthwhile information in terms of the lectures and talks that were given. I don't recall that they went out to change the world, except mentally.

KELLEY

Okay. Before we leave your organizational activities in the 1930s, are there any other organizations we skipped over or we missed?

MATTHEWS

Well, I had a list—and unfortunately it must be in the den—of different things. And I had planned to have it all typed up and give you a copy. I imagine we've covered the principle ones. If something should come up—

KELLEY

We can always come back.

MATTHEWS

—later that I recall, we can insert it.

KELLEY

Now in 1940, you went to New York?

MATTHEWS

Yes. I took a leave of absence.

KELLEY

Okay. Now how did you arrange the transfer to the public library?

MATTHEWS

Well, I just simply wanted a change of scene and asked first for a year's— I didn't ask for a year's leave; I asked for an exchange. So they wrote to New York, and New York didn't have anyone who could come, because, generally, you have to do a lot of things: if you have family, depending on what the conditions are, and so forth. So New York couldn't get any staff member who was interested in a transfer at that time or an exchange. So they offered me a leave of absence to go and work in the New York Public Library. And originally they had said a year. Then they cut it to nine months, because I was a Branch Librarian and they didn't want me away that long. Then before I left, they made it six months. I was glad they did cut it to six months, because I would have gone through that terrible summer, which would have been

devastating. And I was very fortunate: the year I was there, there were only three nights early in June when you couldn't sleep, because it was hot all night long. But other than that, the weather was very pleasant; when I left the first of July, it was raining and it was like our wintertime. And I had already packed my umbrella in my little steamer trunk and was ready to be shipped off, so I had to take taxis all around to say good-bye to my friends. Probably could have bought another umbrella cheaper. And so, it was a very good experience, and, as I say, my main reason was just to have a change of scene and to learn something, too. And even though I had visited New York in 1930 when I was with my sister on the trip, it's not like being there. I went to all of the shows, went to all of the museums, or practically all of them. I investigated everything of value, at least I felt so. I read the different guide books and things. Usually the new person on the staff had to work Saturdays, so I was off usually on Wednesday, in the middle of the week. And sometimes I would start out at Lincoln Center, then I would have some quick lunch, go to a matinee, occasionally have dinner downtown. Sometimes I would make arrangements for a friend to meet me and then go to the opera, or some kind of an evening performance. So I saw practically everything that was on Broadway. And it was lucky in some cases that I went the first week or two, because this was during, let's see, 1940. Well, I don't know. It was almost like wartime; we hadn't gone to war yet. Mostly comedies, and I like real drama, for the most part. Oh, I like a good comedy, but I don't like slapstick. And then I don't like everything the same, you see, if everything practically is comedy. So some of the ones that were the ones that I liked the best only ran two weeks. Closed. Everybody wanted to laugh. And so they didn't make it. And then one or two things, *Life with Father*, and I've forgotten what the other one was, were long runs that were sold out six months in advance. And so I had to buy standing room in order to see it before I left. And it was in at least one of the ones, I don't know, it wasn't *Life with Father* but some other one, I wore comfortable shoes and another friend went with me. And you stood right behind the orchestra seats, and they had a railing. And so you could lean on the railing. Then when they had intermission you could sit down at the seats. And being downstairs, we saw a number of very prominent people in the theatrical world and otherwise—and especially when they were going out. So we weren't too tired at all. And I've forgotten, the price was quite reasonable. And it was just like you were in an orchestra seat, except you're standing up.

KELLEY

Now the public library you worked at, that was 135th Street Branch [Library]?

MATTHEWS

For the most part. And you see, they always have to say, I'm sending a Negro person. And then they think, well, you go to the 135th Street Branch.

KELLEY

Which is in Harlem, right?

MATTHEWS

Before I left I did get transferred to another branch where it wasn't as black as— It was 125th Street. They had some Negro patrons, but not anything like the Harlem branch. And then I also went downtown to the Order Department and the Readers Advisory Department. I'm not sure that's the correct title, Readers Advisory Department. And I was so surprised that this woman in the Readers Advisory Department— Either I was planning to do a bibliography for the branch, because some patron had asked for it on a certain subject, or she assigned me something to do. But I think this was something that some patron at 135th Street Branch had asked for. And the man was of Italian background, and he was an invalid. I think the letter had been sent in by mail. And she was suggesting *Christ in Concrete* to put on that. Horrible story. I mean, well-written and all of that, but nothing for an invalid to be reading when he's not feeling well. Just because he was Italian and the story was about an Italian— And I thought, now here she's been head of that department for I don't know how long, and if she'd even read a review of it, she didn't have to read the book. And so I was happy for the experience, and they had a much larger staff for— I'm trying to remember the difference of the circulation of the branch at Vernon. See, by the time I left Vernon [Branch Library] then in 1940—I had been there since '34—they had— Oh, well, I guess it was in 1940 when I came back that they closed it to three days a week. But even so, when more Negroes began moving in, we didn't have as many good readers as we had before the Negro population began coming in, and so whatever our circulation was in Los Angeles, we had, oh, a very small staff. I would guess that New York had about three times the number of people for about the same circulation as we did. Now in the case of the 135th Street Branch, I was glad to be there for this reason, that Schomburg collection [Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture] which took up the third floor. And when I say it took up the third floor, it may not have been full, but at least it had a floor. See, they had the adult section on the first floor, the children's on the second, and then the Schomburg on the third. And I had the opportunity to get to see certain things that I was interested in there. And I remember serving on a committee, too, when they were making a list, a bibliography of fiction titles on the Negro, and they were surprised that I had read practically everything.

1.6. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (October 26, 1985)

MATTHEWS

We stayed with the [Ralph] Bunches.

KELLEY

Oh, you did?

MATTHEWS

In fact, I guess I stayed with them just before when I was on my way home, and I went down the East Coast, because I was going to Florida and across to Mobile where an aunt lived and then to New Orleans. I must have been to their house twice and the last time was the night before when I was just passing through, and I think I stayed overnight then, I don't think—yes, I didn't just pop in and out. And did I mention to you that when they went to the train with me and I had a first class ticket and had given the [black] porter my car and seat number, and we were just chatting until it was time for me to get on, and Ralph said, "Miriam, I thought you said you had a first class ticket?" I said, "I do." He said, "Well, this man's coming out of your—he just took your suitcase on the Jim Crow car." Just lucky he saw him coming off, and I caught him. I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I gave you my car number." And so we had to run like mad to get on my car before the train pulled out, because that would have been walking clear down the train for a long time, and we just barely made it. And so the blacks discriminating against their own. Now, he didn't want me to be on that thing, and I guess maybe he wanted me to have to walk through and then have my suitcase too. You see, it's bad enough if you have to walk through without it.

KELLEY

That's amazing. Now, where were the Bunches staying? And were they—

MATTHEWS

Oh, they lived in Washington [D.C.].

KELLEY

In Washington, I see.

MATTHEWS

And I'm trying to remember now what Ralph was doing, whether he was working for the [U.S.] State Department at that time. I don't think he was still at Howard [University]. See, that was '40. I know we went over to Howard University, but I'm not sure what his job was, but they had their home in Washington at that time.

KELLEY

I see. So this was while you were staying in New York, you would frequently visit the Bunches or go to other—?

MATTHEWS

Different friends—and several of the East Coast places. When I had a Saturday off, I mean, I could have a whole weekend, then I would always plan to go to Baltimore or Washington or somewhere where I had friends to visit them for the weekend.

KELLEY

What was your overall impression—?

MATTHEWS

And, then, of course, the Wesleys, the Charles Wesleys, were friends of mine too, and I visited them. And I remember one time I must have stayed at their house for the weekend. And then I'm trying to recall if a person who had married one of my uncles had a sister living there or whether that was in 1930. No, that must have been when I was there in 1940, because my sister and I, as I mentioned, stayed at Mary Church Terrell's and so I don't know whether this person was living in Washington at that time.

KELLEY

Did you meet a lot of people while you were in Harlem during that time?

MATTHEWS

Yes, there were some people I knew already; one person who went to college—I don't know if she was in my class or not at [U.C.] Berkeley—had married a New Yorker, and she took me around to meet certain people, especially the people who were working in the library field. I'm trying to think of some of their names. I can see them just as well as can be, but I can't think of all their names. And they invited me to certain parties and things, so I met people that way.

KELLEY

I see. What was your overall impression of Harlem?

MATTHEWS

Now, we're not on tape.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

All this time we've been on?

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

Oh, I didn't realize that.

KELLEY

I just turned it on.

MATTHEWS

Oh. Well, because we go back and forth.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

Now, my overall impression? I enjoyed the time I was there immensely, and it was quite a contrast going back in '44 when the war was on and they didn't

clean the snow off the streets, and the lights were—they had the brown-out—and so I was glad I'd had this opportunity to see New York when it was normal, than when I went through there on my vacation from the University of Chicago at Christmastime, because it was quite different and quite depressing, actually.

KELLEY

Yes. That was a year after the riots in '43 when you went back to visit?

MATTHEWS

No, it was the winter of '44-'45; see, it would be Christmas '44 and New Year's '45.

KELLEY

Yeah. So it followed. I know in 1943, Harlem had experienced massive riots.

MATTHEWS

It was in '43?

KELLEY

'43. Now I'm curious, you said it was depressing—

MATTHEWS

And also in Detroit, too.

KELLEY

Detroit too, right. Since it was depressing, I was just curious if that may have had anything to do with it?

MATTHEWS

Well, offhand, I don't recall that the riot made the difference. It was a matter of the war and the lack of sanitation facilities. I hear you could walk down a street and the snow was 10 feet high, and all they had was a pathway. Anybody could have mugged you or done anything walking down, just like going through a tunnel. And then, of course, the snow was so dirty, and when I was there the first time, it was so beautiful. It was my first time to really see snow in that way. I'd been up to the mountains here. To actually see it fall and see how beautiful everything looked immediately after it would fall. And then if it was a brief snowfall, a few hours later the sanitation department had cleaned it all up, and it didn't stay on the streets forever and ever and build up a wall of dirt and everything, and so it never got to the point of looking that way in the time I was there in 1940. But as I say, in '44 going into the year of '45, just didn't look like the same place. And I was only there a very short time. I visited some friends then and went to theater once or twice and went to a ball. It was, as I say, just a brief visit. But just driving through, and even walking through some of those streets was enough to—

KELLEY

How would you compare Los Angeles with Harlem in terms of conditions for black people?

MATTHEWS

Well, of course, New York had such a huge population of blacks, and so I would say there's no comparison in terms of that. Just the mere numbers of people there made the big difference in New York. And the climate, for another thing, and so in general— Except that I don't know why, as I mentioned, the feeling I had of being less conscious of race when I was in New York; yet in terms of many other conditions, I felt it was better here [Los Angeles].

KELLEY

I see. Okay, so when you returned now, you returned to take your job.

MATTHEWS

Well, I was returning, yes, and I was expecting to be at Vernon Branch again. And it happened that year, when I returned— See, the fiscal year begins July 1, and I returned home two weeks after the beginning of the fiscal year, and the budget had been cut. And they were having to make some drastic cuts themselves in order to operate, and that's when they decided to take, I'm trying to remember whether it was, ten or twelve of the branches with the smallest circulation, and have one Branch Librarian in charge of two and then discharge six. It must have been twelve, because they were discharging six Branch Librarians. When I say discharging them, they were demoting them, putting them back to the librarian grade. Because, originally, when you were appointed head of a branch or head of a department of any kind, you were exempt civil service. So when I was appointed, I was exempt civil service. But in 1937 they blanketed all of the heads of departments into civil service, so in '37 all of the Branch Librarians were the same level. Even though they might have been working for years before then, in terms of civil service they all began in 1937. So the only people they were laying off were people who were appointed after '37 or had had a leave of absence. So four of them had been appointed after '37 and two of us had had a leave of absence. I had had six months, and the other person had a year—she was ill—had a year's sick leave. And so I was very shocked and everything to think I was going to be demoted because I had taken that leave to go to New York, when if I had received an exchange I would still have been on the payroll, so I wouldn't have had that deducted. So I went to see the City Librarian and said I was surprised that my name was on the list and wondered why, in view of the reason for my leave. And she said she was surprised too. But she had called civil service, and they said that was the way they were handling this, since this was their first experience after the people were blanketed in under civil service in '37. Now, if she had already called them, would she pick up the phone and call them while I was in the office? And so she called them supposedly a second time while I was in the office, and then they told her to refer the matter to the City Attorney's Office and let them make a ruling on how it should be done. And so then she told me what they had said. Later on, when they were planning to transfer, I guess, about half the staff of

the city, and they were doing it for clericals and professionals, she told me, I don't know at what point, that no matter— Oh, I think in the meantime they were assigning me to Central Library, the teacher's room. And I didn't want to take education, so that was the last department I'd want to be working in, and I bet she knew that. But no, I think the reason she selected that is because they had a separate entrance for the public to come in a side door. And also, the fact that nobody was in there much except on Saturdays when most of the teachers were off, unless it was in afternoons or early evenings.

KELLEY

Who was the City Librarian?

MATTHEWS

Althea Warren.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

And so, of course I didn't like that. But then the other thing, my having been away in New York, all of my friends were giving parties for me every Saturday in October, and this change would come about October 1. This woman who was head of the department didn't work any Saturdays. She assigned me to work 9 to 5:30 one Saturday and the alternate Saturdays, 1 to 9, or 12:30 to 9. And so when I—I don't know at what point I was talking to the City Librarian—and I said, well, if the City Attorney ruled in my favor, I was going to ask for some of my Saturdays off. And she said, "You must remember you're working for a living and you'll do as you're told." And I said, "Under normal circumstances, I would expect to do just that, but I don't expect to be penalized for something that's not my fault." And so it turned out, when they finally got the word from the City Attorney's Office and he ruled, and I say in "my" favor, but anybody's favor who was blanketed in in 1937— So they didn't make me go to Central Library; they appointed me to be in charge of Vernon and Watts [branches]. And a person who had been my first boss, they sent her downtown to work in the branches department, doing mostly clerical work for three months until the Branch Librarian retired. And now if they had tried to do that to me, I wouldn't have done clerical work waiting for that, because I didn't even like going to the teacher's room, but let alone— And this person didn't complain! I just couldn't understand; if she was a woman, middle-aged, had had good experience and a good librarian, and so I cannot understand them not complaining when things like that happen. Now let me see, to get back to— So two years after I returned, the head of the 135th Street Branch in New York was retiring, Miss Ernestine Rose, and they were looking for a successor. And a letter was written to the president of the local NAACP branch, attorney Tom [Thomas Lee] Griffith, asking if he could recommend anyone from the West

Coast who could fill this post. And he wrote back and said I was the only one he knew who had the training and experience to fill the position. And so then he gave them my address, and they wrote directly to me asking me if I would apply, and then indicating they wanted references and so forth. And I had references sent from a member of the Board of Education, from the bishop of my church, from my supervisor and many people of some importance. And when the decision was finally made to appoint a person locally, because a citizen's committee said they didn't want an outsider coming in, the head of the New York Public Library called my boss, Miss Warren and told her—no, he wrote to her, because I remember now she was reading the letter to me on the telephone—and he said that they were almost forced to take a local person, even though they thought she wasn't quite ready, and said, "Your Miss Matthews must be a 'great ball of fire'." They were very impressed with the references I had sent and the work I had been doing in Los Angeles. So after she finished reading the letter, she said, "Aren't you disappointed, Miss Matthews?" And I said, "No, I'll be ready when a bigger chance comes along." And I was happy the way things worked out; eventually, she retired in a couple of years— Let's see, I came back in '45; she retired in '47, so it was less than—

KELLEY

This is Miss [Althea] Warren?

MATTHEWS

Miss Warren, yes. And the new City Librarian who came, Harold L. Hamill, turned out to be a person who was without prejudice, even though he had been born in Washington D.C. where they had segregation. All of his jobs had been in cities where they had segregated schools and segregated libraries, so I wasn't expecting anything from him. And then I was appointed a regional supervisor, and the fact that I hadn't interrupted my service except by those brief leaves of absence I was able to retire at an early age; whereas, had I accepted a job somewhere else that would have broken up my pension plan and all the rest of it, and I would have had to work until I was much older. And I did retire early, planning to work abroad, but decided after I'd been off the job, even though I loved my work, that I just didn't want to work anymore, at least not for a salary.

KELLEY

I was curious of your overall impression— After 1940, '41 now you're, I guess, Branch Librarian, you're—

MATTHEWS

Oh, I didn't become a regional librarian until 1949.

KELLEY

Okay. So your position by around '41, '42 is—?

MATTHEWS

Branch librarian.

KELLEY

Branch librarian for Vernon Branch, right?

MATTHEWS

Vernon and Watts from 1940-44; I had both branches.

KELLEY

I see.

MATTHEWS

And I worked like a demon, because not only did I have to do two branches, because, you see, you have to do reports for each one: the written reports, the cash reports and the circulation—and also try to manage two staffs, all of them open the same three days a week. And the first year, and I know this was probably deliberate, I had four green children's librarians to break in at the Vernon Branch when I'm only there half-time. And the silly people wouldn't call me when they had a patron they couldn't help when they were there, and if they'd only call me— In fact, I even told them, "Even call me at home, if I'm not at the other branch, and I can probably tell you in a minute, you know, what to do." Then I come back to the branch: there's a note; I have to try to get in touch with this person; I call a number of times, and they're at work; then, finally, I have to sit down and write them a letter to get the whole matter straightened out. And so it would be bad enough if I had full-time experienced staff, but to have greenhorns and working two branches, I was just working like a dog. That's the only word to describe it.

KELLEY

During World War II, I mean, a lot of significant events were taking place in the L.A. community, and one was, you had, from what I understand, massive immigration of black people from the South and an increase of population.

MATTHEWS

Working in the war industries: ship building and aviation.

KELLEY

What was your impression of that immigration and how did it affect your work at all?

MATTHEWS

My work?

KELLEY

Yes.

MATTHEWS

Oh, I wouldn't say it affected my work considerably, but just in general I was aware of this new population. And they were people who came, I wouldn't say with a chip on their shoulders, but they thought, "Well, we're in California, we're free." Then they tried to be obnoxious to other people, either the newcomers who were white or the ones who lived here, thinking, "I'm here, I

can do whatever I want in any way," and not even be well-mannered. And I noticed that in the department stores— There are certain clerks that we had had for years, we'll say in the hosiery department or in this one or that or the other, and one day I was waiting for—you see, if you had a special clerk you liked, you would always wait for them, even though there might be some other clerk who's free—and while I was waiting for this person who had been just delightful all through the years— And she was real curt with one of these newcomers—they can tell, I guess, which are which—and I was so amazed because she wasn't really very polite. And that astonished me. You know, having had her for so long, and she treated me and my mother and the rest of the family in such a wonderful fashion. And then I also heard, generally, and I think even in some of the black newspapers, that they didn't want to wait on some of these newcomers. In fact, some of them would come straight from work, you know, in their overalls or coveralls or what-have-you, shopping downtown. But when they found out that they could pay cash or were willing to pay cash for fur coats and expensive items, then they began waiting on them. But, the main thing was the white Southerners who came also stirred up trouble. I recall being in the theater one time—they would start the movies at eleven o'clock—and the theater would be open a half hour before that time, so they would have the lights up as people were coming in to fill up the place before they started the movie—and I happened to have some people sitting behind me who were whites from the South, and they said, "Look at 'em [blacks], sitting anywhere they please." When blacks would come in, they would just go over; most of them were coming downstairs because the theater doesn't get full the first showing. And the [white southerners] said, "They couldn't do that where I come from." And so you found a lot of hostility on the part of the whites seeing these people having the freedom that they didn't have in their hometown. And so that kind of thing was noticeable, and you were aware of it both in how they [blacks] were received generally, as I mentioned in the department stores and places, and how these whites tried to stir up business if they could somewhere, to not have them accepted as equals.

KELLEY

So were the sort of old timers of Los Angeles, those who lived there before the influx of blacks during World War II, did they look upon these immigrants sort of unfavorably?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't recall too much discussion about them among those who had been here a long time. I do recall maybe their mentioning, "It's too bad that they didn't think about going home to dress up if they're going to try on fur coats." Something like that, because see after all, they weren't going to buy the first one they tried on. Now, possibly they didn't have grease on their overalls, but

just a matter of whether they were properly dressed. But in the early days, you never went downtown without wearing your hat and your gloves. Of course today, now you can't tell who is a patron and who is a salesperson, because the salespeople in the early days usually wore black, plain black dresses. And then later on, when the customers stopped wearing hats, so you couldn't tell who was a salesperson or a customer. For a while they [the salespersons] had little badges that said whatever the name of the store was so people would know. But now, you look around, the clerks dress in all sorts of things, and so you have to say, "Are you a salesperson?" And plus the fact that salespeople today don't always bother to see who's next or anything or to say, "I'll be with you in a minute." They just chat with the other salespeople and take their time about serving you. [mutual laughter] And it's not just for Negroes, it's for anybody, whites as well.

KELLEY

That's true.

MATTHEWS

And so everything is changing. But at that particular time, I know that we were quite aware of their general attitude, that is the general attitude of most of the newcomers.

KELLEY

Another significant event during World War II was the zoot suit riots. I was wondering what your impression of that event was? I mean, do you remember or recall what were the reasons behind it, and what happened?

MATTHEWS

Oh, well, the reason behind it was a matter of prejudice: these sailors thinking that these Mexicans are not white, and also the fact that they dressed in these peculiar looking suits. And then they just thought, "We can do whatever we want with them," and not have anybody to stop them. But eventually, they had to close the theaters in Watts, where they had quite a sizable Mexican population, of course, Mexican-American for the most part; and I might say, when I went to Watts, contrary to what a lot of people believe—I was there from '40-'45—it was still about one-third white, about one-third Negro, and about one-third Mexican, and it wasn't all black. In fact, if you read a lot of these accounts, you'd think it'd been black since the early twenties [1920's] when it became part of the city of Los Angeles. And then some people said that the white people incorporated with Los Angeles so they wouldn't have an all-black community. And all of that is false. And then this whole business even now of thinking it's one hundred percent black—and during the riots thinking that all of Los Angeles was Watts. And, of course, it's just like you would think, now that Hollywood was incorporated in the city of Los Angeles, that all of a certain area is Hollywood, which is not true. And, actually, you know, the

postmark is Los Angeles for all of them, even though they formerly were a separate community and sort of retained the name. In fact, some people think "Hollywood" has a certain ring to it of importance.

KELLEY

That's true, yeah. Were there blacks involved in the zoot suit riots who were victims?

MATTHEWS

I don't think they picked on the blacks at all, and I don't think the blacks picked on the Mexicans. And I do remember, as I mentioned, that they closed the theaters, because in the darkened theaters, a lot could go on, you know, before you discover who's doing what. And then eventually, the navy put all of Los Angeles off-limits for all the sailors. They had to stay down at San Pedro when their ship was in, because they [the navy] were annoyed and upset because they [the sailors] actually did a lot of damage, as I recall, dragged them off street cars; and I'm not sure whether they damaged the street cars themselves, but they did it downtown and everywhere. It wasn't just in isolated areas where there might have been a large population of Mexicans; just wherever they found them, they were jumping on them. And I had a children's librarian who was white, and she had lived in Mexico for a considerable period of time, and you would have thought anyone who had lived in Mexico would have acquired a little sympathy for the Mexicans, and even not just sympathy, but admired them. And she came to work one day and had seen some of this before the navy had put it off-limits, jumping on some of these Mexicans and taking off their pants, and was laughing about it. And I said, "That's not funny! And I'm surprised at you, having lived in Mexico, feeling that this is a joke." I said, "It's outrageous, and there's no excuse for it and no reason for it." The Mexicans hadn't done anything to the sailors, so why should they be jumping on them? And if they don't like the kind of suits they wear, just don't look at them.

KELLEY

Exactly, yeah.

MATTHEWS

And so I don't know fully how everyone reacted. It's just a few people that were close to me or that I knew well, and in this instance, a person that I worked with. But I never missed an opportunity when anyone spoke of any other minority, even Negroes speaking of other minorities, in disparaging terms. I said, "You're not involved with a race." I said, "They aren't all alike." And I've even told white people this. I don't like all black people. I just like people who are people that you can admire and get along well with, and you can't make general statements about any group. And the same way, some blacks think all whites are terrible. And there are good white people and there are bad white

people. And the same is true in any group, whether it's a majority or a minority race, and I don't like anybody who lumps them all into one mold.

KELLEY

Right. Speaking of minorities, World War II also had witnessed the incarceration of the Japanese during the—

MATTHEWS

Yes, and I had good patrons at Vernon Branch who were Japanese. In fact, one case I especially remember, where the woman was Japanese and she was married to a Portuguese person, and she was an American citizen, but he wasn't. And he could've chosen to go into the camp with her, but once he made the decision, he'd have to stay for the duration. He decided he would be better off outside so he could bring them things and tell them about things that are going on, and it would be better and a better morale builder for them, rather than to have all of them there and handicapped, you know, by not being able to have any outside contacts. And it happened— I think he had to go to Mexico every six months, since he wasn't a citizen, in order to— I'm not sure whether he had lived in Mexico a certain length of time, why going to Mexico made the difference. I do know that American citizens who went to Mexico and were not Mexican citizens had to come back to the U.S. at least once every six months. And so it might be that he had Mexican citizenship, so he had to go and just "check in," you might say, once every six months. But they were delightful people. And then I have some friends now who were youngsters when they went to camp. And to think that they were in this horrible, dusty place, without proper facilities and not enough water and not enough of anything, just because they happened to be Japanese. And they said the FBI knew all of the Japanese who were suspect before Pearl Harbor, and within two or three hours after Pearl Harbor, they had picked all of them up. It was silly to take these people who were American citizens—first, second and third generation—and put them in this camp just because they were Japanese. When Pearl Harbor happened they didn't put the people in internment camps in Hawaii, because they couldn't even manage to find all of the ones who had some Japanese blood, because they were all so mixed and mostly Asian. So if it wasn't dangerous where the war began, and the war was fought in the Pacific, why should it be dangerous on our West Coast? That they have to put all of these Japanese citizens in? And they said 99 percent of the Japanese, especially the ones who were American citizens— In fact, I don't think there were any American citizens who were found to be traitors; it was only people who were aliens who were here who might have been doing something that was wrong. And the other thing, they didn't do it to the Italians, the Germans and other people who were our enemies at the time. In the first place, they couldn't even find them all, but those they could find, a lot of them were elected officials and all of this. And then the

thing about it, why put the Japanese in internment camps, but by their facial features. They could spot a Japanese a mile off. Whereas, these ones who were Germans, Italians, were intermarried; they wouldn't know who they were. And so the whole thing was ridiculous and simply a matter of race prejudice.

KELLEY

How did the black community respond to it, at least black leadership?

MATTHEWS

I don't think they did respond, at least not in terms of what I know or felt. I don't think too many of them [blacks] got very upset about it, in terms of wanting to do anything about it or even having discussions in meetings about it. I don't believe they did. I think that in general they just thought, you know, this is part of war and didn't think too much about it. I'm not sure, you know, in terms of my looking back now after all of these years.

KELLEY

You mentioned that some of your patrons were also interned. And they sent you letters describing the conditions?

MATTHEWS

Well, actually, in this one case, the Portuguese husband, and they had either one or two children who used to come in the library and tell me. I'm not sure that I actually corresponded with his wife. But, very high class and delightful people, and of course many others were too, but I didn't know them personally. But I do know that in some cases in the West Jefferson district, there were quite a few Japanese living in that area that was called, you know, a special district for blacks. And in some cases, they left things with their neighbors and other people who were friends. Now, I did not hear about any of the Negroes who had things left with them, who disposed of them or didn't give them back when the people returned, but there were cases where— You see, they [Japanese Americans] had to leave so rapidly in some cases they didn't have time to even try to sell a business or dispose of their household things, and then I guess I also didn't know how long they would be interned and whether they would want their things when they came back. And the people— And speaking of a member of their own race, the one who was a senator here—

KELLEY

Oh, [Senator Samuel I.] Hayakawa?

MATTHEWS

Hayakawa. He talked like some white person would about them [Japanese Americans] not requiring any reparations because of them losing a lot of their things or having them stolen from them and also being upset by all of these years away from the whole business and everything else. And I feel they deserve reparation, because there was no excuse for them being put in those camps.

KELLEY

Right. Now, I read someone's analysis that the motive behind interning the Japanese was partially motivated by people trying to seize their property.

MATTHEWS

You mean that that was the reason for doing it? No, I don't think that. I think that the [U.S.] general and whoever was in charge on the West Coast was just prejudiced. And he just did it on the basis of race. And they never would have done it for any other race, unless it was a black race. In this case, they [U.S.] weren't fighting us [blacks], so they couldn't do it to us. But no, it was strictly a thing of prejudice.

KELLEY

Another thing—

MATTHEWS

At least, that's my impression.

KELLEY

I read that there was also a movement during World War II, and I don't know if it was in Los Angeles, a movement to look upon the Japanese as being an example to the colored races of the world. The Japanese—

MATTHEWS

You mean a good example?

KELLEY

Yeah, a good example. In fact, there was some—

MATTHEWS

Now is this before World War II?

KELLEY

This is during, this is right before World War II and during World War II.

MATTHEWS

Well, I can't understand why during the war, because since Japan was an enemy, and they had these people interned— It was my impression, from the early days when there weren't so many here, that they studied hard, they worked hard, and they were striving always to improve themselves. And they were strict with their children and brought them up both to respect the parents and their wishes and to do the things that would bring them greatest credit. And so I, you know, felt that they were people who deserved respect for their ambition and all the rest of it. But, the other thing, now there were times when I didn't respect some of them because they were discriminating against blacks in some cases—

KELLEY

Oh.

MATTHEWS

—with some of their businesses. Now when, let's see, I guess it was in the early sixties [1960's], my brother was moving his office from the Liberty Savings and Loan building, and they had this new Crenshaw-Santa Barbara shopping center, and about a block from Santa Barbara [Avenue, since renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard], they had a long block of Japanese stores. I think they were all Japanese, not other Orientals, but there might have been one or two, but mainly Japanese. And they had a special name that was in lights, I've forgotten whether it was called Japanese Square or something or whether it even had Japanese in that name, but you knew it was and they would not rent an office building or an office space to my brother and his partner. Of course, they didn't say so outright, but you could tell they were evasive, just like white people do when they're trying not to, finding reasons why this wouldn't be suitable or they'd have to divide this or they'd have to do this that or the other in order to give them the space they needed. And there were Japanese who just in general, not necessarily in business, tried to feel superior to blacks. And, of course, that's been true of a lot of people, and just like the Armenians, who've been persecuted by the Turks, coming over here; and anybody who's newly come, if they had been persecuted in their own country or the country they were living in, they're looking for somebody to be superior to. And if they saw that the white people in the United States discriminated against blacks, then they decided they'd follow suit because then that would put them in good with the majority group.

KELLEY

Yes. Okay. That's really interesting. That's really important information in general. In 1944, you decided to go to the University of Chicago to receive your M.A. First of all, well, what motivated you to even go to receive your M.A., and why did you choose the University of Chicago?

MATTHEWS

Well, actually, when I took my first year at [U.C.] Berkeley, I had planned to take the second year eventually, and the instructors there said it was best to have a little experience first; then you could decide what you would want to concentrate on in your second year. And I was surprised when I looked back through some of my correspondence and found that I wrote to [U.C.] Berkeley about two or three years after I started working, planning to go back. And I don't know why I didn't follow through on it, but I did send a letter. And I'm not sure whether I asked for an application or not, and, of course, maybe I was just sort of debating with myself whether I should, and I just wrote and would have the application just in case. But the reason— When I went to the University of Chicago, I changed universities and decided to go to Chicago. Part of my reason for going, just like going to New York, was to get a break. And then also the fact that they had—well, I had already considered the

University of Chicago before this occurred—a matter of them saying that every Branch Librarian who had been ten years or more in one place would have to be transferred. But I chose the University of Chicago also because it was one of the outstanding library schools in the country. In fact, I guess that one and [U.C.] Berkeley were possibly rated tops. And so I would be getting a different experience in a different city and also getting an education at a good institution. And then, also, this matter of feeling I might not continue in the public library. After I had already spoken to them about going to Chicago, but hadn't officially placed my request with civil service, and they made this comment about transferring anyone who'd been ten years or more—I had been ten years at Vernon Branch—and I found out they had interviewed every Branch Librarian but me about changing. And they even had interviewed people who rebelled about transferring. Some of them were going to retire in a year or two, some of them had bought homes in the neighborhood where they were, and if they had been real young people— Now the reason for having people transfer was so they wouldn't get stale in one spot. Well, if you happen to be in a Central Library department, they wouldn't be transferring you from department to department, unless it happened there was a vacancy that you were interested in and they felt you were suited for it, that they would transfer there. But even so, there were times when people would get and stay in a neighborhood so long that it was just like no inspiration, no stimulation for them to do an outstanding job to keep on working hard. Now, I did that until the very end, no matter where I was. I was always stimulated to do the best I could and to work as hard as I could. But, of course, there are other people who could even move around and still do what I call "half of a job." Well, when I found out they didn't want to transfer me to a place other than where I was, that spurred me on even more, and when I went to Chicago, I actually did plan to go somewhere else. And then it turned out when the year was almost up, the places that I—

1.7. TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (October 26, 1985)

KELLEY

Now, when did you arrive in Chicago to attend the University [of Chicago]?

MATTHEWS

Well, very shortly before the beginning of the semester in September 1944. I had my interview with the dean of the school, Dr. Carleton Jockel, who incidentally had been my professor when I was at the University of California, Berkeley for [the course in] public administration. He was the Berkeley City Librarian, and that was the only course he taught on the campus. And so it was like seeing somebody I knew when he interviewed me. And in the meantime, after he left Berkeley, he went back to the university and received his doctorate

and had been teaching in library school ever since. I don't know for how many years, but quite a while. And he asked me what I wanted to do and what field I wanted to go into, and I said I thought of the special library field. And he said, "What kind?" And I said, "Well, since most of the special libraries have one or two people and they don't change until somebody retires or dies, I feel the Library of Congress would have the greatest possibilities, because they would have a larger staff and maybe more turnover." And he said, "Oh, I don't think they'll take you at the Library of Congress." And I said, "What do you mean they won't take me?" And he said, "Well, I know the personnel officer and he's as good as said that they had a policy [against hiring blacks]." And I said, "A government institution?" And I said, "For your information, I have a friend in Washington [D.C.] who has a good [black] friend who has been the library representative of the Library of Congress at the British Museum in London for twenty-five years, and at the present time, because her apartment building was bombed during the war, she's back at the Library of Congress to wait until the war is over so she can go back to London." And I said, "When my sister and I visited Washington in 1930, a friend had them give us a behind-the-scenes tour of the Library of Congress, and there is a black man who is the specialist in Oriental Languages in the catalog department at the Library of Congress." "Well," he said, "I didn't know that." And I said, "But it doesn't matter whether anybody has preceded me; somebody has to be first, and I can think of no better place than the government where we're paying taxes." And so I don't know whether he had already mentioned my teaching library science before then or at what point it occurred, but he suggested that I teach library science at Atlanta University. And I did say to him, "[In the] first place, I went into the library field because I didn't wish to teach." In fact, I said that. And he said, "Oh, but it's different when you are teaching something that you practice." See, I'd had seventeen years experience at this time. "It's different from just teaching per se." And I said, "And then the other thing, I don't care to go south." I said, "My father sold his home at a great sacrifice and moved out to California so his children wouldn't be brought up in segregation." And he said, "Oh, but they need people like you to help bring up the level of the [black] population so they'll be ready for integration." And I said, "What about the Okies and the Arkies? What about the Kentucky hillbillies? Are they ready?" I said, "You don't need people to have an education to be ready for integration, you take them where they are." And I said, "At any rate, I don't intend to repay my parents by going south at this time. And I also don't wish to teach, even library science." So then we selected three courses that were general courses; you have to take principles of research and administration and a few things of that kind, so then I could make up my mind after the first quarter exactly what I wished to do. So I ended up taking some courses in the public library field, and since they

permitted us to take courses outside the library school, I took two courses in sociology and one course in social statistics. That was at his suggestion. Because he said it's very valuable when you're doing research or a reference to know how to read the charts and do a lot of things. So I had courses from him, and he gave me good grades. In fact, I'm trying to remember what I got from him the first term at [U.C.] Berkeley, whether it was an A or a B, but I got A's from him and I— So then, when it's near the end of the semester, and they gave forms for everyone to fill out to say what salary would you like, what type of work would you like, what areas would you like to work in, I said I would work anywhere in the world except the U.S. South. And I also indicated no interest in teaching library science. When I had a personal interview with the man— Let's see, in the meantime the dean retired at the beginning of the summer, so he had already gone, and the person who succeeded him happened to be a Jewish professor, and he was in charge of placement for students.

KELLEY

Do you remember his name?

MATTHEWS

[Leon] Carnovsky.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

And he was also my counselor for my thesis. And so he's offering me Atlanta University to teach. And I said, "I told Dean Jockel when I had my first interview, I, in the first place, didn't care to teach, even library science, and I also didn't wish to teach at Atlanta." He said, "You ruled out practically everything." I said, "Since when is the U.S. South the biggest part of the world?" I said, "I'd go anywhere in the world except the U.S. South." And I said, "I understand you've interviewed first year students, offering them jobs in Europe, and they didn't put it on their application and they turned you down! Now, you're not offering it to me." And he still didn't offer it to me. And I said, "I was interested in going abroad as well as anywhere else in the U.S." And then [with him] being Jewish too! Now, I know darned well in Europe they didn't say don't send us any black person, because you know the Europeans generally don't even think about that. And even with my telling him that these students had told me, first year students who were just graduating and first year, and they had been offered jobs in Europe. I know at least three of them told me that. And they hadn't asked for it, and they turned him down. So, I remember they had a race relations center that was set up during the war in Chicago, and I applied for a position there. But they were foolish enough to think that a greenhorn finishing first year could set up a special library with no experience or background, because that was the salary they were offering: a

salary for a first-year student. Here I not only had seventeen years experience, but I was a supervisor, and I also had experience with race-relations books, you know, in the field, and race relations and so forth. And so I told them, "You're foolish to think you can get somebody decent to do a proper job for this, you know, for this kind of money." I said, "You're just giving them money almost that you'd pay a clerk." And so, I didn't, you know, do that. And then I recently came across some letters that I had forgotten about. I wrote to Yale University, which was setting up a James Weldon Johnson collection of black literature, and offered myself as a candidate, outlined what my experience had been. I don't know whether I sent them a regular résumé or was waiting for them to ask for it, and it wasn't completed, that is the arrangements for that yet; I don't know whether they had the full money they needed for it or just what. Then I found I had written to some organization or institution that arranged positions in South America; you see, I majored in Spanish. In one case, I had written them six months earlier and hadn't had a reply, and I was writing a follow-up letter. And then I think I wrote to some department involved with the [U.S.] State Department, in terms of jobs abroad. So I was surprised myself, because all I remembered was the race relations business in Chicago and their offering me Atlanta University teaching. So I had also had a letter from the Los Angeles Public Library a couple a months before the end of the year, to ask me what my plans were and whether I planned to come back. And the first one came from the Assistant City Librarian, and she told me the branches that were available at that time. And of the ones she mentioned, I told her I would be interested in John Muir [Branch] which was— In fact, most of the ones other than the ones [branches] where I was would be in an area where you would find a number of white people, unless I went over to the Boyle Heights area, where it would be a foreign kind of mixture of people. And I told her I would be interested in John Muir [Branch]. Well, then, later, I received a letter from the City Librarian and they had already filled all of those vacancies she told me about two months earlier. I don't know whether she mentioned any particular places, but the one thing that I was furious about in this letter that I received from her, she said something about my branch housekeeping, being left very much in arrears when I left to go to the University of Chicago—and I had used a week of my vacation trying to get everything in as near as tip-top order as I could. Now, the Watts Branch [Library] was a smaller branch and, having always been fairly small, I got it in perfect shape early. But Vernon, having been a huge branch and then going downhill after the first blacks were moving in and didn't read as much, and the fact that when they reduced it to three days a week, the people who were the good readers, and especially my white readers, they went to the Central Library downtown. I can't remember when I get ready to go to the library whether it's Monday, Wednesday, Friday or what other days of the

week, and so when they cut it down to three days a week I lost as much as six thousand circulation a month. And so it was really just like a knife in the back. And, let's see, I was talking about, oh, coming back to Los Angeles. So when I finally got back— Oh, and so I was so furious about this letter saying that the things were in bad shape when I also had my one experienced clerk-typist on maternity leave. And in addition to her giving me all these green professionals, I had only messenger-clerks—kids who shelved books—to do the overdues. Well, naturally, they had to come after school—they were either high school or college— All of the drawers where they had to look up the records of people were right in the front of the desk where people would come in. And after school, the place was bedlam, and if you were there trying to do your work, even the noise and the racket would prevent you from doing a good job, plus the fact they weren't experienced, so they had to stop sometimes to just wait on the people. And then here I was doing messenger notices before and after going to work and coming back for both Vernon and Watts [Branches], because people were beginning to move rather rapidly, and if you waited to send it downtown [to the Central Library] for the man who took care of that kind of thing, they would have been long gone by then. So here I was doing work out of class, not having proper help to do the work—when this girl is on maternity leave—so I told her before I left, I said, "Now the overdues are very much in arrears, because I didn't have experienced help and these people—" You see, she could work when the library was closed in the morning or some other time and work undisturbed or early in the afternoon before all the crowds came in. And I said, "Since she's not entitled to vacation, let her work those two weeks in Vernon [Branch] to get caught up on those overdues." "Oh no, can't do that. We need her for substitute at Central Library." See, they only— I forgot to tell you that during this period when they were short of funds, they closed all of the branches the last two weeks in August and ran it through Labor Day, so that they all took their vacations at the same time, because then they didn't have to furnish substitutes. In fact, they didn't furnish substitutes generally, but sometimes if the branch was very small, they would have to furnish a substitute. And then they kept the Central Library, only, open, and, then, if anybody was not entitled to vacation, they let a lot of the people at Central Library go on vacation at the same time and sent the people not entitled to vacation down there to substitute. Well, they didn't need this girl at Central Library as a substitute, and then they made her take two weeks without pay after she's had a year—I don't know if it was a full year—on maternity leave, and she wanted to work. And so then this girl who took my place was a Branch Librarian at a smaller branch and lazy. She took— See, they had the book checks then where you wrote the person's name and everything. She took the batch of back overdues downtown with her when she went to the first book

order meeting and said, "Look, some of these are three or four months old and haven't been sent blah, blah, blah," and all of this. And this person who was my good, experienced, clerk-typist used to write me in New York, and she said, "She's the sloppiest, the laziest, person you ever saw, and if she happened to step to the circulation desk to charge out a couple of books when it was busy, she'd just throw down the stamps"—that was before they had the machines—"and you'd have to look all over for the stamps if you happened to go there after she had been there." And she didn't half do her reference work or anything else and then she's criticizing me when I had worked like a dog, you know, to get the place in as good shape as it was, except for the overdues. And so when I came back and had my first interview with the City Librarian [Althea Warren]—when I answered her letter I waited a week, because I was really burning up for a whole week after receiving the letter—I didn't mention it at all. And they say whenever you're angry or anything it's best, even if you write a letter, to sit on it a while and then reread it later. Well, in this case, I just didn't even write it until a week had passed, and then I didn't mention this at all. And almost the first thing she mentioned was the matter of— Oh, I think she was saying this branch where I was going, Washington Irving, there wasn't a lot of community work to do—there's only one organization in the neighborhood—and then brought up about Vernon Branch and this housekeeping being in arrears. I shook my finger in her face, and I said, "Miss [Althea] Warren, I couldn't have done any more than I did, unless I had forty-eight hours in every day and four hands." I said, "I used a week of my vacation." I said, "I had nobody really to do those overdues except inexperienced messenger clerks, and then they couldn't get the work done even as fast as they would've been able to do it for the public coming up to the desk, and all of those things right at the front." And I said, "Nobody else would have even had it in as good shape as I did after I did work out of class, doing overdues before I left, and then also used a week of my vacation to do things as well as I could." And I said, "Having green help, and inexperienced help generally, but to have this experienced person who could just—" Oh, she was better than any of the librarians. When I used to go away and show the children's librarian how to do the cash report, one of them spent a half hour writing every detail about how it's done. And if you look at this form, you write down what the fines and so forth are and you add its total here. The end of the month, you add all of these totals here and you get them to match, and there you have it. If there are any disbursements, then you subtract those in that last column, and a baby who can add should be able to do it. Well, the next time I showed this clerk-typist how to do it, and I just said it once, and she repeated it back just like that, didn't take a single note, and somebody told me she did the report in fifteen minutes. That

other girl took almost a day—half a day anyway—to do that little old cash report.

KELLEY

That's amazing.

MATTHEWS

And so to show you the difference, having somebody who was experienced, and she was a college graduate too. And so then I had the Washington Irving [Branch Library] which was in a nice neighborhood, mostly white. There were only a few residents who were Negro who lived in one block not so far from there, and all of them liked me. And I didn't have to do a lot of community work, because I didn't have to build up the circulation and it was at a time, too, when things were going well—right after the war [World War II] ended when people were coming back to the library more than they had before. Some of the people said the woman who retired was not too old, but she apparently had a hearing problem and wore a hearing aid and a lot of times if you're not speaking so they see you— Now if you walk up to the desk and she has her head turned this way and they say something to her, she wouldn't even know they were talking to her. And so maybe she didn't answer. And they said, "We're so glad to have somebody who's not afraid to get up off their seat." And then, of course, a lot of people weren't as energetic as I was anyway, even if she hadn't had this little hearing difficulty, and they didn't know that maybe she wasn't deliberately ignoring them; it was just a case of not hearing it. And so I got along very well there. In fact, there were several people who wrote letters to her [Althea Warren, City Librarian]. One of them was a woman who was, I don't know if she was director of a children's home society, kind of an adoption agency, and their headquarters was just a few blocks away, and she said, "Oh, I've been to a lot of libraries in my lifetime and I've never had such good service as I've gotten here." And she wrote that to the City Librarian. She told me many times, you know, how delighted she was to come there. And then she wrote that to the City Librarian. Now, William Grant Still's wife is Caucasian—of course, he's dead now—and she wrote a letter, and guess how [Warren] answered her letter. She was just telling her what good service I gave and so forth, but had to tell her about my having been at Watts and Vernon [Branches] and dealing with the black collection. And I don't know what else she said, which is totally, you know, irrelevant, in terms of answering her letter, saying what good service I was giving at Washington Irving [Branch] . And she even had to bring up to me something about the people having signed restrictive covenants in this neighborhood. And so what she was trying to do was to make me feel ill at ease and self-conscious, but she didn't know who she was talking to, because that didn't bother me a bit, and I got along well with all

of them [whites]. And as I say, she got even two letters, a lot of people wouldn't get one letter. Now let me see, what else was I going to say?

KELLEY

Can we just backtrack to something that I think is important. When you were at University of Chicago, you decided to write your master's thesis on race relations and—

MATTHEWS

Library activities in the field of race relations.

KELLEY

Yes, I'm curious, why did you choose that topic?

MATTHEWS

Well, it happened I had just finished the annotated bibliography on the Negro in California, 1781-1910, and I was hoping it could be worked into something I could use for my thesis. And the very first day in our course on methods of investigation, the professor went around the class and said, "Do you have any idea what subject you will choose for your thesis?" And I don't know whether I mentioned that or whether he had indicated in some way that a straight history thing wouldn't be adequate. So while he was—he didn't get to me immediately—going around the room, I thought this up. Just happened to come to me, you know, since I was interested in doing something— Of course, what I thought I would be doing if I'd continued with this bibliography I'd been doing, would be to get something done and get credit for it too that I had already started. And so it just was one of those things that popped into my head while he was talking to the other people, and it proved very interesting to me. You haven't read it, but in the very beginning, I mention that the— See, some of the people who were on staff at the American Library Association [ALA] headquarters, which was in Chicago, had classes in some of our classes—I mean, they were taking just one course while they were working—and I knew a number of them just by seeing them in the classes and talking to them. And when I had mentioned my subject, and I don't know how far along I was with it, because I sent out my questionnaire— See, we had four quarters, and I guess at least by the second quarter I had sent out my questionnaire, and so I may have talked to her [an ALA staff person] about it, and I don't even remember which department she was in at the American Library Association. But somebody in the Association headquarters indicated they [ALA] would be interested in this after I finished it, even before I had started it. And then after I finished it, one of them said that they would send it to one of the leading literary magazines like Harper's or Atlantic Monthly if I rewrote it or maybe did a couple of articles on it, you know, because they don't like the form that one has to use for a thesis. So it was of general interest too. And I don't remember having read anything much in the library literature, and I'm surprised that they

suggested sending it to one of the literary magazines rather than to one of the leading library journals. And the other thing—it brings in a number of things that have to do with racial and cultural tensions in America— And it was at a time when things had just been happening. In fact, at the very beginning I mention that racial and cultural tensions in America were not a recent development, but go way back in our nation's history, that the Quakers in New England were early victims of religious intolerance, and in the 1850's an attempt was made to prevent newly arrived immigrants from becoming U.S. citizens. And, of course, long before the Civil War there were slave insurrections in the South and race riots in the north, and many riots and lynchings took place following the Civil War. And shortly after the turn of the century there were serious riots in Atlanta, Georgia and Springfield, Illinois. And the period during and following the first world war was one of intense racial conflict. So then within the space of a single year, in 1919, riots took place in twenty-six American cities. Of this number, two were in Illinois: East St. Louis, and Chicago; and one in Phillips County, Arkansas and one in Houston, Texas; and they were very costly in terms of lives lost, persons injured and property destroyed. And it seems that racial and cultural tensions occur mostly in war periods or shortly thereafter.

KELLEY

In terms of the role of the library in trying to reduce—? Did you draw—? I mean, I know that you saw that various sources were—

MATTHEWS

Oh, I sent a questionnaire to fifty libraries and received answers from forty-five. And I had them selected from all over the country, large libraries, medium sized, and some small. And I tried to analyze them in part by the areas; I know I did the West Coast and the South—and showed also differences in terms of sections of the country. And it was surprising to me even then that the middle west was so segregated—and other parts of the east and parts of the East Coast. And so it wasn't just the South where there was segregation and they needed to have things to— And also, not only a matter of these different sections of the country, but I was surprised in some parts of the country that Indians and Mexicans were included, not just on the West Coast in terms of minorities who were segregated and discriminated against. And, of course, the schools and educational institutions were segregated. So I learned a lot doing this, and I wrote to these libraries to find out what they were doing, and I indicated certain areas that I would be interested in— And I might mention here that the Jewish professor, Mr. [Leon] Carnovsky, who was my counselor for the thesis, didn't want me to list employment on the list of things I was indicating that the library might do to help relieve tensions and so forth. He said, "Oh no! That's administration!" I said, "Everything listed here's administration. Everything a

library does comes under Administration. They have to have rules and regulations about everything they do." And I was very pleased when I reread this. I had already talked with a woman who was head of the regional library that was closest to Chicago. In fact, she had even invited me to one of her staff meetings and was very interested in what I was planning to do with my thesis. And she had indicated while we were just chatting that when people go into the club room and hear a lecture on a certain subject that has to do with race relations, and they come out and they're waited on by people belonging to different minority groups, then they get a positive demonstration that all people are alike and can give the same service, no matter what color or what race they belong to. And see, that applied to others, not just blacks, because this particular study included, in terms of minorities, Jews, Indians, all of the Orientals, Mexicans or people of Spanish descent, as well as Negroes. And I don't know whether I've forgotten any, but I was trying to include all minorities who suffered any type of discrimination in the United States. And so this matter of employment— You see, some of them [questionnaire respondents] might not even employ Jews, and they would look white. And then other— Now, in some cases they [respondents] would employ any minority but a black. And in one of the chapters at the end, where I summarize—I don't know whether I should get to that point right now, but since I'm speaking about employment—where several of them reported that they employed not only Negroes but other people as members of the staff, and some of them [respondents] were in cities where they didn't have but two or three Negroes. So it wasn't a case of having a pocket of Negroes in the city. And the several ones [respondents] that I quoted said that they felt employment was number one in terms of having some effect on racial and cultural tensions, and said that, of course, if you were using people for this purpose, you would select them very wisely—but said that would be true of selecting any staff member, and told how they were liked by the public and the staff. They never had any friction at all, and in one or two cases they said there would be one or two raised eyebrows, but never anybody going so far as to come to the librarian and make a complaint. And so I was very pleased, and of course my counselor said, "Don't put employment in." So I mailed all of these out to the people with that in it. It was just the one copy he had that didn't have it in it! And of course in my thesis, it isn't in either, because I couldn't let him know I had done it. But I am sure that some of these people, since this person that I had already talked to right there near the University of Chicago, had brought the subject up even before I got around to doing it, and I don't even think I sent her a letter. I think I sent it to the overall head of the whole Chicago public library. And so to get all of these good statements about them, about the importance of employing people, and some of them saying, "That's number one."

KELLEY

So your thesis may have made an impact all over the United States in terms of—

MATTHEWS

Oh, and then this, I might make this little statement here, too. [mutual laughter] I mentioned already that the City Librarian, Mr. [Harold L.] Hamill, who succeeded Miss [Althea] Warren, had been born in Washington D.C., where there was segregation, and he had been in Maryland where there was segregation, he'd been in Kansas where there was segregation, and the only place where he had worked was just for a few months before he received this appointment was in upstate New York. And so when I heard he was the person selected—he happened to have been number one on the nationwide civil service list, that is, you know, it was an open exam—I went back to read his answer to my questionnaire. And he said in Kansas they had two school librarians who were in charge of libraries in those schools, and they came to Central Library for the book order meetings because they didn't have a set-up for book ordering in the school system. And he said, I don't know just how he put it, but he as good as said, when they visited then, we try to treat them [blacks] as equals. And so, when you write things, you can read into it maybe something that wasn't intended, and when librarians or any person in business dictates a letter, they don't always draft it first and then dictate it, and often they even have to occasionally have it rewritten after the typist types it up, because the way they stated something isn't exactly like they wanted it to sound. So I was very dubious about this new person coming, and I had decided that I would study law, and I'm trying to remember whether I decided it before he came or after he came—

KELLEY

You were in Los Angeles at the time.

MATTHEWS

Oh yes, I was still in Los Angeles, just working here, and I was going to just take a few courses part-time and work full-time. Then if I decided I liked it [law] and wanted to continue, then I would give up my appointment as Branch Librarian and just become a librarian and work half-time, because I don't think they had any Branch Librarians working half-time. And then when I got to the last year, the third year of law—I would be sure that I would be interested—I was going to resign altogether to take the third year. And it happened, I went over to USC to find out what I would have to do, because having majored in languages and taken just a general liberal arts course, I wasn't sure I wouldn't have to go back and take political science courses before I'd be eligible to enter law school. And I was very surprised to find out that they would take me without taking any courses in political science and as in preparation for the law.

And then the man who was head of, I don't know what his particular job was, but for some reason, the fact that I was a librarian interested him. I don't know whether he was married to a librarian or something, but he rushed through this, getting me special permission to enter the law school—I think it was going to be in the wintertime, in between semesters normally—and even sent me the reply special delivery so I'd get it in time to register on Monday. And it was just before that Monday I was going to register for law school that they called me in on Friday to tell me they were considering me for a regional supervisor, and would I be interested, and I said, "Yes." And so then after getting that appointment, I gave up the idea of studying law. But I had thought— And so the matter of taking leaves of absence was a matter of getting a change of scene. And lots of times, you know, you come back with a fresh outlook, too, even if you didn't want to leave that particular job. But as I mentioned when I went to the University of Chicago, because I felt they were not going to promote me any further, even though I got a Westside branch and one that wasn't strictly Negro, I still felt that they weren't interested in pushing me at all. Oh, and I forgot to say, when I went to University of Chicago, nobody in the whole system had a master's degree in library science, including the City Librarian [Althea Warren]. Now, she had an honorary doctor's, you know, but she hadn't even a master's degree. And the year I went to Chicago, the head of the art department went to, I don't know whether it was University of North Carolina, but she went to another university, and so the two of us came back with our master's, and those were the first two master's in the whole system. And there were somewhere around, well, the whole staff was around seven hundred. I don't remember how it was divided in terms of professional and clerical. And also, when I was gone, they instituted a new system of analyzing the positions and fixing it so each department in the city wouldn't be paying separate salaries—I mean, different salaries for clerk-typists and so forth, and a person could transfer from one place to the other. Of course, librarians would be the only exception, because there were no other library departments for them to transfer to—so the profession was—but they were also trying to have the salaries fixed so that they would be in keeping with other professional salaries in the system—for example, an architect or an engineer. And as a matter of fact, most of the other professions were four-year degrees, and the librarians had five years. And, still, this company was brought from Chicago to do an objective job. The only people they didn't properly analyze or come up with a better salary range were the librarians, because the library had a separate budget and they felt they wouldn't have the money to pay this. And they hadn't gotten to the point, I don't believe then, of having the city to supplement the charter budget, which was ten [inaudible] on the dollar or something like that. And so a person in the head of the social sciences department took the—what

shall I say?—the rules or whatever the company was using to classify all of these departments: what kind of work they did, how much education they had, whether they worked at night and so many different things that they had. And if they had paid the librarians according to the things that they were using as a yardstick, they would have been double in their salaries and above any other profession in the system, because they had more education, they worked some nights until nine, and for many other reasons they would be way up there, but they didn't do it. But the main thing I was going to say when I started out about the salaries and what they did when I was away, wouldn't you think a year at the University of Chicago should entitle me to just a regular step raise that I would have gotten if I had been home working? And I had written her [Althea Warren, City Librarian] in the very beginning that I would expect to have a one-step increase because I wasn't at the maximum of my grade at the time I left, and I don't know that she answered me before that. And then when I was ready to come back, I don't know whether I asked it specifically, and she didn't say, "Yes," and I said, "Well, certainly, this is worth more than my just being on the job one more year." And I don't remember whether she ever relented and I just went on on that basis. And so there were times even when I complained, I didn't always get it. I know some time ago—that is, earlier, when I was at Vernon Branch—and some problem came up and I would go down and talk to the City Librarian and then I would tell my mother about it at home and she said, "Don't you think you said too much?" But you would be surprised, they respected me even though they didn't always do what I did. And this particular time it was when they were doing all of these transfers, and I had a black clerk-typist at Vernon Branch and there was a white clerk-typist at Watts [Branch] . That was when I was going to be in charge of those two branches. And the Assistant City Librarian, who was newly appointed, and she didn't know all the staff and everything—although, of course, you know, you can't tell me they don't know who all the blacks are, that they had them marked—so she [Assistant City Librarian] was asking me, was this clerk-typist at Watts [Branch] white or Negro? And I thought, "Well, why is she asking that?" And then, of course, the reason she's asking it, she's going to take my black clerk-typist and divide her between Vernon and Watts [Branches], then she's going to take the white one and divide her between Junipero Serra [Branch Library] and Jefferson Branch, which are Westside branches. And so then that's what she ended up saying, and so I don't think I said it to her right then, but I went back to the branch and either I phoned her or I wrote her, and I said, "Now, Jefferson and Junipero Serra [Branches] are open full-time. These two branches are open three days a week and they have limited staff, and how can I divide one clerk-typist into five days when they're open three days a week? I wouldn't have enough help with just a half-time person." So I said, "It's better to have this

person, one of them, work at Vernon and Junipero Serra [Branches], and one of them work Watts and Jefferson [Branches]," you know, either way. One of them work at a full-time branch and half time at another branch. Then they could work at that other place on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and be available Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at Vernon Branch, or I don't know how that we did the half days, whether they alternated one day a full day at one branch this week, and the other branch the full day. But, when I suggested that, she [Assistant City Librarian] said, "Why that's very sensible, Miss Matthews." And she did it. And so, you see, now the first time I made a suggestion, they didn't follow through, but I didn't give up, I just kept on trying.

1.8. TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (October 26, 1985)

KELLEY

Are there any points you'd like to make that are pertinent to the work that you've done on your master's thesis?

MATTHEWS

Well, there are two or three things I'd like to mention that will give some idea of the compass of the work. Notable collections of books on various minority groups are being built—or were being built, at the time I did this, in 1944-45—in New York, Cleveland, Chicago and other cities, and a new interest in the local history of certain minority groups has lead several libraries to advertise for early documents, letters, diaries and other important source materials which might otherwise be lost. In addition to some of the items already reported, there are two factors inherent in library administration which have a definite bearing on the removal of racial and cultural barriers and therefore are included here. The first concerns the policy of nondiscrimination adopted by libraries in certain areas of the country. When libraries open their doors and offer their services impartially to all races, colors and creeds in regions where patterns of racial segregation and education institutions are well-established, they are definitely contributing to the improvement of racial and cultural relations. Since separate schools are found in many cities in the middle west and on the eastern seaboard, as well as in the South, a number of libraries in these regions are taking the lead and breaking down segregation. These include El Paso, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; and Washington D.C. The second item concerns the employment policy of libraries with regard to certain minority groups. In their report, several librarians stress particularly the value and importance of a liberal employment policy as part of the library's program for the improvement of racial and cultural relations. The employment of Negro librarians in various Central Library departments and in branches located outside of segregated neighborhoods was reported by a

number of libraries. Negroes serving as Branch Librarians are found in a small number of cities, several of whom are in charge of all-white or mixed staffs. One city has a Negro regional librarian in charge of five branches. In various large public library systems, Negroes have served as radio speakers, members of executive committees and officers of staff associations, credit unions, library unions and forums. The emphasis in this study has been placed on positive action. In spite of the fact that a few librarians do not consider the combating of prejudices as their proper function, or they lack the facilities for carrying on such a program, the evidence is clear that a great number of librarians recognize the problem and are taking steps to remove it.

KELLEY

Now, when you were appointed regional librarian, did you try to take steps based on some of your own research? Try to implement—?

MATTHEWS

To implement it in the various places where I was?

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

Well, I always bought a reasonable number of black titles, even though I wasn't trying to build up a kind of exhaustive collection like I did at Helen Hunt Jackson [Branch] and Vernon Branch. And certainly in the matter of staff, I always believed in the interracial staff, and in terms of people not being allocated to any particular area because they happened to belong to a particular racial group or minority group. So I think, in general, I have. And then try to, you know, treat each person as an individual, regardless of color, and not think about race or minorities in terms of service, generally, you know, when you're giving service. Because some people are the kind who would even, I would say, discriminate against a person because they were poorly dressed or appeared not to be well-educated. But I take just as much time with the person who has trouble even trying to describe what he wants, as I would a person who's highly educated and can say very quickly what it is he came for.

KELLEY

I see. 1946 is an extremely significant year because this is when you had begun your work with the Intellectual Freedom [Committee]. And I was wondering if you can give sort of a description of the organization, its purpose, its founding and your activities there?

MATTHEWS

Well, the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the American Library Association was organized, I believe, about 1938 but—at least the Library Bill of Rights was written at that date—but I don't believe they had a really active committee even at that time. But Miss Helen Haines, who was not a librarian, worked

originally for the Publisher's Weekly magazine, which lists all of the current new books, and she also acted as secretary for the conventions for the American Library Association in the early days. And writing up all of those minutes and doing I don't know how much work and, I guess, publishing certain things and sending them to officers, she got a grand total of ten dollars for that feat. And she's a very smart person and a very bookish person and eventually served as a lecturer at the Los Angeles Public Library School. As a matter of fact, she worked full-time there for a number of years. And then she was also a lecturer at Columbia University, University of California, Berkeley and various institutions, sometimes for a summer. And she was very interested in intellectual freedom, and after the American Library Association adopted this first Library Bill of Rights, she organized a committee for the California Library Association [CLA] and she was the first chairman. And there was one other person, Mrs. Bruitt I believe her name was, who was head of the Long Beach Public Library, who was the second chairman. Now, I was the third chairman, and I'm sure Miss Haines told the newly elected president of CLA to appoint me as chairman of this committee, and at that time, the Intellectual Freedom Committee was not a standing committee either of the state or the national organization. But I was surprised at being appointed chairman when I'd never even served on the committee. Usually you serve on a committee and work up to being chairman. And I'm surprised, knowing how I generally feel about things, that I accepted it. And this person who was president, I have a feeling, didn't know who I was when she appointed me. And we did a nice little job that first, I think it was sort of a half-year, when we had a meeting. And being a committee chairman—and all committee chairmen are supposed to make reports—I was sitting down to my typewriter almost to the last minute before driving up to Berkeley where the convention was held to get my report written. So when it came to the business meeting and she [CLA president] was calling people up on the platform, the committee people, the committee chairs, to be ready to give their reports, she didn't call the Intellectual Freedom Committee, and so I walked to—let's see, the lectern was up on just a very small platform—and I said, "You didn't call my name; I have a committee report to give." She said, "Oh, I thought you were all through with that." See, the legislature had to close, but we had defeated some bills. Well, even though she had gotten record of it, the rest of the people didn't know about what we had done and even other things beside just a matter of fighting certain bills that we felt were detrimental to the well being of, you know, the people—the public I should say. So she said, "I'll give you—" I don't know if she said one minute or two minutes. And she didn't invite me to the platform and I sat in the first row. And here I had this report all written, ready to read it, and so I had to sit there and sit there and read through it quickly and try to decide what to select

and what to leave out. And then, you know, I have to be listening to other people too. And when I gave my report—and I didn't read anything, the parts that I had sort of decided to emphasize, I just did it in a hurry— And more people came to me— Now, this woman was a professor at a college in Oakland that was a private school and very high hat. And her president she had for the main speaker, and he was long and dry. And more people came up to me afterwards and said, "You said in—"and I don't know whether it was one minute or two minutes—"more that was worth listening to than this man who talked an hour and a half." And I was surprised that they were impressed, because I could only, you know, just give a quick little summary of a few things that I thought were important for them to know. And one of my best friends who drove up with me commented on it too, and she's the kind of person— Just like family, you could expect her to be very frank about whether you did do well or whether you should've done this or added this or that or the other. And so, several times I've been put on the spot like that, and I've been able to come through with a pretty good summary without having time to really plan it. So what I was going to say, she [CLA president]— And I don't know whether she said something about it not being a standing committee anyway, and I think it was principally because she had found out I was a Negro, I feel. But Miss Haines, as I mentioned, was very interested in me and very interested in the Intellectual Freedom Committee, and I imagine I wouldn't have done nearly as well in the beginning if I hadn't had her background and support.

KELLEY

I see. I'm curious, why did the ALA draft a bill of rights in 1938? Was there a reason to—

MATTHEWS

Oh, I think they felt even then that it was good to have some standards set for books selection. And I don't know that they had had any particular incident that caused them to feel that it would be a protection to have— Just like you have your by-laws and constitution so if anything goes wrong, you can say, "No, we're supposed to do it this way, and not that way." I think it was just to sum— Whoever initiated that first one just felt it was something an organization like ours should have; that's all I can remember now.

KELLEY

And when the committee was founded, what was its precise function?

MATTHEWS

Well, now, you mean the one [founded by] the American Library Association or the California Library Association?

KELLEY

Let's see, the California Library Association predated the American—

MATTHEWS

No, the American Library Association adopted this Library Bill of Rights in 1938 and I think formed a committee then too. And Miss Haines organized the California one at least about a year after I think the ALA had been formed.

KELLEY

I see. But it wasn't really active though.

MATTHEWS

Well, as far as I can recall. I know at the time I was chairman of the California Library Association, and I don't know if Miss Haines might not have written to somebody, to ALA, because I was appointed to the American Library Association [Intellectual Freedom] Committee—I was on the council, but that didn't have anything to do with it. And the woman who was chairman sent me several letters—I have correspondence back and forth with her—at least three letters exchanged before they had the midwinter conference in Chicago in January. And she had received some suggestions from some roundtables and maybe some letters from individuals, I don't recall which, but she was all for taking no action on any of them, as I recall. Just felt that they weren't worth bothering with or something or other. And sometimes, you know, people just don't know what to do, so they just do nothing. And I was the only one, and I was the newest member of the [ALA] Intellectual Freedom] Committee], who said I thought we should do something about it, at least two of the items. And it happened she [committee chairman] was ill and couldn't come to the midwinter conference, and she appointed some older member of the committee to act in her absence and call a meeting of the group at the conference. And she sent a tentative report, and she said they could revise the report, they could scrap it entirely and write a new one or just she'd leave it entirely up to the committee. They could operate without considering her at all in terms of what she would think or how she would feel; that she didn't mind whether they rewrote hers or scrapped it altogether. And so in the discussion of the committee, I was the only one who said we ought to do something about this and this and this, and so they said, "Well, you write it, and you give it." And here it is going to be the next day, the last business meeting, and I was in a meeting up till, oh, late, maybe eleven-thirty or something the night before. And, unfortunately, this particular time, I hadn't made my reservations soon enough to be in the convention hotel, so I had to take a cab back to my hotel, and then I was too tired that night to try to start working on it. The next morning I had to attend a meeting for my boss, the Assistant City Librarian, because nobody went to the conference that midwinter but me from our LAPL [Los Angeles Public Library]. And Mr. [Harold L.] Hamill [City Librarian] couldn't go either. And so I promised to sit in on her meeting and bring her notes right away, because, you know, if she waited for minutes it would be quite a while, and she wanted to know what was being done about certain items. Then after I went to that

meeting for her, they had told me that somebody in the secretarial pool at the ALA [American Library Association] headquarters could type up the report for me, so I went over there and started trying to work on this report—hadn't had any breakfast since, I guess, about lunch time about this time—and found out these gals couldn't type at all. You know, not to suit me. And so while I was sitting there working, a woman who was head of the textbook department of L.A. city schools came by, and she had somebody in her department who was on the ALA [Intellectual Freedom] Committee], but I don't think she came that particular time. So she read over what I had written and made some suggestions that were good. And so— I don't know whether she did it or somebody else brought me a sandwich and a glass of milk that I drank while I was still writing this. So after a while, the afternoon session had begun, and they sent word over to find out if I was going to have a report and whether I was going to give it. I told them, "Yes, as soon as could get finished." So I managed to get it finished before it was time for them to call on me. So then I sat listening to part of the—not part—the reports that were being given before mine, and when I got up and gave mine—I was fairly near the end—I was so amazed. They broke out in applause and they didn't do that for anybody else. And some of those who were in there, even before I got in the meeting, and there again they thought it was important subject matter and important that we do something about it. And and as I say, since that time, we have a— Let's see, what do they call it? Well, they have an Intellectual Freedom Round Table; there's an office—I'm not sure what they call the office, but it has to do with intellectual freedom—and it's like a foundation and exempt in terms of taxes and that sort of thing. And in the meantime, I mentioned earlier that—or did I mention it on tape?

KELLEY

It's off the tape.

MATTHEWS

—that we, some of the librarians, didn't buy certain books because they didn't want to buy anything that might be controversial for fear that, if they got caught in the middle, they might lose their jobs. Well, now, with this new type of foundation they have, if anybody is in that kind of a predicament, these people will support them and look for a new job for them so they won't feel they're left out in the cold. And then to think, you know, you have a big organization behind you, it makes a big difference in how you act and whether you're shy about taking a risk. And then the fact that both the state and the national are standing committees now; and before I even retired they had a whole conference, national conference, where that was the total emphasis. All of the general meetings had speakers speaking on some phase of intellectual freedom, and so it's been given a lot of attention in the years since the beginning when it

was only a—lets see, I don't know what they call something that's not a standing committee—but at any rate, just an ordinary committee.

KELLEY

I see. Well, what exactly was the purpose of the California committee [Intellectual Freedom Committee]? What kind of things did they—?

MATTHEWS

Oh, its a matter of freedom of choice for the librarians first, in a way, and then for the public, so that the public can read all sides of any question and then make up their minds as to whether it should be this way or that way and not have somebody say, "This is right." For example, if you are a Reaganite [a Ronald Reagan supporter], why then you would just read the things he approves of. And in this case, you can read all sides and then form your own opinion. And it's a matter of not having one or two people because it only takes one or two people to start a little thing rolling to censor a book or books, either in schools or in public libraries or in other places.

KELLEY

Now, it seems a paradox because this is right after World War II, and in Nazi Germany, Hitler had books censored and banned and even burned. Now, if this is like the United States—

MATTHEWS

Well, that's the kind of thing you don't want.

KELLEY

Yeah, exactly. It seems like that's what the purpose of the committee is, to combat those things.

MATTHEWS

Yes, the people who are radicals, extremists. And I don't know whether it was mentioned on tape, but I had people coming to, I think I was at the Vernon Branch at the time, wanting me to take out Mein Kampf, and I said, "No, it belongs here. We want people to know what [Hitler's] thinking, and what he's planning. And if you don't know what he's doing, how are you going to combat it if you think it's the kind of thing you should combat." And it's true of a lot of other subjects that you have to have. And sometimes there's more than just two sides; there may be several different opinions about certain things, and you can read all of them and then decide which you think is the better way.

KELLEY

Yeah, exactly. And for a committee to exist they'd have to be combating tendencies to ban books. So I'm curious, were there groups and organizations who were trying to get books banned?

MATTHEWS

Oh, and I forgot to say, since this began, it's not only books now, it's anything, because there are tapes, you see, with all this mechanization of libraries— I

forget how they worded a little amendment which would include all possible types of communication, whether it's film or, you know, anything else. Because libraries now, in fact, even way back then, were beginning to have films and records and various other types of things, and then now they're getting rid of books. In fact, there are many articles now in the library literature about a paperless society. See, everything's going to be—

KELLEY

Video.

MATTHEWS

Yes, on tape. Or microfilm, which is tape too.

KELLEY

Well, what sort of local groups in Los Angeles were trying to get books banned?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't know of any particular groups in Los Angeles that you could name, but when I mentioned a while ago that they were trying to eliminate the— not all of them but some of—Building America series, which had been approved by the National Teachers Association and were widely used throughout the country, just because one person thought the book on Russia was bad for the children to be exposed to, when it didn't mention politics at all, only how the people lived, and I think possibly mainly dealt with the agricultural element in Russia. And so for that particular series of books, the persons who initiated the drive against them were supposed to be a chapter of the Native Sons of California or America, I forget which, but they were a chapter up in Palo Alto. But somebody said when they investigated there were only two or three people; it wasn't really an active chapter. But they got a lot of attention in the media and began trying to do what they could to destroy this series or certain ones of the series and, of course, got to the legislature, and the legislature was holding up the whole budget to try to cancel these items before they would approve the budget.

KELLEY

Did the state or federal government try to ban books at all during this time?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't know of any particular instance where the— Well, see, in this case if they had succeeded in holding up the budget until they removed those, they would have, but I don't remember now how they managed to force them to accept the budget and not have that as a reason for waiting, you know, to do it. And I don't think of anyone in terms of the government doing it; although, there may have been lots of attempts just like this to hold up the budget in order to force people to withdraw. And it's strange. I'm trying to recall what finally happened in some parts. Now, in some parts of California—the same thing

happens in other states—some particular school district might withdraw the book. Each school district, as I recall, is more or less independent in terms of accepting the books that they buy, and when these books are adopted by the [U.S.] State Department of Education, they are not obligatory in terms of every school district having them. And then there are certain books that are optional. They can select from this group or that group or the other for some additional reading for students in certain subject fields. So I'm not a hundred percent sure about the federal government ever having done anything that came close to censorship or attempt at censorship like this holding a rod over the head, you know, in terms of budget.

KELLEY

While you were chair of the California commission, what activities were you involved in?

MATTHEWS

Now you're speaking of the Intellectual Freedom?

KELLEY

Yeah, the California Committee on Intellectual Freedom.

MATTHEWS

When I was chairman— What was it you asked me, what was involved?

KELLEY

Yeah, what were the activities of the organization?

MATTHEWS

Well, we were watching legislation for one thing, to see whether there were any bills that were pending that we needed to fight to see that they didn't get passed because we felt they would restrict freedom of thought and all the rest— advertising at different times things that were good. And I know we had a problem when I was chairman of the board of supervisors here, and I don't know who prompted them. They wanted to— In fact, I think they did appoint a lay board to supervise the County Librarian's selection of books. Now can you imagine it? And these are people who knew nothing about literature; they weren't trained people at all. And then they're going to supervise the person who is an experienced, trained person? And then we found out it's contrary to state law. The County Librarian, that's his duty, you know, that duty of selecting the books is delegated to him and no supervisory committee. And I think that was when I went to Santa Barbara and this was pending, and I presented two resolutions on the first day at the business meeting. I was kind of lucky. Mr. [Harold L.] Hamill [City Librarian] would let me get things xeroxed—of course, then it was mimeograph—and in quantity, so they had enough— And we had pretty good sized annual conventions of the California Library Association, and everybody had a copy. And here I told them, "If you have any suggestions to make, see me before the next—" the final day when we

had the final business meeting when they were supposed to be adopted. All these nuts running around like chickens with their heads cut off thinking that— See, some of them came from very conservative communities and were afraid of how they would react. Then, on the floor, same business of trying to rewrite the whole business from the floor. This one adding this phrase and this one adding this or deleting this phrase and adding. So I told them that I agreed with the sentiment involved because they were trying to protect themselves, in a way, from any accusation of being radical and all of that, but I didn't feel we should accept that wording from the floor that way, that the committee should reword it so it would be smoother; because, you know, it was very awkward sticking this in and cutting this out because when you don't sit down and do the whole thing, it makes it difficult. And I don't know, I think I lost that battle; they insisted on leaving the wording in for fear I would change it so the sentiment would be a little different. But I forgot also to say that— Oh, so, well, I'll finish with the fact that while we were at that convention, I was given a whole evening to do the whole evening program. I was to be chairman of it [evening program] and plan the whole thing. And I had Dr. Sterling, who had just been appointed president of Stanford University, as my main speaker. At the time, he was a scholar working at the Huntington Library [Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens]. And then I had a report from my committee, and that was the time when the county people had been asked to sign a loyalty oath. Now, nobody objected to signing a simple loyalty oath; that's routine, you know, with office holders and everybody else, that you'll uphold the constitution and so forth and so on. But they stuck on the end of that a list of, oh, I don't know, twenty-five or thirty organizations that they must say they do not and have never belonged to. And there were at least eleven or twelve of the County Librarians who refused to sign that portion of the oath, not because they belonged to any of them—and then a lot of them weren't really subversive anyway. But I think they did have the Communist Party on there, and the silly thing about it, the Communist Party was legal. It was on the ballot at the time. Now, isn't that stupid that you're going to, what shall I say, fire somebody maybe because they belong to a party that's legal because it's on the ballot? Now, if it had been outlawed and it was not on any ballot anywhere in the country, then that would be different. And so this man who was president of CLA that year was the Santa Barbara City Librarian.

KELLEY

What was his name?

MATTHEWS

[Pause] Well, I guess we'll not put it down—

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

—since what I'm going to say—

KELLEY

Oh, okay.

MATTHEWS

And I possibly will think of it later. He had a brother too who was a librarian. He told the press— Because the local press had had nice write-ups every morning, you know, for the of the day before our meetings, and I think the meetings lasted three or four days, I've forgotten. And he told them they didn't need to come Thursday night, because that wasn't important; that's the night I was going to have my meeting. And then he thought it was so important—that was a dress-up; we had to wear formal wear that night—he wanted to— Now, he wasn't supposed to have anything to do with it. He wanted to introduce my main speaker, and he just forced himself into introducing the main speaker. Now he thought it was important enough for him to be on the program, yet he told the papers [media] not to come because he was afraid some of the things in my report might not be the kind of thing his conservative constituency would approve of. And so I gave my report, and then I introduced the fellow who was kind of chairman of these eleven County Librarians who had not signed the supplementary part of that loyalty oath. Just on principle they felt they had no business asking those questions. And so the next morning, we had a booth at the particular convention and I had displays of a lot of books that had been censored in previous years, a lot of them classics today, but they wouldn't let them have them when they first came out. At least they wouldn't let them circulate generally. And so people came by our booth and said, "How come the [news]paper doesn't have anything about the meeting last night?" And that was the best meeting of the whole convention. And some of them said they liked my report better than they did Dr. Sterling's speech I guess because it got to matters that concerned them more personally, you know. His was a scholarly kind of a speech, and it was good speech, but it was just simply because they were interested in the things we had been doing, our committee [Intellectual Freedom Committee], and the fact that this was something that affected every member in the organization personally. And then I don't know who had told me that the man had told the press not to come. Maybe somebody even went to the press to ask them, and they got that information that they were told not to show up because it wasn't going to be an important meeting.

KELLEY

I see. I'm curious. Do you remember the names of some of these books that were censored?

MATTHEWS

Oh, a lot of them are things that, you know, today would have a few swear words in them and even, you know, youngsters can not only read them, but they say them. And occasionally, I suppose there might be something in terms of sex involved. But the books were well-written, and, you see, you don't judge entirely by subject matter. And then the other thing is, for parents who haven't been reading the last twenty years and they pick up a book that's modern, they're not aware of what's going on in the world today. And then the other thing is, they would pick a quotation from a page, either one sentence or not even a complete sentence, and take things out of context. And what the librarians usually try to do in selecting books is to select things that have good literary merit and reflect real life. And all life isn't beautiful and pretty, and there's some that we know that they've just brought in the swearing and a few other things just to make a bestseller. [They] think that people will rush to read it just because it has certain of these elements in it. And they don't select books of that kind if they aren't properly written and all of that. And as I say, offhand, I don't know any particular books except this Building America series, since those were school textbooks across the country. And what we were doing to try to stop it here was repeated at the American Library Association convention and the teachers convention. Isn't that funny, I always forget exactly how—the American Teacher's Association or something like that. And so it had a special significance because of its widespread use and the fact that several organizations nationwide were trying to avoid its being withdrawn from a lot of the schools.

KELLEY

Was the Committee on Intellectual Freedom around during 1953 with the McCarthy era?

MATTHEWS

Oh, it's still in existence and has been ever since I served on it.

KELLEY

How did it fare during at the period of time?

MATTHEWS

Well, do you know—? Of course, we had our own right here in California. And do you know, isn't that funny? I can't think of the man's name who was the state senator. Did you mention his name a while ago?

KELLEY

Senator [Jack B.] Tenney?

MATTHEWS

Yes, Tenney. Tenney was going to other states, busy trying to indoctrinate them to have their legislatures ban this and ban that and ban the other and they were having a special meeting in one of the places downtown, I don't remember whether it was the Federal Building or where. And I read about it in the paper,

and I went there to listen to some of the stuff they were saying and they wouldn't let me in. They only let special people in. They didn't know me, but, you know, they didn't even ask who I was. But I guess you had to have some kind of card or pass or something to get in, and so they were acting like a German militia. Just really very surprising. And as I say, here Tenney was objecting to Pearl Buck, to Willa Cather, a lot of standard, and we'd even consider them conservative, people. And because Pearl Buck lived in China and she recognized the Chinese as people, I guess that put her on his blacklist. And I forget what it was that Willa Cather had written, but they're beautiful, classical authors of fiction, and he had a lot of them in his index complaining about this, that, and the other. So those are people who have no judgment in terms of literature and do things, you know, in a harum-scarum way.

KELLEY

Were there any other comments concerning the committee? Intellectual [Freedom] Committee?

MATTHEWS

Well, I didn't mention on tape—did I?—that I went to the American Library Association annual meeting, I think it was in '84, and went to some of the meetings of the Intellectual—

KELLEY

Oh no.

MATTHEWS

—Freedom Committee and—

KELLEY

This is recent, huh?

MATTHEWS

—they were still doing the same thing I did when I was chairman and working on both the national and the state level on intellectual freedom. Still the schools beginning—you know, it's usually in high school level—of having certain books— And usually the books were not on the required list, they would be on the supplementary list, and the children could select certain ones. But they didn't even want them to have them even suggested for any kind of reading, so they weren't strictly required reading and a few of the same titles. I'm trying to think of some of the ones that they objected to in the schools. And the thing about it, they don't know that these children— Now, when I mentioned to you a while ago about the young girls who came to the classes at Vernon Branch [Library] in the thirties [1930's] and how sophisticated they were about a lot of things that you wouldn't have thought they'd be thinking about at that age, the same thing was true before them. When I was at the Helen Hunt Jackson Branch [Library], Steinbeck's—

KELLEY

Grapes of Wrath?

MATTHEWS

Grapes of Wrath. I had two old ladies who'd come in, looked like church ladies, and they asked for that book, and I said, "I'm sorry it's on reserve, you'll have to pay five cents to reserve it and we'll notify you when your turn comes." And one of them said, "five cents for that old dirty book!" [mutual laughter] And then we had little children to come in, maybe not for Steinbeck, but for something else that was beyond their age; and, in fact, we had a juvenile card, then we had an intermediate card, and then after fourteen, I believe, they got an adult card. And these girls may have had an intermediate card, and they asked for some particular book that was rather risqué and really definitely an adult book, and when I either told them, you know, they had to reserve it, or I think maybe I told them they couldn't reserve it, and so one girl told the other one, "Oh come on, I'll tell you about it at recess." [mutual laughter] So you see, that's way back. I went to Helen Hunt Jackson [Branch] from '29-'34 and so if children were reading things and learning about it then, before all of the TV— Now all this exposure to TV, even babies practically can talk to you about certain things and describe them— And so today, it seems odd to me that these same things are happening in the field of intellectual freedom that were happening way back in the thirties [1930's] and the forties [1940's].

KELLEY

Yeah, that's amazing.

1.9. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (November 11, 1985)

KELLEY

Okay, even before your retirement in 1960, you've been involved in a lot of committees and commissions and organizations, and I was wondering if you can go over your professional activities from, I guess, after 1950—

MATTHEWS

No, beginning.

KELLEY

Actually the beginning on up to the present. Even though you may have gone over some items before, we can tie it all together.

MATTHEWS

Yes, I think it would be advisable to have those as a single unit, and those that I've already mentioned, I'll be very brief about. The first important activity was as a radio book reviewer for the Los Angeles Public Library over stations KHJ and KFI which were two of the largest at that time. And I served with several other individuals on the library staff for a period of six years from 1929-35. Then I started a library book club at the Helen Hunt Jackson Branch Library

and operated it from 1929-34, when I was transferred to the Vernon Branch [Library] , where I founded another library book club, and it operated from 1934-39. During the period from '38 to '39, I was a secretary for the Los Angeles Public Library Forum Committee, and this was an overall organization for the entire library system. We had various authors come to town, and we planned certain subjects, even when there was no important main speaker, so that the librarians would get together to discuss certain matters of mutual concern. During the time I was in New York, they held two conference leadership training groups. A member of the state department of education was the instructor, and I arrived home from my stay in New York in 1940 just in time for the third group, which was the last of the groups to be organized. And the heads of the branches and the heads of Central Library departments were combined for these special in-service training courses from the state. And at the end of each session—I shouldn't say each session—but when the conference leadership group for each one was completed, a chairman was elected by that group. And the previous two, the first and second groups, had elected a person from the Central Library feeling that the heads of departments at Central Library were a step above Branch Librarians. And I was very surprised, being a Negro and a Branch Librarian, to have been selected as chairman of my group. And after the three had been selected, each group was asked to select a project which would be of some benefit to the Los Angeles Public Library. And it was my suggestion, since we were having problems with budget, to try to find some way to get additional funds for our general operating budget for the library. And I suggested writing to all of the leading libraries in the state to find out what their tax rate was, what their total budget was for the city or the town per capita, and found out that Los Angeles Public Library was quite a ways down in terms of per capita income. And before the instructor who had taught these three groups left, he called a special mass meeting of the Los Angeles Public Library staff, so it included everyone, clerical and professional, and had each of the three chairman to give an outline of their particular project and what had been done up to that point. And after the meeting was over, he asked our group to come to the front so he could give us our certificates of completion of our particular course. All the other people had left, and he commented that our group had the best chairman and the best project and the best presentation, and so I was very pleased to have that kind of a compliment. He said, "Now don't tell any of the others I told you this," to our group. And so in addition to being the only Branch Librarian who was selected as a chairman, to think that he thought that our presentation and project was the best, certainly pleased me a great deal.

KELLEY

Do you remember his name?

MATTHEWS

Offhand, no, I don't recall his name. I'd have to look it up. I've already mentioned my Intellectual Freedom Committee activities, both with the California Library Association and with the American Library Association, and the fact that our California Library Association as a state committee had done more than the national committee. We set an example for the national committee to follow, and, eventually, other states were urged to form an Intellectual Freedom Committee so that they could act promptly in their own community without waiting for the national to back them up; also to correspond with the national to see if they'd had a similar complaint from some other state or city. So that was a very busy time for me and a very rewarding time, because I felt it was such an important task. I was also chairman of the nominating committee in 1950 for the California Library Association, and just before I retired I was asked to serve on still another committee—I can't recall the name of the committee—but since I was planning to retire, I declined that nomination; but my name had gotten associated with intellectual freedom, so for a long time, they didn't think of me for anything else except the nominating committee. When Mr. Hamill, Harold L. Hamill, became City Librarian in 1947, after Miss Althea Warren retired, he decided that he would like to have a survey made of the Los Angeles Public Library, and I was appointed on the Survey Committee on Library Objectives in '48-'49 while this survey was being conducted. And it happened, as consultants they invited Leon Carnovsky and, I believe the other man's name was Miller, who were on the staff at the University of Chicago. And since I had just completed my course there a short while before, they were very familiar with me and even talked with me privately and asked me questions about certain things. And they were impressed with some of the things we did in Los Angeles Public Library, especially our book selection process and our special committees that plan lists for replacement. Because it's good to keep up with the new books, but you need to have a basic collection in various fields, and if you don't have people who are covering that material on a special basis to suggest a new edition on a particular subject or to fill in where you had too weak a collection in a certain area, we'll say, in science— Now science and technology was a field that was constantly changing, and many times a book would be out of date, so it's better to discard that book if you didn't have a more recent one and borrow from Central Library, than to have a person take a book that was out of date and would be giving them false information. So they felt that this particular replacement schedule that we had with this list of suggested books was a very fine way for librarians to have a much better branch collection in various subject areas. When the City Librarian [Harold H. Hamill] arrived to take over the Los Angeles Public Library, he knew he had to get acquainted with our

system as well as the staff, and he asked the Central Library department heads and the Branch Librarians to list three people that they would like to have represent them with the most important one listed first. And I was very surprised when he appointed me and one other Branch Librarian to represent all the Branch Librarians in the system. And he called me in for more meetings, administrative meetings, than he did the other person.

KELLEY

What year was this?

MATTHEWS

That was '47-'49, see, while he was getting acquainted with the Los Angeles Public Library system.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

The University of Chicago Graduate Library School Alumni Association elected me vice president in 1950-51. Since I was on the American Library Association council, I was going to all the meetings in the midwinter and the summer, and the alumni association meetings were always held at one of these meetings. After I retired, I served on several committees, and the most important in the beginning was the Southern California Committee on Library Cooperation, from '64-'65. I traveled from 100-300 miles each day. I went out into the field and interviewed all the heads of all of the public libraries in four counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino and filed written reports with the committee[Southern California Committee on Library Cooperation]. In addition, I reviewed the reports sent in to the committee by the various libraries—especially on interlibrary loans—what subjects and how many and how often they had to get material from other libraries. Of all of the libraries involved, Los Angeles Public Library was the largest, so it had fewer interlibrary loans than any of the others, and most of its interlibrary loans had to be sent to Library of Congress or the [California] State Library, a much larger library, because most often they would have all of the books that the smaller libraries would have in their area, unless by some chance they had lost the last copy. So this report was finally written up about '65 or '66 and included a number of ways in which libraries in Southern California could cooperate to give better library service to every individual borrower, because they felt a person should not be penalized because he lived in a small city and didn't have very much money and perhaps could only buy a few books a year. And today the cooperative system has spread, and, eventually, a state law was passed called the California Library Services Act, and they divided the state into various systems. And within each system they cooperated, and that way the smaller ones got the benefit of being close to the larger ones. And they had a

system of electronic mail, a delivery system, to get books in a hurry when they needed them, and advice, too, from the larger libraries, and that kind of thing. And so at first the Los Angeles Public Library was a system by itself. Los Angeles, San Francisco and Long Beach, I believe, were the three systems that were large enough to have a system of their own. So when the Los Angeles Public Library first appointed an advisory board, I was chairman of that board from 1970-80. But, subsequently, the Los Angeles Public Library and the Long Beach Public Library decided to join the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System Advisory Board, which was made up of twenty-eight libraries, after these other two systems decided that there would be some advantage in them joining the larger cooperative library system, both in service they could render to these other libraries and, in some cases, get service in exchange. And I was very surprised, before I retired from the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System Advisory Board— I served from 1980-82 or '83—I've forgotten when I resigned— I did an administrative survey for a rather full report which was done at the suggestion of the person who was serving as chairperson for the Metropolitan system. And I interviewed the heads of several libraries before I wrote my particular section on administration. And when I visited Beverly Hills, I was surprised to find out that they served a large number of people who were—some of them not right on the border line between Beverly Hills and Los Angeles, partly because they had much longer hours than the Los Angeles Public Library. Now here was a huge city in a huge system, but their budget had been cut to such an extent that they were open only three nights a week till eight o'clock, and when they were open until eight o'clock, they didn't open until twelve noon. I was so astonished when I went down to Central Library one day, before I knew about the new hours, and got there before noon, and it was a day they were going to be open in the evening, and I had to wait for them to open at twelve o'clock. And the Beverly Hills system had a much longer schedule of hours for the whole week, both opening earlier in the morning and being open later more evenings and better hours on Saturday. So the people who live close enough found they could go when they would find the public library in Los Angeles closed, whether it was the branch or the Central Library building. And so I felt that the cooperation that was made possible through these systems and their advisory boards was very valuable for the library, and I was happy to have given volunteer service in carrying some of the business to its ultimate goal. And then I served on the Los Angeles Public Library Advisory Board for the docents project, which they began in the Los Angeles Public Library in 1981. The object was to have these special tours for people who were new to the city or new to the Los Angeles Public Library, so they would know more about the various departments, where they were located, what type of service they could expect, and to take a greater interest in their

public library, both the Central Library and the branches; even though they would just talk about the branches, they would just do the tours of the Central Library building. And I recommended certain individuals to serve as docents, and they were giving special training courses to the docents until they were ready to take over their job as a docent.

KELLEY

I'm sorry, I must be really ignorant, but what is a docent?

MATTHEWS

Oh, a docent is a person who serves in a museum, in this case a public library. If you go to a museum, often people who are going to see a special exhibit will have a docent take them around and explain everything, and so the docent would be a person who would give a set talk, and then they would answer questions if any of the people were interested in knowing more about certain subjects. So that concludes the major things I have done as a professional volunteer, you might say, both while I was working and since I've been retired. [tape recorder off]. I neglected to mention that I joined the California Librarians Black Caucus after I retired. They have a southern section and a northern section in California, and I've been connected only with the southern section. It's dedicated to the welfare and concerns of black librarians, with specific emphasis on supporting all efforts to eradicate inequalities in the profession—I had to fight that battle all by myself—functioning as an ombudsman for black librarians in all communities, promoting library and information services to blacks, evaluating the quality of published materials concerning blacks and monitoring political activity. The southern section was organized in May 1972, and since that time, the caucus has been very active in working towards the fulfillment of its goals. Today they are recommending and supporting candidates for California Library Association, especially black candidates, supporting librarians in affirmative action, evaluating and promoting black materials and black authors by having annual black autograph parties, monitoring library legislation and policies and monitoring the activities of the California Library Services Board, all of which has a definite influence on the black librarian. So it's a very worthwhile organization and it is doing something to help the black librarian achieve greater recognition.

KELLEY

I see. You were also involved in a number of women's organizations and various civic organizations. I was wondering if you can discuss your activities and what are some of the goals and aims of these organizations.

MATTHEWS

They cover quite a period. I don't recall the date the YWCA was organized, Young Women's Christian Association, but it goes back before the turn of the century. I'm not certain whether Los Angeles is quite as old as the beginnings

of the YWCA nationally, but I think I read something recently, it's that L.A. is probably celebrating its ninetieth anniversary about now. Now I've been a member of the "Y" ever since I was in high school. And during the early periods, I gave talks, book reviews, that is when I was working, and attended meetings of various types and was more active than I've been in recent years where I've given my financial support and occasionally attended some special function. As a matter of fact, when they were trying to get their first new building— When I say "new," it was not a building which was built, but a different one from the first one, which was on Twelfth Street near Central Avenue. And eventually that became a very undesirable neighborhood, and it was a rented building that didn't have the space and facilities for dormitories and even certain types of activities—no gymnasium—and so the women for a while were using the men's "Y" at the Twenty-eighth Street branch YMCA for gymnastics; they would get special assignments for time, especially in the evening when they could use it when the men weren't operating it or using it. And I recall, as a member of a group after I'd graduated, we had a private club that took gym classes twice a week, and we were using the men's gym, but they kept switching us around, because they had preference over any outside women's group. So I went down with another member of the committee or the organization to the central YWCA and wanted to make an appointment for regular classes there, and they told us to use the men's YMCA. I said, "We are members of the YWCA and we have a right to use these facilities." And while we were walking through, they had a Japanese class there, and then they couldn't have Negroes there, and we were here before the Japanese. And we didn't immediately get access to it, but very shortly thereafter, a Negro was appointed to the metropolitan "Y" board, and eventually they were given permission to use the facilities there. But the reason I mention that when I started out saying that they needed a larger place and a better place and a better neighborhood, when they were working to get the "Woodlawn branch"—The reason they called it the "Woodlawn branch," they called the Twelfth Street branch [which] was on Twelfth Street, the Woodlawn branch [which] was on Woodlawn. They had a larger building, and I think they had rooms for rent at that place, but I'm still not certain they had a gymnasium. But all of the "Y's" went in to help raise the funds, and they would give speeches and give different benefits to help do it. And I recall going clear out to Eagle Rock to speak to a group of white people there who were working to help get this building, and it happened while I was there, someone ran into my car, which was parked out front—196 it was damaged so badly, it had to be towed to a garage—and so I had to stay overnight. They happened to be librarian friends of mine, and so they let me stay overnight and I had to take the streetcar to my library the next day while my car was being repaired. But, the YWCA has been uppermost in

my mind all through the years, because it has done such good work, and I even went to Santa Barbara to give a talk to the conference of YWCA's, oh, quite a long time ago, when I was a fairly young librarian at the time, but the subject had to do with race relations. Now we have several organizations, at least I have several on my list, which fall into a similar category. Their purpose was to further better community relations, but they were not just another organization, they were made up of a group of organizations, and with cooperation, they were able to make possible many community accomplishments which individual organizations and citizens could not achieve alone. Now this is the Operation Woman Power, which was made up of various large organizations throughout Los Angeles County, and the Women's Council, which was made up mainly of organizations with a religious background such as the United Church Women, the Southern California Conference of B'nai Brith Women, the Catholic Women's Clubs, Women's International Club, the Metropolitan YWCA, and the Links Los Angeles Chapter. And did I mention the Women's International Club? Those two were not primarily religiously oriented. And then the other one, the Women's Council, was made up of most of the major organizations in Los Angeles County. The Women's Council was organized in 1951, and I don't recall the exact date Operation Woman Power was organized, but it was in the 1950's, I believe, and both did very good work in the field of problems that involved women and the total community.

KELLEY

What were some of their accomplishments?

MATTHEWS

Well, I don't have a list in front of me, but they worked with the schools and with all of the various social agencies in the community which, without the help of interested citizens, might not have achieved as much as they were able to do, having a united front. So with that backing, they were able to do things that had to do with juvenile problems and improving social conditions generally—housing—all of the things that you can think of that would make a better community.

KELLEY

Were they at all interested in women's rights?

MATTHEWS

Oh, definitely, and I didn't mention in this same group the League of Women Voters, which was mainly directed towards the political side to see that you voted for the right propositions and for the right candidates and for those who would do the most to improve the daily life of the average citizen. And of course, the League of Women Voters has been in operation for many, many years. I don't recall exactly when they were organized. And in the early years I went to meetings as well as supported them financially; in later years my

support has been mainly financial. And one of their new projects is to have a nonpartisan public forum on TV, as they have had the presidential debates, to permit citizens to explore crucial issues and to make up their minds about difficult public policy choices. And this would be done in ordinary language and not difficult for the average citizen to understand and make them a better participant in the management of our government. In addition to those general, large, organizations, there was a black organization, the Women's Political Study Club, which was organized I believe in the 1930's. For a long time, Mrs. Betty Hill was the director, and they interviewed candidates for office, asking them many questions that would indicate their opinion about blacks and their interest in doing things that would be of benefit to blacks. And those days, most of the candidates were white, so it was important to find out those who had the best attitudes towards blacks and would do the most after they got in office; although, of course, you can't always tell. A person will promise anything to get elected and then do the opposite when they got in office. But, I feel they did do a great deal of good, and they had study clubs throughout the state of California. They began in Los Angeles, then spread through Southern California, and eventually spread throughout the state. And the chapters, I guess you'd call them, were named for outstanding Negroes; there would be one named for Fred Roberts and some of the earlier ones, and that way they were perpetuating their black history as well as doing something to help the present day black. A newer organization is—well, there are two, the Links were organized as a philanthropic and social organization; and here, this [Los Angeles] chapter was organized in 1950, and they raised funds to help all types of projects that were in progress: something that had to do with the city schools, with many of the projects that otherwise might not have any backing, at least financial backing. And then the Women on Target is a still later organization, and they have worked very hard to improve the community in general, all the things having to do with education, housing, politics. And the main purpose would be to make it a better community and emphasizing communities where there was a large black population.

KELLEY

I see. What years were you involved in Women on Target?

MATTHEWS

Well, I would say, well, it hasn't been organized, I don't believe longer than ten years, and I would say the last five years I've been more active with it than prior to that time. So I believe that covers most of the organizations that we can count as typically women's organizations. Operation Woman Power, Women's Council, League of Women Voters, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Links, and Women on Target. [tape recorder off]

KELLEY

You were involved in a number of organizations which, you know, struggled for civil rights or organizations which dealt directly with the problems of race relations, and I was wondering if you can elaborate on some of these organizations from the fifties [1950's], the sixties [1960's], and on into the present?

MATTHEWS

Well, there aren't too many of them, but they are high on my list. I feel that civil rights and race relations are most important, not only to Afro-Americans, but to all minorities. In fact, if everyone isn't free, no one is free.

KELLEY

Right.

KELLEY

And I remember years ago when my mother was getting subscriptions, or memberships, for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], and she'd call some of her friends who were always giving parties and spending money in that fashion—and at that time, memberships were only a dollar for the NAACP—and she said, "They aren't doing anything for me." My mother said, "Every time they win a case they're doing something for you. Your liberties are enhanced by every step they take, and so is it for everyone else." And imagine, one dollar when they were, you know, spending money freely for socializing, and they wouldn't give her a membership. So I have been involved in the NAACP; I guess I would be a life member many times over if I had sent the money to them as life membership, but I did that only once in the very beginning; but when I say in the very beginning, not when I first joined the NAACP, because that was when I was in college, and they had what they called the junior branch of the NAACP then. But most of the junior branches in other cities were much younger people, I would say possibly high school age. And we did quite a bit in the community even then because we were college or in some cases even graduates, college graduates. And there was a person, a James McGregor, who served as president, who was eventually an attorney, but he was very capable, and he was a little older than most of the young people in the organization. Eventually, we got to the point where the adult chapter was a little jealous of what we were doing—and I'm not certain, did I mention this earlier?

KELLEY

Yes.

MATTHEWS

Well, then I won't go into that again. And so many of the people resigned from the junior branch and just went on into the adult branch. So I've had a membership in the NAACP from the time I was, at least, in college and all the way through since then, and I believe it was in the early sixties [1960's] when I

purchased my first life membership, but since that time I've given at the rate of \$100 a year to the special subscription fund, or even more on different occasions, and so have kept in touch through the literature and through activities in Los Angeles locally. The NAACP Legal Defense [and Educational] Fund, which many people confuse with the parent organization, was organized about twenty-one years ago and was organized by the NAACP, but because of legal matters, they were not able to operate jointly, so it became a separate organization with its own board and budget and staff, and has continued through the years doing the same type of work the NAACP would be doing: jobs for minority workers, equal educational opportunities, working against racial segregation, integrated housing as well as integrated schools; in fact, it's segregated housing that has caused the segregated schools in most large cities. So they have done very fine work through the years, and I have been associated with the Southern California Steering Committee [of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund], which was organized about 1968, and been active ever since then and have worked each year, in fact, for several years. The initial letter asking persons to join the Southern California Steering Committee indicated they should either give or raise \$1000 a year. And when they started having the annual dinners in the fall, the price per plate was \$100, and if you got a table, then, of course, you would have fulfilled this function. And in the early years I even had more than a table—and especially when I was buying a whole table myself and had a rather easy time of selling them. But now they're \$200, and there are many, many other organizations with dinners that cost \$150 to \$200—and some of them even \$250—so it's getting more and more difficult to find people who aren't bombarded with this type of request from various organizations, including the Los Angeles Urban League, which I support too. And they jumped their per capita for their dinners from, we'll say, \$75 to \$250 all at one fell swoop, which is rather surprising. But I'm still active. In addition to the annual dinner where they give awards to people who have accomplished certain things in the field of civil rights—they call them, now, Equal Justice Awards, for the law, education, community relations and civil rights generally—they have a luncheon to honor black women who have achieved certain things in a community, and this is held in June as a rule. And I was one of the recipients of the first luncheon, which was held last year, because of the work I've done, not only for this organization, but for others as well. The American Civil Liberties Union is a well-known and an old civil rights organization, and they fight for the rights of everyone, even people that you might disagree with. And they feel that if the law gives everybody protection of certain Amendments to the [U.S.] Constitution, that we shouldn't worry about what their political preference is or any other association they may have, as long as they have a right to do what they're doing. And so I have

supported the American Civil Liberties Union in various ways throughout the years and am still an active, I mean, an active financial member, I shall say. In addition to these organizations which are very well-known, I'm a member of the Freedom to Read Foundation, which grew out of my work with the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee. And because this organization has exempt status, because it's a foundation, they have the money to pursue cases in court which involve freedom to read, freedom to speak and all of the other things involved with libraries. And, also, they can protect a librarian who may lose his job because he upheld the right for any individual to read certain materials. And an opportunity to get a better job or another job if they lose the job they have. So these [organizations] are all very important and I feel [they] have continued to do a good job through the years.

1.10. TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (November 11, 1985)

KELLEY

Now, did the Freedom to Read Foundation come out of the Committee on Intellectual Freedom?

MATTHEWS

Well, I mean, the work that the Intellectual Freedom Committee had indicated a need for this, and you see, it's a foundation, so it's exempt from taxation, and they raise funds—I don't know how they raise the funds for that; whether it comes out of a special part of the money paid into the American Library Association or whether it's gotten through—I think they get grants too, from various sources. I believe maybe that's their principle source of income, getting grants. And it seemed to me in reading one of the more recent Intellectual Freedom newsletters, I have a feeling that they might even be giving grants for certain purposes—small ones, you know, like \$2,500 or something of the sort—but I won't say that for sure, because I've been going through so much material I can't always remember exactly what I was reading, you know, unless I made a note right away to remember that.

KELLEY

Exactly. You have a relatively long history of interest in history. I mean, you're one of the founders of Negro History Week in Los Angeles. I understand in the 1970's you began to become interested in archives and archival research and other things generally with historical records, and I was wondering if you can sort of give us some background on your recent interests in state and national or local archives?

MATTHEWS

My first involvement with archives occurred— When I say "involvement," I had been to some archives to do research, you know, much earlier. When I first

started doing some research on blacks in California, I'd been to the Bancroft [Library, U.C. Berkeley] and the [California] State Library and various other places and also to Los Angeles archives in Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City and County. But in Los Angeles City and County, they had never had a professional archivist, and all of the records weren't properly indexed or in possibly the best condition for use by people. They needed a lot of work done, and they needed a professional to facilitate its use by historians and scholars and just the general public, because sometimes people would want to go just to look up something on their own family, not for any book or any special thing other than their own satisfaction of getting facts on their own family history. So in 1975, the committee that was appointed for Los Angeles to help celebrate the U.S. Revolution Bicentennial decided that something needed to be done about both the city and county archives in Los Angeles, and a Metropolitan Archives Committee was appointed, and I was one of the members of that committee. And after we investigated the condition of the archives in the city and county [of Los Angeles] and talked with some of the various officials who were concerned, we decided— Because we found out that in Houston, Texas they had what was possibly the first metropolitan archives combining city and county and the public library and maybe one or two of the local universities, all of them cooperating in a giant project on archives. And so four of the committee members journeyed to Houston, Texas for three days and talked with the people who had started the project in Houston, to learn what not to do and what were the best things to do, and it was quite revealing. And they were at the point where they were about to move into the old public library building, because they had built a new public library. Things seemed to be moving along very well there, and we felt that it was worthwhile going there to talk firsthand. We had had some correspondence and some telephone conversations with the person, but it's not like seeing what they're doing and asking lots of direct questions that you wouldn't think to ask until you got into the situation. But when we came back, there wasn't time and there was no budget for us to pursue this to any advantage, and so nothing except a report was made indicating our findings. In 1977, that was after the [U.S.] Bicentennial Celebration was over in '76, I was appointed to the California Heritage Preservation Commission, which many people confuse with a landmark-type preservation project, but it has to do with the preservation and use of archives throughout the state, beginning in the state archives and any city and county in the whole state. And, at the same time, there were seven people appointed to this commission by the Governor [of California], and all of the seven appointees of the governor also served on the California Historical Records Advisory Board, and they evaluated all proposals coming from California institutions and then forwarded their evaluation to the national Historical Publications and Records

Commission for funding, because they had the money. But rarely did they go against our evaluation. I think only once in the almost five years I served did they overturn our particular evaluation. And it had to do with a national figure [Mark Twain], an author who was an outstanding American author. And it was a matter of the local committee [California Historical Advisory Board] feeling that they shouldn't preserve all of his original documents, records, the books, since they were all being published in full and exactly as written by the author, but they felt it was still important to keep the originals. And I was the only one on the committee [California Historical Advisory Board] who voted to give the money to keep the originals and have them preserved. And so when the news came from headquarters, some of the people weren't very happy, and they said, "None of us." I said, "You forget, I voted for it." And so I was the only one who did. There were a few occasions when my experience as a librarian stood me in good stead. One of them had to do with intellectual freedom, as a matter of fact, when some organization that dealt in that area—they didn't call it intellectual freedom, but that's what it was—and somebody said, "Oh, that's not important, this is a little organization, and it's not doing anything." And I said, "Oh, yes it is." I said, "That's one of the most important things: the right to read and to read everything, and then make your own decision about what's the right side. If you can't get the pros and cons, then you haven't a basis for making a good judgment." And then when I was the only one from Los Angeles on the Commission [California Heritage Preservation Commission] and the Advisory Board [California Historical Records], I had to deal with—I mean, the only one from Los Angeles County, is what I was about to say—I had to deal with the politicians and everybody and the whole of Los Angeles County. And the Commission met three times a year, once in Sacramento, and then in San Francisco, then Los Angeles, and I also had to get a place for them to meet. So I usually arranged it in [Los Angeles] City Hall, because those who were flying in could get transportation to City Hall easily from the airport and get back and forth, and then plus the fact they had, you know, good-sized conference rooms there too. I became exceedingly interested in the whole subject of archives and learned a great deal in the process. And the fact that I was collecting documents and so forth, I learned about things to do and not to do with my own, although I haven't carried all of them out yet: the matter of acid free paper and folders and so many things that will protect them—and definitely not to mix newspaper clippings with some of your other even typewritten letters and things of that kind. And so it was a learning process for me as well as one of giving, you know, a community service. And the only reason I finally resigned was because, there again, I was traveling up and down the state and having to— Oh, those reports that we had to review, sometimes we'd have a stack this high. Might be ten or twelve or fifteen institutions and some of them wrote regular

books. And to read all of that and then decide, you know, what to do about it—and to read it critically—was really quite a job. Now other people on the Commission who were not appointed by the Governor didn't have to serve on the [California Historical] Advisory Board, and that meant they didn't have as much work to do as those of us who were serving on both the [California Heritage Preservation] Commission and the Advisory Board. Then, during the time I was serving on the Commission, a state statute had been written some years earlier—I've forgotten now whether it was in the forties [1940's]—empowering every county to set up a citizens' historical records commission. And here's Los Angeles County, not only the largest in the state of California, but almost the largest in the country—very few exceeded L.A. County in the whole country—and still they have no archival commission, even if it is a lay commission. They have no professional archivist and still do not have a professional archivist, unless they got it the last couple a months since I've been in touch. And so during the L.A. Bicentennial, I was the vice-chairman of a Los Angeles Archives Committee—really, we call it a subcommittee, because my main committee was the [L.A.] History Committee, and then they called the committees that were formed from the history committees, subcommittees. And it turned out, the man who was the chairman, I had to push him every step of the way to call meetings, to see the city councilman who was in charge of this particular subject, and to do all of these things. So then the man who was in charge of records for the whole city of Los Angeles wrote a proposal to get funds to set up a permanent—well, I don't think he said permanent—archival system in Los Angeles County and to get a trained archivist. And my contact with the Commission [California Heritage Preservation Commission], the state commission, and, of course, with the state archivist, made it possible for me to cut some red tape and to get this proposal put through, even though it was going to miss our deadline; but by doing certain things, we were able to have the proposal sent to our committee for appraisal and get the proper signature, go through all the channels and get the Mayor's signature in the end. Of course, the Mayor knew about it, and everybody knew about it, so it wasn't a case of it being a complete surprise. And then it had to be finally approved by the [Los Angeles] city council, too. And then I was also able to call the national office and talk with somebody who was reviewing it at that end and get criticism from her about things that should be added or subtracted and so forth. And I actually helped rewrite the proposal and added some documents to the end for a person who might have additional questions after reading it, that is, this national commission [Historical Publications and Records Commission] that would be giving the money. And so it was accepted, and I feel that I played a major role in setting up a permanent archival program for the city of Los Angeles and a professional archivist. And we got the city clerk and the Mayor to sign a

statement saying that they would not use the money from the proposal for one year and then just forget about it, you know, just get as much work done in that one year, so we now have a permanent archival program and a permanent archivist. And then I was chairman of the [Los Angeles] County Archival Committee during the [U.S.] Bicentennial to try to do the same thing with the County. But there's so much red tape and it's so much larger than the city, you know, and five different supervisors and all of this, and after we got a number of things accomplished, we finally had to go to the [Los Angeles County] Chief Administrative Office [CAO]. And the man who represented that office came to a meeting with us and said, "We know it's important, but we don't have the money. Find out which ones of the records that most need preservation or conservation or whatever, and we'll begin, do a few at a time." I said, "It's no use doing a piecemeal job; you're not going to accomplish anything, you have to have a plan—" And at the time we had a special educational service—I've forgotten now the full title—that we had received our national—I mean, our state [California Heritage Preservation] Commission had gotten a grant for two years to set this program up. And we had hired two professional archivists, and they went up and down the state giving workshops. They set up an information center of records from all over—publications, I should say—and this information file was eventually turned over to the state archives, so that people could write in and get information either telephone, if it was something quick that could be answered on the phone— And get lots of information that they wouldn't be able to get otherwise, because they couldn't afford to subscribe to all these different things. And so then if any county had a special problem, they would send someone. So I had the man who was in charge of public records to come to L.A. County. He met all the people who were in charge of records, he was given an overview, and then he examined the records himself and he set up a short-range and a long-range plan for L.A. County to begin taking proper care of their archives. And this was before I had this conference with the— And one other member of my committee. In fact, strange, one time when this one man was absent from the committee, he knew all of the city and county politicians, I call them, and that was a real help, because, you know, if you can go and say, "Hello Joe, can you give us a little time this afternoon?" it helps a lot. And so one meeting, he was absent because his wife was sick, and I told them what had happened up to this time, the rest of the committee, and they said, oh, you know, "Don't do this," about going to see the CAO. And I said, "Well, do you mind if I do it?" And they said, "No." And then when after the meeting, I talked with this other fellow, and he went to the meeting with me, and it was good having two people rather than just one. But we ended up not getting anywhere, because the CAO's office holds the purse strings, and they said they didn't have the money to do it. And then, more recently, the Los Angeles City Historical

Society, of which I'm a board member, set up a committee at the suggestion of one other person who's on the board, who served on these other committees with me, beginning with that first Metropolitan Archives Committee, and said, "We ought to pursue it still," even though—see, when the bicentennial ended, all of those committees died. And I was doing all of the writing of letters and everything, and remembering to prod them when I didn't get an answer. In fact, some cases, they were two and three months answering a letter; and so they finally now have a man who's supposed to be a head of records, all records, but he's not a qualified person in terms of having any training in archives or anything else. I understand he came from the auditor's office. And there was a person who tried to take the exam who's fully qualified, professional in terms of public records, and do you know they wrote him a letter and told him he wasn't qualified? It was only an oral exam, and so I guess they didn't want somebody who was better qualified than the person they wanted to appoint. I guess I shouldn't be saying all of this, because I haven't had any proof of this, except I do know that that man was turned down who was qualified, didn't even let him take the exam, and you know if they didn't let him take the exam, it was because they had somebody else who was not as well-qualified that they didn't want him as an example saying that they appointed him over this other person. But when I wrote the follow-up letter, the new person who was just appointed said, "I could answer all your questions now, but I would rather wait until I get the answers to a questionnaire that I've sent around to various departments, and I'll have that by the end of August." Now he was appointed in June. Well, guess what? August came and went. November, I wrote him again, and he finally responded and gave answers to some of the questions, but I had asked him specifically— They did finally appoint a citizen's historical records commission, but what they did was to combine it with the [Los Angeles County] Historical Landmarks Commission. Now the Landmarks was a committee, not a commission, but by adding this other historical records activity, they called it a commission. Kept the same personnel that was for Landmarks. The woman who was in charge of that when I was trying to get in touch with her a long time ago—this is before the L.A. City Historical Society appointed this committee—I wrote her a letter asking for the names and occupations of the people who were serving, asked for permission to have five or ten minutes at their next meeting to review some of the things our committee on archives for the [U.S.] Bicentennial had been doing, and to see if we couldn't cooperate in some way. She never did answer my letter. Now she's head of some department in Fullerton or some other little community near here—When I say "little community" I don't know how big it is. And one of the persons who was from the L.A. County Natural History Museum, who was an ex-officio person on that committee [Citizens Historical Records Commission,

L.A. County Historical Landmarks Commission] representing the director of the Natural History Museum, called somebody else the day before the meeting and got permission for me to come to the meeting. And I went to the meeting, and the people on there when they discuss their little business just, you know, no real point to anything, and you could tell that those people who were appointed were people who had no idea of records or even of landmarks, as far as that went; and one of them was saying he was looking up something and came across Ronald Reagan's first wife, who was, you know, some movie star or something. But you know, just silly kind of stuff. And so then I read the one page survey or résumé of what we had been doing, and asking, you know, couldn't they cooperate? And then, also, saying that they needed to get people on their commission who had some background in records and archives. And she said, "Wasn't this person from the Natural History Museum sufficient?" I said, "He's not a regular member of the commission." And I said, "No, you need at least two or three people, and you couldn't do any better than start with some of the six who are on this committee that we had on the archival committee." So I haven't heard from her till this day.

KELLEY

Now what year was that commission [L.A. County Historical Landmarks Commission] formed?

MATTHEWS

You mean the [L.A.] County—? When they appointed this?

KELLEY

And included the Landmarks [L.A. County Historical Landmarks Commission].

MATTHEWS

When they converted the Landmarks into a dual commission. I was working on the city historical—I mean, [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial Commission, from '78-'81, and I don't know what year I went to see her, whether it was '81 or '80, but whatever year I went to see her, it hadn't been more than six months they had been appointed. The [Landmarks] Commission had been formed about six months prior to that. So, well, I would just guess somewhere between '79 and '81.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

And so then, I asked this new person what was the committee [Landmarks] doing, who was on the Commission. And do you know, he answered, he didn't know anything about it. Now here he's had six months and told me he could answer all the questions in the beginning. Now if I said something about a commission, he must have known I knew something about there having been

one, and a big man sitting up there, all he had to do is ask his secretary or somebody to call around and find out if they had one and who was in charge of it. And so isn't that stupid to have somebody appointed who can't even answer a simple question like that when I knew there was a commission, and then he said he'd never heard of one. And you see, he'd never heard of a lot of other things either. And so, then, the other thing, the man who asked to have this commission—or the committee—organized by the L.A. City Historical Society got interested in something else, and I said, "Well we haven't finished this project yet. What do you want to do?" And of course I said, "We haven't?" I was the one doing all the work that had been done at that point, of writing the letters and getting answers and then rewriting, or, you know, prodding them to get an answer. And so right now it's in limbo. [mutual laughter]

KELLEY

You were involved in a lot more activities than that in terms of the L.A. Bicentennial?

MATTHEWS

Well, I'll do the two bicentennials, the U.S. and the other [Los Angeles City] separately. I just brought in the two bicentennials because these committees were formed to do a special job to get the [Los Angeles] City and the [Los Angeles] County to work on their archives and records. But everybody on the History Committee [of the Los Angeles Revolution Committee] was complaining that, you know, material wasn't easily available, properly indexed, and then they didn't have trained help to give you help when you went there. As a matter of fact, when I went to the City [of Los Angeles] for the first time to see their archives, they were in the [Los Angeles] City Hall, and they had what they called a vault, but I don't know whether it was like the present vaults that have air conditioning—of course, they call it temperature control—and all of the things, but at any rate, they used to call it "the vault." When I went there, a clerk, just an ordinary clerk, signed me in and showed me where the index volumes were—the old records were indexed by WPA [Works Progress Administration], translated from the Spanish and indexed back in WPA days—and showed me where the index volumes were. And she said, "If you come over"—there was a big table—"if you take anything off the shelf, just leave it on the table," because, see, I guess some people put them back in the wrong place, and they aren't all librarians. [mutual laughter] And when I was there one day— Oh, and then I forgot to say, when you get through, you sign yourself off; there's a little book you sign yourself out.

KELLEY

Wow.

MATTHEWS

So you could've torn pages out of the book and done all kinds of things while you were there with nobody supervising you. One day I went there and happened to be staying through the noon hour. Do you know that some of those people who had bag lunches were sitting at this table eating their lunch. And the worst of it was, they were talking to each other, and I'm trying to study. And that was annoying, just the fact that they were there, but to think that they're eating lunch around there. Some crumbs would be on the table at nighttime, some mice would come and then nibble on the books, eat the few crumbs and then nibble on the books. And so, I mean, the whole set-up was dreadful, you know, in terms of both interfering with people doing work they want to do and the fact that they're eating lunch at a place like that.

KELLEY

Right.

MATTHEWS

Now, you know, you go into museums and different places, you can't bring any food of any kind, food or drink into any area, and even if you're just looking at pictures on the wall. And here is something more important, these old records, and going to be sitting on this table overnight till somebody the next day would put them back on the shelves. And then they're eating lunch there. And so I, you know, had very unhappy experiences both places, went to the [Los Angeles] County in more recent years, and here's this whole big room unattended—at least they had a person at the desk when I first went in there. Index volume missing, then you go and look up something in a volume, and maybe some pages torn out there. And then some of the people who are just employees coming in and talking to somebody, having a real loud conversation just like they're in their own home. And then you're ready to leave—I had three or four of these huge volumes I wanted to have something copied from—here's a note on the desk: "If you have anything to be copied, take it up to the tenth floor." I have to carry these heavy things up to the tenth floor. There's no dolly or anything for you to take them up there to indicate what things I wanted copied and mailed to me. Well, they didn't have a guard at the front door, and if anybody went walking out—I guess they'd notice a woman doing it—but a man taking it, they'd think maybe he was asked to bring it from this building to one of the other county buildings. So inadequate protection for the records, and not, you know, sufficient staff to handle your requests and so forth just, you know, a dreadful state of things, and then for them not to be really concerned about it.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

This man saying, "We don't have the money." And then, you see, you can lose invaluable records. As a matter of fact, one of the persons who was on this

committee [L.A. County Historical Landmarks Commission] said that they had people coming to the Natural History Museum; attorneys, people like that, had just taken the records on home with them when they got through. Then they were ashamed to try to take them back, so then they were bringing them to the Natural History Museum to get them to send them back to the [Los Angeles] County. And in some cases, wanting to even trade something. Now can you imagine, they've stolen them and even asked them for trade. So because they knew these were valuable, they'd give them some old map that they had a lot of copies of that wasn't, you know, too important, and they would be so delighted and take it. And so when we were even trying to talk about some of those things, they weren't interested in listening.

KELLEY

That's amazing.

MATTHEWS

And they said, "Why didn't you call the police or something?" Now isn't this something, why don't they have better guard system right there so they can't walk out with them? Now wait, I'm going way off the track with all of these things and maybe we're going to have to cut some of these. It might be a little bit, you know, in terms of talking about current officials. Now, let's see, when I retired from the California Heritage Preservation Commission, the commission wrote up a nice little resolution, and it was signed by the [California] Secretary of State, who's the overall boss of records and all of the things of that kind. And I was quite pleased with what they had to say in the resolution, and was quite surprised too to receive one. And also, at the meeting, the last meeting I attended, one of the women who was a trained professional archivist—in fact, she has her own firm now, but she has worked for a number of different organizations including the California Historical Society—and she mentioned at the last meeting that, you know, I was leaving and that I was one of the best members of the commission [California Heritage Preservation Commission]. I was surprised at her saying that. And here I felt a little bit hesitant about accepting when they asked me, thinking that I wasn't a professional archivist, you know, just a librarian; although, there still is no school that gives a straight archival degree that I know of, but they now have some courses at library schools and different places, and I did attend an archival training session that lasted a week in San Francisco. Some—I don't know whether it's kind of like a business institution—puts these on across the country and they had set this one up for San Francisco. And some of the things, because I had served on the Commission, were familiar to me, and this person that I told you who said that I was one of the most valuable members of the Commission, she was one of the people serving; they got some local people to serve for this training session. But many people have gotten their training that way, going to these weeklong

sessions; sometimes they're in connection with the Society of American Archivists and that kind of thing. And the Society of California Archivists has an annual workshop too, although theirs are usually one day sessions. But I think the American Society sometimes has more than one day in connection with their annual conventions. To get back to another thing that has to do with archives. [pause] Well, I guess I've put in all the different archival committees I served on in addition to the statewide archives, and also received a nice letter from the Governor [of California] thanking me for giving my time and saying how valuable it had been to the state; of course, it's a form kind of letter, but even so, it's still nice to get it.

KELLEY

Yeah. Definitely.

MATTHEWS

And then he also, after he was defeated, wrote a letter to all the people who served on the [California Heritage Preservation] Commission and said how valuable our services had been and keep in touch, he'd like to find out what we're doing. And so I thought well that's really interesting to say that he wanted to keep in touch.

KELLEY

You were also involved in a lot of historical associations and organizations?

MATTHEWS

Yes, there are quite a few, and I might say that some of them date back quite a ways, but a number of them are more recent, I would say, the last ten or twelve years at the most. But I had joined them because literature is so important, most of them have quarterly scholarly journals, and then many of them have monthly newsletters and shorter publications, and then their annual conventions, if it's near enough to Los Angeles, I might decide to go. And then it partly depends on the timing too. And I have made nice contacts at some of the conventions, and I was surprised: I went to one in San Diego a couple of years ago, and this article on me had come out recently in the [Los Angeles] Times and several of the—of course, there were mostly white people there—had even saved that article on me, and they didn't know me or anything but just were interested in what I was doing in terms of the historical research I had been doing and the collections I had been involved in. And I started many years ago going to the [California] State Library and the Bancroft Library [U.C. Berkeley] and Huntington Library and some of the— Of course, naturally, the Los Angeles Public Library California Room, and as I mentioned already, the [Los Angeles] City and [Los Angeles] County records, to some extent, although there's a lot more work I can do and shall do in those areas. But, digging for information has been very important, since not too much had been written and what had been written hadn't always been indexed. Now, James Abidjan of San

Francisco, who was librarian of the California Historical Society for around twenty years—I think he left the Historical Society some time ago now, and he's had a couple of other positions in the meantime—but he's done a lot of work on his own doing research and has published several large volumes. The first one was done for the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library, and it involved holdings of libraries in all of the western states on blacks. And it was really quite a wonderful publication and one that I find very useful. Then, more recently—well, the first three volumes came out, I would say, five years ago at least—he had been searching the census records, the early black newspapers in California—some of them were in the northern part of the state as early as the 1850's and the 1860's—and all the various sources he could find to get information on various people. And even though they might not be outstanding in terms of your knowing that they were this or that or the other, a great person, you never know, it might be just the kind of person or a particular individual somebody would be searching for. And he [Abidjan] would give the person's name, usually their occupation, and, if he knew them, birth and death dates, and then he would give the source where he found the name, whether it was in the census of 1880 or 19 something or other, or if it was from a certain newspaper, he'd give the volume and the page. And so at first, he had a huge catalog. When I first met him and went to his house, it would be big enough for one of our regional branches in terms of the number of cards that he had already in his file. And he was planning to give the catalog to the Bancroft Library [U.C. Berkeley] when he died. And so a friend, Dorthy Porter, of Howard University, happened to be out here, and either she knew him or met him and saw this, and she said, "Oh, it's a shame to wait all that time." And he said, "Oh, it would be too much trouble to try to get this in shape to be published." And so she contacted a publisher when she went back East—I've forgotten whether they were in Connecticut or one of the New England states—and the man said all he'd have to do is just to ship all of his cards in boxes, and he did an offset job, just—I forget how many were photographed on a page—and so the first three volumes came out, as I say, about five years ago—

KELLEY

I've seen those.

MATTHEWS

—and now he has two additional volumes that have just been published. You are familiar—

KELLEY

Yeah, I'm definitely familiar.

MATTHEWS

—with that one. And I forget now what the exact title is. It's kind of a long title, but it indicates that it there indexes two various publications that he has

reviewed. And then they're, well, let me see— Well, in terms of my historical work, I've done it, you know, at my own pace while working in various organizations and I've used many sources, but the other main source was visiting friends or people I knew who'd been in California a long time and borrowing photographs and records to copy. And since I've lived here so long, I knew most of them personally and didn't have any difficulty borrowing it. Sometimes, some people would be reluctant, you know, to let a stranger come. And then one case— A person who I thought should have known better, when, now, here she knew me and my family for years, and I gave her a complete list of everything I was borrowing—if it was a newspaper I gave the date and the pages and all of that, and for yearbooks or college things—whatever I borrowed I gave a complete description of it— And later on, some student from UCLA was referred to her by Mrs. Wright of our office study club—and I was glad I hadn't referred him to her—and she let him borrow a number of things, and all he putdown was "two yearbooks, three newspapers" and, you know, no dates, not names of the newspapers or anything, and never brought her material back. And when she finally happened to mention it to me—I just met her accidentally downtown—I said, "Well, why would you wait so long—"it had been over a year then—"in trying to get them back? In fact, you should have told him they were only for a one or two weeks loan." Then I called the university [UCLA]—he was getting his master's and he was going to do his whole thesis on her husband, who was deceased—and he didn't finish his master's program, and they had no current address for him. The address that he had at the time— Oh, I think she had written, and he didn't have a telephone, and she had written to the old address, and it had come back "moved, no address." And I happened to mention this to Degraf, who works at [California State University at] Fullerton, and he was a graduate of UCLA, and he said, "Oh, that's dreadful to have that happen to UCLA students." So he began trying to track him down. He was living in Santa Monica originally, and he found he had moved to another beach city—I don't remember which one—no telephone again. So he took his own time and gasoline to go down to this address on the weekend—I don't know whether it was a Saturday or Sunday—happened not to catch him at home. And I was wondering, though, if he took any pains to write; if he got a new address, whether he wrote to him there to see whether he had them and so forth. Now sometimes these things occur because the person is careless, because surely he couldn't have thought those were important enough that he could sell them for any particular sum of money. And we found in the public library when people didn't return things, they nearly always had—and you know they could take out ten books—ten of the most expensive art books. And many times they would move before you could send the special investigator to pick them up. So I always try, both for my own protection and

the person I'm borrowing from, to give them a complete list of what I'm borrowing. And then, I found in one case, when people get a little old, they forget you've returned them, and I had two copies made; they have one copy, I have one copy. And when I return them, I have them sign my copy to show they've been returned, because one elderly gentleman called me and told me I hadn't returned certain things, and I hadn't thought about a person, you know, getting to the point of forgetting. And I was so happy I had this paper to show him that he had signed. [laughter] Well, the main thing is I've enjoyed all of the work I've been doing in collecting this material, and the main thing is that I've just put off too long getting around to publishing it, but I have had several exhibits at museums of the historical photographs which have been blown up; the first one I think I already mentioned, at the Natural History Museum in '69-'70. I think it ran— Originally, it was scheduled for maybe two months, and it ran possibly three and a half months. And there was one at the California Museum of Science and Industry that was supposed to have opened during the U.S. Bicentennial, but it wasn't ready in time, so I think it was two or three years later that it finally opened. And it was supposed to have traveled across country; whether or not it went anywhere after it opened here in Los Angeles I'm not sure. And then I had one in 1984 during Black History Month at the California Museum of Science and Industry that was sponsored by three congressmen. And that was the largest one I've ever had. It included around 350 of my historical photographs, mostly on Los Angeles, a few on Pasadena. And the May Company, during the L.A. Bicentennial, included mostly my pictures, but a few books and records from the collection of Bruce Tyler, in seven of their windows on Broadway downtown. And a lot of people got off buses that said, "L.A. Bicentennial, the Negroes' Contribution" or something—I've forgotten the exact wording used. And those white letters were pasted on the outside of the windows. And people, some of them got off busses or some of them waited till if they were going to or from work, till another day to get off, so they'd have time to look at them. And I took a photographer to have him take pictures of all seven windows, and there was a man there who used to come to the Vernon Branch Library when I was there, and I thought he was seeing it for the first time. He had been there practically every day the exhibit was up, couldn't get enough of looking.

1.11. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (February 12, 1986)

KELLEY

You were involved in a number of commissions and committees dealing with the organization of the bicentennial of the American Revolution. I was wondering if you could sort of discuss some of your activities from 1976 on?

MATTHEWS

Well, I was appointed to the History Committee of the Los Angeles American Revolution Committee in 1974 or 75, I've forgotten, I think it was '74 because they always have people beginning ahead of the actual year of celebration, which is the year before and is culminated at the actual birthday. I was not appointed to the overall committee by the [Los Angeles] Mayor and the [Los Angeles] City Council as I was later for the city [committee]. The History Committee was chaired by Mrs. Jean Poole who is now the head history curator for the part of the city that runs or administers the business of the [El Pueblo] plaza and the whole state historic park there. I served on the History Committee, and then eventually served also on the Black Heritage Committee. I was really appointed by the History Committee to be a liaison person to the Black Heritage Committee, because they were planning an exhibition and it was published in the paper to be a traveling exhibition for the bicentennial year, and we wanted to see both if we could help and that the history was going to be correct. So it turned out I became a regular member because I went to all the meetings. Eventually, some of the people who were even officers didn't show up for meetings, and so I played just as prominent a role on the Black Heritage Committee, or "Team" they called it at that time, as I did on the History Committee.

KELLEY

Who were some of the members of the Black Heritage Committee? Do you remember any of them?

MATTHEWS

I remember one or two, but I better check on that to give you the correct information, especially of the two people who were alternate chairs of the meeting. Of course, neither of them was there. I don't recall whether there was a vice-chair or not, but it got to the point of who will preside. The L.A. History Committee had several projects. In fact, they knew when they started outlining projects that they would not have the time or the money to achieve them before the end of the U.S. Bicentennial, and felt since they knew the [Los Angeles] City Bicentennial would come about in just a few years that it would be good to do some long distance planning for that bicentennial. One of the main things that I worked on was the— They called it the Metropolitan Archives Committee." We felt that was a pressing need: to have the [Los Angeles] City and the [Los Angeles] County archives in proper condition, and also to have professional archivists. They'd never had a professional archivist for either the City or the County and whereas they had had some help where people did do work, they called themselves archivists but without any training. Being the largest county [Los Angeles] in the state and Los Angeles the second or third largest city in the nation, that of all places they should've had more people

looking into the archives and putting them into better order and making them more available to historians and scholars, or just the average public. Because we thought making a metropolitan archives, we could get the support not only of the [Los Angeles] City and the [Los Angeles] County, but also of some of the surrounding universities. In union, we felt we'd be able to get the manpower and the finances that we needed to carry on this job. What happened at that particular time— In Houston, Texas, they had just established a metropolitan archives. Of course, the area wasn't nearly as vast as Los Angeles would be, but it was the first, to our knowledge, in the country and we had telephone conversations and exchange of correspondence with the people who were responsible for initiating the metropolitan archives in Houston. Then we felt it would be highly desirable to have the [Metropolitan Archives] Committee visit Houston so we could see what they were doing and have more involved conversations with the people. We learned a lot of things. In fact, the main thing we wanted to learn was what they felt was most valuable and least valuable; things to avoid if we should try to follow in their footsteps. The young man who had the idea in the beginning and got it started, he even raised some of the money by promising a hospital, he would do the history of the hospital if they donated a certain sum of money, involved himself personally, which you know he would get no compensation for, and then near the end, I don't know, I mean shortly before we came, they were even trying to supplant him with somebody else when it was his idea. He wrote up the proposal; he did all of the groundwork, and was involved all along up to that point more or less in charge. I believe there was one other person who was the, we'll say, head of a department or something, who was officially the head, but he was in Japan or somewhere when the young man wrote the proposal; didn't see it or anything. He didn't raise any of the funds that were necessary for the matching grant, that was what this hospital was giving—matching funds— And with all of that, being really on his own for that whole time, and then I don't recall whether they got rid of him completely or supplanted him partially by someone else. Also, the main thing that I was surprised to learn was that when you secure a grant, they have to have someone to dispense the funds. Now, in the case of Los Angeles city, when we secured a grant, they have their regular accounting department, and they take care of it. But now, when a city is getting money from a grant, and it's to the advantage of a city department, you would imagine that their accounting would be routine. They charge a good percentage of the grant for accounting fees. And this outside company, I think got over 50 percent of the grant for accounting fees. That's all I can term it, is accounting fees. And that amazed me no end, that they can charge that much money on a grant just to dispense the funds. [mutual laughter]

KELLEY

Now, which hospital was this that offered the—?

MATTHEWS

Oh, well, it was in Houston. I don't know—

KELLEY

Oh, in Houston. Okay.

MATTHEWS

But it was just the fact that I remembered that he got some of the matching funds for the grant from a hospital, and in order to get the money he had promised them he would do their history.

KELLEY

I see.

MATTHEWS

And he was, I think, a history professor. I've forgotten, but I believe he was. At any rate, we were there three days and learned quite a bit, both in terms of what to do and what not to do, and about various types of gifts and how they would be handled. Eventually they were setting up the permanent metropolitan archives in Houston in the old building of the Los—not the Los Angeles—the Houston Public Library. They had just built a new building, the old building was still usable, but I guess not large enough for their current needs. So we also found out what types of things could be done, dealing with other institutions. When we returned and made a report— And I should say, that wasn't the only thing we did on this committee. We also visited the L.A. city schools to see whether we could use their computer for various services—or any other way that they could be of help. We visited the CAO, that's the Chief Administrative Officer of the [Los Angeles] City. We visited the CAO for the [Los Angeles] County, and also the Los Angeles Public Library, because we felt, since they were talking about preserving that building as a historic cultural monument, and the library was, I mean, the library would have to be built somewhere else, of course, because it wasn't suitable or large enough, but it would be suitable, we felt, for the archives. But now, when I look back on it, it wouldn't be large enough for the archives either. The building that the [Los Angeles] County had, I don't know how it happened that it got allocated for archives, because it wasn't built for that purpose, but when we had visited there during this U.S. Bicentennial, they felt they had room enough to accommodate the city and the county archives. Now just these five years later when we were working on the [Los Angeles] City Bicentennial, they're already beginning to get overcrowded. So it shows you how far off you can be in calculations. Then partly it could be that they needed to discard some of the things they had; they didn't need to keep all of them. But at any rate, it's a matter of place and trained staff and all the things that are involved in finding out what you need and how you're going to be able to have the archives in the kind of condition you need them for

general use. It happened, fortunately, that the [Los Angeles] City, before we got around to the City Bicentennial—I possibly shouldn't jump into that now, because they were building a building for the city to accommodate several different departments, including the records department, so I'll go back to the U.S. Bicentennial. In addition to the archives, I was a member of a symposium held at University of Southern California [USC] in January 1976 and read a paper on sources for family history in California. This was sponsored by the U.S. Archives, the USC, and the [U.S.] Bicentennial Committee. Then I contributed photographs and information on local landmarks, and not all of them black landmarks, for a guide to historic places in Los Angeles County, which was published by the history team in 1978. We worked on that past the date for the [U.S.] Bicentennial because we weren't able to get all the material together in time. Then there was a [Los Angeles] Founders Day reception hosted by the Black Heritage Team on September 4, 1975, that's the City's birthday, at the Space Museum in Exposition Park. And I gave the principle speech and stressed the contributions of blacks to our [Los Angeles] city's history beginning with its founders. And it happened, one of the radio stations, KNX, called me, and they had been referred to me by the woman who was the director of the U.S. Bicentennial in Los Angeles. She didn't call me to tell me they were going to call, and they didn't tell me why they were calling. KNX Radio said that they learned from her that there were four black families included among the [Los Angeles City] founders and wanted to know something about them. So I just talked off the cuff and told them about different things, and also the two Indians who were married to mulattos; different accomplishments of some of these people who were of Negro descent. Then after I hung up, I remembered one or two facts that I thought were rather important and called the man back immediately. He said, "Oh, I have all the material I need." It wasn't until the day of the birthday [Los Angeles Founders Day]—I don't know how many days before this I had the telephone call—people started calling me at 6 A.M. to tell me they heard me on the radio. It seems that he used little bits, had minute spots beginning as early as 5 A.M. and did that all through the day from early in the morning until late at night. I don't know whether he repeated any of it or not, and I'm not sure whether I heard any of them myself, but I thought, "My, how terrible for them not say, 'We're recording you and we're going to do it.'" Now, even if he had thought that the woman had called me back when they asked her for somebody to do this and told me, they should be sure I knew I was being recorded. In fact, I heard that that's mandatory.

KELLEY

It is law.

MATTHEWS

And to tell you how they're going to use it. I thought the man was writing an article on the founding of Los Angeles, and this was only going to be a little bit of the information he needed on the founders. So I was dumbfounded that at any rate, everybody seemed to think it was all right, and that gave a little additional advertising to the birthday [Los Angeles Founders Day]. Then later, the exhibit that they had planned for the [U.S.] Bicentennial year [1976], it was to be sponsored by the California Museum of Science and Industry, and I had given, oh, quite a few, maybe a couple hundred photographs for it, and it involved national figures as well as California historical figures. I also had given them captions and that kind of material, but it was at least three years before the exhibit was put on. I don't know why the delay. So I did furnish that, which was to have been for the [U.S.] Bicentennial, but was put on later. As a matter of fact, it was supposed to have been in the California Museum of Science and Industry, but by the time it was prepared, they didn't have the space there because they were already dated up, and they had to have it in the Space Museum with those tall ceilings. It really wasn't quite as good as it would have been in the California Museum. Those were the highlights of my participation in the U.S. Bicentennial. Except I did write the purpose, and I've forgotten now what else they called it, for the Black Heritage Team. In fact, I was so amazed when they would, you know, have certain committees appointed to do certain things, and then they would come up missing, and then here they're ready for the particular project or the committee report, and so with that I jumped in and got it together. The same way with this [Los Angeles] Founders Day speech, I wasn't supposed to have been the speaker for that, and I must have gotten that ready and pulled it out of the typewriter just two minutes before I drove over to the park, because they didn't have anybody to do it.

KELLEY

Wow.

MATTHEWS

So I did become a full-fledged member of the Black Heritage Team. Then in 1977 I was appointed by the governor, Governor Edmund [G.] Brown, Jr., to the California Heritage Preservation Commission, which had to do with the preservation and use of archives, and also to the California Historical Records Advisory Board, which evaluated the proposals coming from California institutions and then would send the evaluations to the national Historical Publications and Records Commission in Washington [D.C.] to review and give the funds. And rarely did the national commission change anything that our committee sent in. I understand some of the states weren't as good as ours, but there was only one time that I recall where they reversed our decision, and that had to do with something that had national importance, and in those cases they indicated especially that they might reverse the decision of the state. The

main thing that they might have to make a decision on would be the amount of funds. If they were short of funds, even though they felt it was worthwhile and perhaps the amount requested wasn't exorbitant, they still might not be able to give them the full amount. But, as I mentioned, generally speaking, they did as a rule carry out our particular state's advisory board's evaluation. As a matter of fact, the one thing that they reversed was preserving the original Mark Twain papers. They were at the University of California [Berkeley] in the Bancroft Library, and this proposal was asking for funds to preserve the originals. And the committee [California Historical Records Advisory Board] thought, well, they're publishing all of them, why do they need the originals? I couldn't understand why they wouldn't realize that the original papers of a figure, you know, as well-known and as important as Mark Twain, the original should be preserved also. So I was the only person voting to preserve them, and the national board granted the proposal to the University [U.C. Berkeley] the money to preserve them.

KELLEY

I was going to sort of jump ahead— I don't know if there's anything in between.

MATTHEWS

Well, I was going to finish about archives of the City [of Los Angeles].

KELLEY

Okay, yeah.

MATTHEWS

While I was serving on the committee, I should say the Commission [California Heritage Preservation Commission], the commission requested funds to set up a state educational, California Historical Records Educational and Consultants Service, because so many of the counties in the state were small. Many of them had just a clerk to oversee the records and do many other tasks as well, and many of them needed training. They felt having this California Historical Records Educational and Consultants Service, headed by two trained archivists who could travel up and down the state. They could answer questions by mail. In fact, they gave many workshops in various sections of the state, and in that way helped educate the people where the funds were too few and you would never have a professional archivist. They had three members of our commission to supervise this service and the two archivists who were primarily— One was a public archivist and one was for private archives. I was one of the three persons helping to supervise the [California Historical Records Educational Consultants Service]. They held training workshops throughout the state, and they developed an important file for the state archives which would answer all types of information. They got on all the mailing lists of types of material that a lot of smaller archives wouldn't have the time or the personnel to handle and made it available at the [California] state archives, where a phone

call perhaps or a letter would get the information they needed. Then they made an excellent final report, which was published with recommendations for the future of records planning in the state of California, and the main emphasis was to be on cooperation. All the historical societies and any of the people having to do with records in any way would combine their forces to make California a top state in this regard. Then when I was working on the Los Angeles Bicentennial Committee, I was appointed by the Mayor and the city council in 1978 to serve as one of the 44 people on the overall Bicentennial commission. Immediately, I began working on getting a permanent archival program set up for the city of Los Angeles. There was a committee of three people, but in the end, I did most of the work. And because of my contacts with the state, I could call the state archivist and get permission to do this and that and the other, and then there were times when I even called Washington [D.C.] and got consent for certain deviations from the rule. And it happened, the man who was head of the records program for the city of Los Angeles—he would have been over the archives as well, if they had a permanent one—he was over the archives— He wrote a proposal, sent it to the people in the [Los Angeles] City Clerks Office who would have to review it, and then sent it on to our state advisory board [California Historical Records Advisory Board] He sent it to him in November, and the person who received it just sat on it. And he missed the February 1 deadline, and then in April told this fellow it was not well-written and needed to be redone. And he said, "Well, you rewrite it then, because the next deadline is July 1." And he said, "Oh, no, it isn't." Now, he didn't know anything about the deadlines and didn't care, as a matter of fact. So it turned out [that] if I hadn't gotten our history committee [L.A. History Committee] to meet with the [Los Angeles] City Clerk earlier—this was in March—to discuss the city archives and what could be done and that sort of thing. And it happened only the man who was head of the [L.A.] History Committee—we called ours committees then, they called them teams under the U.S.—and I were the only two at that particular meeting. So when we were leaving [Los Angeles] City Hall, this other man said, it was wonderful we want to help, and he's all agreeable. And he said, "We've done the job." I said, "No we haven't." I said, "Now we want to write a letter to the [Los Angeles] Mayor and the City Council and get them interested in doing something about archives. So, of course, I wrote the letter, and it was signed by the head of the L.A. City Bicentennial, the chairman, and by the [L.A.] History Committee.

KELLEY

Do you recall their names at all?

MATTHEWS

Albert Martin was the head of the Los Angeles 200 Committee, they called it, because since they had had the bicentennial for the U.S., they didn't want

people to be confused, so they called it the Los Angeles 200 Committee. And Doyce—Dr. Doyce Nunis—was the chairman of the [L.A.] History Committee. And then, being chairman of a committee, you were automatically on the executive committee or executive board of the L.A. 200 [Committee]. So after we wrote the letter and it was signed and sent of to the Mayor and the City Council, nobody worried about whether there was an answer or not. I'd call the executive office from time to time, and they hadn't gotten a reply from the Mayor. And then I called the chairman of the [L.A.] History Committee to see if he had gotten a reply, and nobody had. So I just went ahead and called the Mayor's Office to find out about it, and I gave him the date of the letter and the message that was included. They spent five hours, they found the card that showed it had been received, but they didn't find the actual letter. Then they called me back in five hours and still hadn't located the letter. I said, "Don't bother, I'll mail you another copy." So all the way along, I was the only one who was worried about continuing and following, you know, one step behind the other. So after the letter, I sent the copy of the letter, and I believe it was— Oh, then when I took the letter, I took it in, I didn't mail it, the person that I saw in the office, I said, "We need an answer to this right away because it's getting near the deadline for the proposal to be presented to our state commission [California Heritage Preservation Commission]." So she had me write a personal note to the Mayor, and she attached it to this letter and put a red flag on it and put it right on his desk so it'd be the first thing he would see. Then the other thing was, we wanted to get it put through as a "special." So he gave his consent to have it put through as a special. Then I contacted the councilman who was in charge of grants to tell him we wanted it put through as a special, and he said it would be. Then I called the City Clerk's Office, the fellow who had it there, telling him to send it over to the Mayor's Office. So the man who was in charge of proposals in the Mayor's Office called this man and he said, "Oh, there's no hurry, it's not due until July," or middle of July or something of this sort. And it just happened this fellow had lunch that day with the woman who was director of the L.A. Bicentennial, or the L.A. 200 Committee, you know, the office director. And she called me back right away and she said, "This man says it's not due until then," and told the man there's no hurry about it. And I said, "It's due on June 1," and even with the special, I had gotten consent from the state archivist to have it sent without the Mayor's signature for our committee [California Historical Records Advisory Board] to study because we had two months to do our evaluation and we would have the signed copy before it would go to Washington [D.C.]. So I called him and I said, "What do you mean telling that fellow—"I forget what his name was—"in the Mayor's Office it wasn't due until the middle of July?" And he said, "Oh, it's a matter of communication." It happened that man had a Spanish name, but he

was just as American as anybody else could be, and he tried to make me believe that he didn't understand what he had said. And do you know he actually turned that man down a second time telling him there's no hurry? Then when I called him back the second time, when I learned that, I said, "Now what on earth do you think you're doing?" And he said, "Well, they don't like it if you put things through in a rush." I said, "You don't have to worry about that while it's your fault, because I'm taking care of having it put through, and I already have the approval of the Mayor's Office, I already have the approval of the councilman who's chairman of the committee, so you just jolly well get that to him right away." Imagine that nerve! After all of this, he's still trying to hang on to this. And the only thing he did when he told this fellow it wasn't properly written was to go to the finance department and get them to add some more money for the city to collect, you know, for dispensing the money when the thing came through. Didn't do another thing in terms of doing anything to it. So actually, it was a brief proposal. I wrote an introduction to it giving a history of archives in the city of Los Angeles, and then I also attached a number of documents—243 most of them written by this man who was head of the records department, who had done a good job of organizing the records generally, but didn't have the staff, you know, to do anything additional in terms of the archives at that point—and sent it through, and our committee [California Historical Records Advisory Board] in Sacramento went through it and approved it. Then before all of this was over, I went to the meeting of the grants committee of the council, Council of the Grants Committee, then it had to be approved by the [Los Angeles] City Council. I had to go three days because they would give out all of these awards and spend a lot of time introducing guests at the beginning of the meeting. Then, when they would get in the middle of the agenda, two or three councilmen would have left, and then they didn't have a quorum, so then you go back another day. Then one councilwoman was objecting to it being put through, not just this one, but a couple of other items too, as a special. She said, "When they come through as specials, we don't have time to study them." So I tried to see her before the next meeting to tell her that this was urgent and it wasn't our fault it was late, it was due to somebody sitting on it, and it was most necessary to get it through. So the next day, she withdrew her objections, I had put my name in to speak on the floor in case she did object, but it turned out she gave in the next day and let it pass, but said she would hope that there wouldn't be too many specials coming up in the future. So after it went through and the— Oh, and the other thing was, I kept telling the [L.A. History] Committee we ought to see that the City Council, not the City Council, but that the [Los Angeles] City Attorney's Office got the ordinance written that would describe the duties and appointment of an archivist. It happened they had worked on one, but it was wordy and the man

didn't know the whole workings of this. They needed somebody who was in the business, so Edgar Allen, who was the person who was head of the [Los Angeles] Records Department, wrote a very brief, to the point ordinance, so we got an appointment with the city councilman who was in charge of that particular area to try to get him to push it through fast so that the ordinance would have been passed before the national commission [Historical Publications and Record Commission] would consider the proposal. And he said, "Oh, if you want to get it put through in a hurry, you'll have to go to the Mayor's Office." So then we trotted down to the Mayor's Office, and just luckily, the man we should see, one of his chief aides, or the chief aide, came out of his office just as we went down the hallway. One of the people on the [L.A. History] Committee knew everybody in [Los Angeles] City Hall and in the [Los Angeles] County Hall of Administration. He went up to him and said, "Could we see you sometime this afternoon? It's very important." And he said, "If you can come back in an hour, yes, I'll be happy to see you." Now, we had waited two weeks to see that city councilman whose job it was to take care of the kind of business we went to him for, and he sat up there so indifferent during the whole time we were talking, you know, [when we] had the conference with him. And this man, the minute we told him about the different things; we told him we had gotten the City Clerk to sign a letter; that they wouldn't just use the proposal money for one year and then think they had gotten it well enough organized to go back to business as usual and not have a permanent archivist, trained archivist. And he said, "Well, wouldn't it be valuable to have a letter like that from the Mayor too?" And we said, "Oh, yes indeed!" So I rushed over the next morning with some more information so he would have, you know, full information about the whole project. The person I was talking with in Washington, D.C., told me that she was delighted, and she put it right on top of the pile for the commission [Historical Publications and Records Commission] in Washington when they were meeting. She was sure that having that extra letter from the Mayor had a great influence on the decision of the board. So after all of this over the business was granted, they were having the first, it was a cocktail party that the Biltmore Hotel gave to open the bicentennial year. The woman who was the executive director of the office was at the door when I came in, and she grabbed me and hugged me and said, "So glad you're on our side." Now see, that's the way it was in the beginning, this happened early. And then later on, here they're doing all of these things to put roadblocks in my path, which I'll tell about later. But to show you that they were so delighted, and they knew it was both my position on the state board [California Historical Advisory Board] and the fact that I just, you know, used my initiative about all the business from every step. Then later on, I wish she had remembered what she had said, because they certainly

weren't on my side, you know, delaying me in terms of the— Well, I guess I better wait until I get to that. So then, after the archival program was set up they did have a building which was already being built to house all of the records, including the archival records, and, of course, a special vault that would be temperature controlled and all the things that you need. And that was another big talking point, because many times, if they set up a program and there are not proper facilities for the archives, then having a trained person wouldn't be sufficient. So that was another talking point in terms of getting that put through. When the first meeting was held of the [L.A.] History Committee— When we were appointed, we were asked which committee we'd prefer serving on, and I had selected the [L.A.] History [Committee] because that's my main interest. The very first meeting I handed in a two page report giving, oh, I would imagine as many as 15 possible proposals or activities, but in brief, you know, just almost the title. Many of them were from our U.S. Bicentennial, which we had no time to complete or even to organize because of the time element and the matter of funding. And that was my top priority: a proper founders monument to be erected in the plaza, in the State Historic Park which is near Olvera Street. That's the only place most people know, so if you tell them that, they know where the plaza is. They had one small plaque, I don't have the dimensions in mind clearly, but I would judge not more than 16 by 20 inches if it was that large, and it was on a little fence that was just about waist high, a brick wall that goes in a circle around the plaza area had been put up ten years earlier and it said, "Dedicated to the founders of Los Angeles, who traveled a long weary way from Mexico to somewhere near this point. September 4, 1781." Then they listed the 11 male heads of families, didn't even say they were the 11 male heads of families among the founders. All of them were Spanish names, so you would assume that they were Spanish or Mexican. And even the initial— I don't know that mine's an exact quote, but the two sentences that they had, you know, weren't even well-phrased. Especially not saying— Now while they're talking about the long, weary trek, they could have said that the—and I don't believe they even said there were forty-four of them—they could have said they were of mixed Indian, Negro and Spanish blood [or] at least gotten something in there to indicate that they were not all Spaniards. It was small, and one time I was in the plaza with some visitors and I wanted to show it to them. I looked and looked, and I knew I was on the right side and I didn't see it anywhere. Finally, I saw two little boys were sitting on it. It was kind of slanted, and you see it wasn't very high for them to climb up there. Imagine, having a plaque so small that two little boys could obscure it completely by sitting on it. Now, the new monument that I proposed, I had hoped for something even larger and more spectacular. They have a large statue that's larger than life size of Felipe de Neve in the plaza area which made me think it

would be good to have a sculptor do maybe one family as a part of the founders monument. Now, it could either be free-standing, like his was, as a separate thing, or just a family on a big plaque, a larger one, naturally, than this because you would need it in order to get the information on it. So I had to keep after this, having proposed it in '78 at the first meeting. Then, before the end of the first year, our history committee had accepted the wording for the plaque unanimously. Then here we arrived to ten weeks almost before the September 4, 1981, birthday [Los Angeles City Bicentennial] and it took ten weeks, at least—the foundry, they had to allow ten weeks to cast it—and they still didn't have the money for it. Whereas, before that time [and I thought they might be stalling], I contacted my councilman to see if there was any chance of getting the money from the City [of Los Angeles]. They came up empty handed, you know, just as a ruse to not do it. He started pursuing that, and so, finally, in talking with the man who was with the [L.A.] History Committee, right after he had come from a [City of Los Angeles] executive committee meeting, he told me that they had collected over \$85,000 that was not allocated for any purpose except paying the office workers. But they didn't need that much for the office workers, and the amount of money needed for this plaque was less than \$3,000 and then the installation made it run close to \$5,000. And so he came back from this meeting— Now, I wonder whether he was told to tell me that to throw me off the track or whether they actually said they decided not to use that money for that purpose—found some other way to spend it. Maybe pay the people higher salaries, I don't know what. So when I called the executive office after he told me this, she wasn't in. I talked with one of the other professional people on the staff and she said, "Oh no, we need all of that for our salaries." And I said, "Well, I know this man who's a history professor at USC [University of Southern California] is neither deaf nor dumb." I said, "He heard them say at the meeting that they had enough money of unallocated funds to cover the plaque." So the other person didn't call me back. I sent her the contract from the foundry and they gave me a ten day price, because prices keep going up, then she says, "Well I have a union that will probably give us the money, ask for an extension." So I asked for a week's extension. By end of the week she still didn't have it, and then she said, "Ask for another extension." I said, "You ask them for an extension." Then after I told her that, I called the people and she hadn't called. So I just have a feeling that they didn't care whether this ever went through.

1.12. TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (February 12, 1986)

MATTHEWS

We were running short on time, for a ten week period before September 4, [1981-Los Angeles City Bicentennial] I offered to pay the fifty percent of the price that the foundry required before they begin casting. They said, "Oh, no, you can't do that. We'd have problems with our bookkeeping to reimburse you." Then I had already— Oh, I forgot to say, I had asked my councilman to see about the City [of Los Angeles], whether they could pay it. Well, when they told me that the executive committee had enough money for it, I called and told them to not worry about it, it was already taken care of. After the plaque was finally made, I was so amazed that they went back to the City [of Los Angeles] to get the money to install it in the plaza. It wasn't installed for several months after that because they had to get the brick to match, and of course, finally got brick that didn't match, but it still was a matter of installation. Plus, the fact it was going to be presented at the [Los Angeles] City Hall, it was better that it wasn't installed first because then they could unveil the plaque there. But while I was going to the foundry with the man who was head of the [L.A.] History Committee, Doyce Nunis, I told him that I would expect to be introduced on the program on September 4 because it was said that this was going to be one of the major events on the program—the unveiling— I didn't think about saying, you know, that I should be one of the persons to help unveil it, but at least I thought I should be introduced, to say not only was it my idea, but I chaired the committee. And he said, "Oh, I think they've already sent the final program to the Mayor's Office." The way he said it, and the fact that he was on the executive committee, I got the feeling that he— Now, see, he may or may not have known what was in the program, but the fact that he knew it had gone, and that he knew that much, I have a feeling he knew my name wasn't on there or wasn't going to be included. Even if my name wasn't on the program, at least they still could've introduced me. So I called the Mayor's Office and talked to one of his aides. I said I was told that he has the program now, and I thought since this was my project that I should be introduced. And she said— I don't know whether she told me right then that she would just take it up with the Mayor. I think she came back and called me and said that the Mayor said that I had done so many things for the City [of Los Angeles] that he wanted to give me a resolution, and for me to get the information necessary there immediately because there was barely time for the calligrapher to get it finished by that time. I took it there the next day, and she gave it to her immediately. The day of the celebration, I went with my nephew. They gave out a number of resolutions to different firms that had given money for the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial. The City Hall Chambers, City Council gave them out. Then I went to First Street, where they had set up the chairs on the lawn for the big program. No special seat for me in the first row or anything; no special arrangement for me; and, of course, definitely no place for me on the platform. Then when I read the

program, I really was outraged that they had the unveiling— Of course you'd expect the Mayor, unveiling of the plaque to be done by the Mayor. Then I didn't see why the president of the City Council had to be included, but they had him included. And then they had Mr. Martin—

KELLEY

That's Albert Martin, right?

MATTHEWS

Albert Martin, yes, chairman of the L.A. 200 Committee. That was okay, you'd expect that too. But then, the final insult: they had two choirs of school children on lower platforms, but up front and up high, you know, compared with the audience down below. And then they said, "And all the school children." My name wasn't mentioned anywhere in the program, except as a member of the L.A. 200 Committee. I had served on, oh, four different committees. One of them, I must also indicate where I felt they had, you know, improperly given me credit, or I shouldn't say improperly—I should say improperly denied me credit. It was the Spectrum 200 Exhibition, which included photographs from the history of Los Angeles from 1860-1940. We had a \$200,000 grant for that, but it happened they did have to spend some of that money to revamp the Merced Theater, which is in the historic area there next to the Pico House which was the first two or three story hotel, I forget which, in Los Angeles, so some of the money was spent that way. Then they spent money having an administrator there the whole time the exhibition was there. And, of course, she furnished speakers to people who wanted it and a number of other things, so she was paid a salary for the time of the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial. Then the people who set up the exhibit were paid, so I have this special collection of photographs of blacks in California dating back to 1781. Now, I shouldn't say photographs, because in 1781 photography hadn't been invented. In fact, I think it was around the 1840's, early 1840's, and the reason they had the exhibit beginning in 1860 is because photography didn't become popular in general until later, and then many of the early ones were not preserved. So they knew I had this special collection, and the man who was the historiographer, I believe they call it, knew about it and he was somebody I knew well. It wasn't a person I had just met for the first time, you know, when he came to my house.

KELLEY

What was his name?

MATTHEWS

Weinstein. Sometimes when I'm criticizing, I don't always give names. Robert A. Weinstein.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

He went a lot of places first. In terms of looking for black photographs, I know he went to the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. He happens to be a good friend of William Pajaud, who's in charge of public relations and other things at the Golden State. When he came to my house, I don't remember, but it couldn't have been much over an hour, and I have hundreds or even thousands of pictures. I didn't know what he wanted and so forth, so I just gave him box after box to flip through. Some of them I had arranged in albums by subject, like the Mason-Owens family and the Pío Pico family, and some that were just sort of general history beginning with the early period. And he didn't even give me time to, you know—He'd just flip, flip, flip, flip. So then he picked out 35, and didn't have time for me to list the ones he was taking so I would know what to suggest in addition to that if he hadn't selected some that I thought were important, and just gave me a receipt for 35 photographs. He said that was only for the portable exhibit, which was going to be opened first. They were going to make a larger production of the permanent exhibit, so he would be back again before the permanent exhibit. Well, I've been intending— The portable exhibit, after the whole business was over, traveled around Southern California to a number of cities. It was finally given to the, I believe it's Cal State L.A., and it was in a certain area of the library there. I've been out there for meetings several times and have seen it. I think I may have counted those when I was out there one time. I intended to count the number they have in the permanent exhibit, because it's still on display in the Merced Theater, ever since it was put up in March of 1981, to find out. Because, as I recall it, there were probably very few added to the permanent exhibit. The main thing, they took some and blew them up you know, enormously. He had one of an oil well. What do they call it when the well comes in? A gusher. And I would guess that one could've been half of a wall space, you know, real big. I think it's mainly just the large ones adding to the space it took in this Merced Theater that made the permanent exhibit look larger. The thing about the whole thing that annoyed me so much, they had this historiographer to write— I don't know whether they asked him to write it, but he did write what you'd call two big columns that were on display in the exhibit. He was saying it was too bad that they didn't have better coverage of the minorities. You see, they had Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, and Negroes, the main minorities, because, he said, in the early days these people who went around taking pictures for various purposes and mainly as commercial photographers to sell, didn't find the minority photographs were saleable so they didn't take any. Therefore, there were very few available, and he said mostly all that would be available would be family portraits. Well, even family portraits are important, especially those that show costume and the period, you know, the time in which they were taken. Of the things I have, I have a fair number that date before 1900 and he didn't select a single one from

my collection that dated before 1900, and I don't believe too many close after 1900. When I saw the opening of the moveable exhibit, I thought, well, he's going to add more important things later. What he did was call the [L.A. History] Committee to his home the day before he's supposed to send it off to the people who blow up the pictures and mount them, and gave us coffee and showed us some posters and things down in the living room until the whole group got there. He should have had us up there individually looking at them as we came. When we got upstairs, he said, "Well I don't know how to do this." And I said, "Pass them around and let everybody look at them individually." No, he decided to hold them up. Now, what can a whole group, a committee of six or seven, do when he's holding up the pictures? As I say, it ended up most of them being about the same. There was one person who was not an official member of the committee, but because of her knowledge and her position she was asked to come to this meeting when he had shown the pictures. I don't remember which family said, "Well, if you're going to have the family, you ought to have this family. Don't put down the names of the families since I don't remember which ones were mentioned.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

But she just meant if you're going to include this family, you ought to include this family. He said, "I don't have a picture of it." She said, "Well, I do." "Well, I have to have it tomorrow." And anybody who made any suggestion at all, and I think she and I were the main ones who made any suggestions, the others just sat there and accepted the— One man who was a history professor said, "Oh, I thought we were going to have some decisions to make." That was his only comment. I may have made some suggestions during the meeting. I stayed after everybody was gone and I said, "I'm going home and bring you some pictures that I want you to put in." I said, "You don't have anything in here that dates before 1900." The thing about it was the fact that he had said he was going to come back for one thing, and here I saw that it was practically the same exhibit and it was just a matter of him blowing up some bigger that made it take more space. So, I went back with this Weller Street 1895 Fourth of July photograph. I took him the Robert's Mortuary and the family picture of the Roberts family . They had come here in 1888, and he had the first transfer, moving and transfer, business before 1900. In 1905 , he sold out to his partner, a Mr. Dunston, who had come into Los Angeles the same time he had with his family. He built the first, or at least opened the first, black mortuary in 1905. His son was the first Negro assemblyman elected; in fact, the first elected black official of any kind in California, elected in 1918. His son was also editor of a newspaper and had been a school principal.

KELLEY

Do you recall his first name?

MATTHEWS

Fred, Frederick— Oh, you're talking about the father. Andrew. His middle initial— I can't think of the middle initial. Andrew Roberts.

KELLEY

Okay. Andrew Roberts.

MATTHEWS

Yes.

KELLEY

And the son is Fred Roberts.

MATTHEWS

Frederick.

KELLEY

Okay. Frederick.

MATTHEWS

Of course, people used to shorten it to Fred. Fred M. Roberts. Fred Madison Roberts. An important family. They had arrived here early and the family picture I know was taken before 1900. But the picture of the mortuary, naturally, was after, you know, it was established in 1905. I took several other things to him, and the only one of those I took to him— Oh, the other one was, he was using Bidy Mason sitting on a front porch with some other women. You wouldn't know who she was or what, except that you just have it in the caption. So I took the bust portrait of her and said, "You must put this bust portrait in." All of the pictures that had to do with Negroes were 11 by 14, which was the smallest size in the exhibit, except one he did of the Bessie Coleman. She wasn't strictly a Californian, but because she was an early person in aviation, not only as a black nationally but also as a women nationally, even though there were a few white women earlier, she was among the earliest women; and of course, about the first black in America. Now, there was one black that we know well who preceded her but he, I think, was in France, was in World War I in France. Either France or England, but I think it was France. So she was the only one. I don't think he ever flew in the United States. Just was in the war and flying in Europe. She had to go to France to get her training because no American aviation school would take a Negro. So she got her international pilot's license in France. Apparently, a lot of the early white women to fly didn't even have a pilot's license, and if some of them did have, they didn't have an international pilot's license, so I don't know exactly how she ranks. I've been trying to run that down. She might have been the first woman to have an international pilot's license in America, first American woman. But I'm not sure about that. The only reason he had hers a little bit wider was to

accommodate the plane. She was standing beside her plane. So it was 11 by 14. It was 11 inches high but a little wider than 14, maybe it was 20 inches wide. All the rest of the them were 11 by 14. When I went several times to show people the different Negro ones, every now and then I'd forget one of some men in the fire department. It was so high up, you wouldn't have known what color they were way up there. At the opening reception, there was a man who used to be a photographer at the California museum— L.A. County or Museum of Natural History. And he was there. He had photographed her, but had retired in the meantime. I was just getting ready to leave when he came in with a friend and happened to tell him about the exhibit and about my being disappointed about the use of the Negroes and, of course, some of the other minorities. He used a picture of some Mexicans making tortillas and had cigarettes hanging out of the sides of their mouths. Of course, you know, very ordinary Mexicans.

KELLEY

Yes, good.

MATTHEWS

The one minority he really blew up was a huge picture of three Chinese coolies. All of this worry about the people doing pictures of minorities that you wouldn't want to have, in terms of his article, on why there were not so many pictures available of minorities. And then also the fact that, you know, they were the ones that possibly were done were derogatory. That's what he used in terms of the biggest one that he did of a minority. Now, he had some of the Chinese dressed in nice costumes, but the big one he blew up. He blew up that one. I just couldn't understand. Then after he returned my pictures, I found out he had, not necessarily before 1900, some early ones, some nice ones that I had gotten from individual friends, which had never been seen before and would have been, you know, of interest to the people. And here he wanted to keep some of those for his personal collection, but didn't think about putting them in the exhibit. This is a bicentennial exhibition. It was the only thing the [L.A.] History Committee got any money to put up, and they had one sentence about the founding of Los Angeles in the exhibit. When they put the first one that was a traveling exhibit, I called three times to the man who was the top man, the chairman, Dr. Nunis, to tell him I wanted something more about the founding of Los Angeles. And three times on the phone he promised me he would. Then when they opened this permanent exhibit, here's the same caption. The second sentence mentioned that they used the Indians who were already here as labor force. And why is it so important to mention them when they only have one sentence on the founding or the founders? So I just hit the ceiling when I saw they had put the same thing up after he had promised me three times. I thought we were on good terms. I didn't need to write him a letter. Then, because they

did it that way, I started having people who were prominent call Dr. Nunis, to write him. I was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Los Angeles City Historical Society. So the board voted to write a letter, which I wrote but the president signed. I ended the letter— Of course, somebody on the board suggested that we use the caption that was going to be on the monument. So, at the end of the letter, I said, "And whose birthday are we celebrating anyway?" Because, you know, of all things, they didn't have a picture of the founding—

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

—and I would have thought, for that— Because there have been plenty of artists who've done nice renderings of the founding of Los Angeles in drawings. It's imaginary, of course, but they have the costumes according to the period. They could have found a good artist rendering for that one thing to show the founding of Los Angeles as well as have a larger caption. I talked to these people, and I'm so amazed— Of course, practically all of them were white people. I said, "Well, what did he say?" And he said, "Oh, we can't do that because that's going on the monument," or "We can't do this or that or the other because this, that, or the other." He didn't give a satisfactory answer to anyone and I said, "And what did you say?" And none of them answered him back, which surprised me so much! I was just so amazed. And I've always been a reserved sort of person and, you know, normally I wouldn't go and do certain things. But when something is really totally wrong and irresponsible, then I think it's time to get angry and to do something about it. So finally, one of the other persons on the [L.A. History] Committee— And then, this is the other thing about the committee. In the credits on the little brochure that they got out in the beginning to give to people—it was free—they just listed me as a member of the advisory committee. And under credits, they didn't mention my name at all. Here, I not only had given my time and my photographs, I had done a bibliography that they used, a brief bibliography on blacks in Los Angeles. I had given a talk to the Docents. I had given a little gallery talk, you know, when they first opened to some of the people who came the first day. I participated in more than just giving my photographs. Other places—the Huntington Library and others—they have to pay to use those pictures, and they weren't even paying to use mine. And then I didn't get any credit except for being a member of the [L.A.] History Committee. And then when I looked at the committee, I think I was possibly the only person still on that committee who was on there when it was organized, except for Doyce Nunis, who was the chairman. And, of course, Weinstein was not considered an official member of the committee because they knew he was going to be the historiographer, but it was valuable for him to come to those planning meetings earlier. And then,

with all of that, I'm not even listed in terms of credit. So when they finally got out a large catalog, oh, a year or two after the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial, and they told me they were doing it, I said, "Well, I hope you'll have the decency to give me credit for having given my pictures free." So they did put my picture— But the thing about it, they put all the acknowledgements in the end. I just couldn't understand all of this overlooking me, and especially since— I know of this one other person who was on the education committee that I think— Oh, I'm not gonna call any names— in fact, I shouldn't have called as many names as I have—that I think did a lot of work and put in a lot of time. But aside from that, it didn't matter, you know, whether I did or didn't. I mean, you know, whether she put in as much time as I did or more. She did get introduced at some of the regular meetings of the L.A. 200 Committee; in fact, even was permitted to make a report. At the very last meeting, the Mayor attended. The man who was the general chairman happened to mention that they were going to unveil the plaque, and then, as an aside, looked at me and said something about Miriam Matthews, and I don't even know that he said I was chairman of the committee. Then this other person had given her second report about what she had done for the education committee at that particular meeting. So I really couldn't understand at all, and I also wondered if—When Doyce Nunis told me that they had the money for the plaque, whether that was told to me to throw me off and think it was all okay and I wouldn't worry about doing anything— They probably thought— Because I went to the finance committee, or to my councilman, and he went to the finance committee to try to see if I could get the money if they fell down on the job.

KELLEY

Right.

MATTHEWS

But there's no excuse for that much— I call it discrimination.

KELLEY

Yeah, that's basically what it is.

MATTHEWS

I probably have elaborated too much on some of these things. I should have gone through a little faster. Now, during the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial year— As a matter of fact, after I wasn't happy with this showing of blacks in the Spectrum 200 Exhibition, I thought, well, I might get busy and try to get up a complete black photographic show.

KELLEY

Right.

MATTHEWS

I talked with this man who was the photographer, but it was too late to get any place. I didn't want it in a Negro neighborhood. I wanted it to be where whites

would have equal access because they were the ones who needed it more than the blacks, even though it had been nice for all of them to see. So I tried the Security Pacific building where they had that downstairs gallery in downtown Los Angeles. But, see, they're dated up way ahead and a number of other places. So it was a matter of having to know a year or more ahead to get a suitable place to get it, and especially get one that wouldn't cost a lot of money or maybe be free. Then, also, when I found out how much it would cost to blow up the pictures and all of that, I gave up on trying to do it before the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial. But it happened that a young man who was at UCLA— What's his name? Tyler.

KELLEY

Oh, Bruce Tyler.

MATTHEWS

What's his first name?

KELLEY

Bruce.

MATTHEWS

Oh. Bruce Tyler, a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA, had gone to the man who was head of the display windows at the May Company downtown. For more than a year they had been displaying mainly the works of artists, downtown artists. They felt it was valuable giving some of that showspace to show what was going on in the downtown area even though they could have put merchandise in there and possibly sold more things by having people see it in the window and come in to get it. So when he went to him with some books and a bibliography and a few records that had good pictures on the outside—one of them I know had Central Avenue on it or something— he said he would be very happy to give the space but he would need more material than he had. Two people had told him about me, one of them was the woman who was administrator of that exhibit at the Merced Theater, and I've forgotten who the second person was. So when I got the pictures together and took them down, he said he was very happy to do it. So it turned out that most of the windows had all of my material in it. I think one window where we had books, some of the books were his and some were mine. He had one window by himself that had his records blown up. But if he hadn't been—what shall I say?—energetic, or taking the initiative to find out about having the exhibit, it wouldn't have happened. But it did attract a lot of attention. Maybe they didn't like that either. The man who put the exhibit up had white block letters and he pasted them on outside of the window. I was surprised that, you know, people didn't realize if— I didn't know they were on the outside. They hadn't— You know how kids will chip things off.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

It said, "A Bicentennial Salute—Black History of Los Angeles." People got off the bus to look at the exhibit; some went back again and again. As a matter of fact, I hired a photographer to take pictures of each window, and while we were doing it we had to wait for a man, you know, who was in front of the window we wanted to photograph. Finally I said, "Let's go to the other end and then maybe we'll meet him in the middle." It turned out to be one of my old patrons from the Vernon Branch Library, and he had been there every day. I didn't find that out. If I had known he had been there that many times, we wouldn't have been so polite trying to wait to wait for him to finish the window before we went through. So it showed— Then I had people that I rarely saw who called me up, and they had gone back on a Sunday, you know, when [there are] not many people downtown so they could look at it without so much traffic. So it was really a very gratifying display. And the fact that we were downtown attracted a lot of attention. It was in the downtown throw-around newspaper, too. One of my tenants, as a matter of fact, saw it in the throw-around newspaper, and then she went to see it because her job was in a different part of the city. So I'm sure a lot of people saw that, and I'm sure they saw that or heard about it anyway. I also gave pictures to the Children's Museum that's in the—I call it kind of the mall. Not the mall, but, you know, that downtown area opposite the [Los Angeles] City Hall. They put up an exhibit. They had gotten one or two pictures from some other source, but I think they left theirs up a whole year. Then the Los Angeles County Museum [of Art] was doing an exhibit, and one of the people I know, Mrs. Nola Ewing, who works for the art department—I mean the costume department of the art museum on Wilshire, L.A. County Art Museum. She ran into a person she knew in the hall and said, "Oh, haven't seen you for some time. What are you doing now?" And she said, "Oh, I'm getting an exhibit together of artists who were in Los Angeles before 1940 for a bicentennial exhibit." She said, "What black artists do you have?" She said, "Oh, none. There weren't any before that." She said, "You should get in touch with Miss Matthews." So she came over to my house and took some pictures of Beulah Woodard's two pieces of sculpture. I think maybe she took only Beulah Woodard's two pieces, photographs of them. When I went to the exhibit, not only weren't there any black artists in the exhibit, but some of the white artists who were in there that I knew, I was surprised at them being in there and some others that I thought were more prominent weren't. So some of the white people might have thought, you know, "Who got this exhibit together?" They were going to have a catalog and I thought, well, maybe she might put one of the black ones in the catalog, but I never remembered, you know, after it was published, to go to the bookshop to look for it. At any rate,

she came and I cooperated with her. There are many times that I get letters from people and— Oh, I also gave a slide lecture at the headquarters, you know, where they have the exhibit in Merced Theatre too on the blacks. Not just the ones who were in the exhibit, but just generally in California. While I was just doing other things and interested in black history, I helped persuade the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage board to preserve certain black historic monuments. Actually, it was Mrs. Nola Ewing who went to them first with the First AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Church, which was the first black institutional building in Los Angeles that was declared a historic cultural monument. That was declared in 1971, and she did that practically on her own, except the last minute when they have what they call the open meeting. They've nearly always made up their mind before then unless there's some little technicality that may come up which somebody discusses in the meeting. She called a number of prominent people who were members of the church and maybe some who weren't. At that time I didn't know her. She had called [Paul R.] Williams and several people that I did know well to speak about that. She suggested later to me after we became friends that Paul R. Williams's and William Grant Still's homes should be declared historic cultural monuments. So after she made suggestions, I did all of the paperwork the first time, but I'm sure she had to do— The forms you have to fill out. You have to keep writing them to find out when and why they are going to make a decision. They sometimes take years to make a decision. I don't know whether it's because the board just gives so much time a month, or every other month, to it. They have to go out and visit it. And if the material that you've sent them, written material, is insufficient, they have to either write the people who are in charge of the building or find out from you different additional facts. But the two of us, Mrs. Ewing and I, were responsible for Paul R. Williams's and William Grant Still's homes being declared historical cultural monuments. Then I suggested the Sojourner Truth Home and the Golden State [Mutual Life] Insurance Company. Finally I dropped the Sojourner Truth Home. I may have sent them one letter with both of them listed. The Sojourner Truth Home, the original one, is still standing, but in '65 they sold it to a church. And it has the church name across it. I don't know whether that should make any difference since they used it as a clubhouse since 1913 to 1965. The building is still standing, and they built it themselves. It wasn't just a building they bought, you know, already built. The one for the Golden State [Mutual Life Insurance Company], I'm sure they've had it four years and I don't know how many times I've written them. The last time they said that, the district had been changed to [David S.] Cunningham to [Robert] Farrell, and the councilman has to approve it if it's in his district. But they do that early, you know, go right to the councilman, "Have you any comment to make?" So I don't know why they're taking so long. I tried to get

the Twenty-eighth Street branch of the YMCA because it had been built by Paul Williams in 1926. It turned out that the downtown metropolitan Y board wouldn't permit it to go through. They said they don't know what might be done in the future with that building. See, if it's a historical cultural monument and they want to tear it down or do something else or sell it, they have to give warning in time for some heritage or conservancy group to either buy it or get somebody to buy it or to have it restored if it's coming apart, you know, falling down. I guess if they did have some plan to move that branch somewhere else, they didn't want to get involved in that. I didn't believe them at first. I just thought because I hadn't heard of any YMCA branch being declared a monument that they didn't want a black person to be the first one. I even called Chicago, the headquarters, to find out that they have absolute final say. Because I had talked to the man who was director of the Twenty-eighth branch and you would think he would've known that he needed to consult them before, you know, telling us to go ahead.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

I was really quite put out. I was already, before I had called Chicago to get the ministerial alliances and different groups in the community to stir up a little business, you know, and try to bring pressure to bear on the downtown committee. So that one didn't work. I have several other things in mind but I haven't gotten to it because I must get around to getting my book done. Also, when they— The Dunbar Museum, I didn't initiate that nor did I initiate the Ralph Bunche [Home], but I got information for them that they needed for both of those. In the case of the Ralph Bunche one, the Dunbar Museum, since all of the immediate relatives had died who were living in the Bunche home, didn't want it to get into some person's hands who wouldn't retain it as a monument. They had to get a down payment, and I was one of five people who gave a thousand dollars, you know, on the down payment for the home. And, of course, the Ralph Bunche Home is now on the national landmarks list, too. Now, what else am I supposed to—?

KELLEY

Yeah. I was curious. You mentioned a lot about your involvement in collection of photographs. When did you start collecting historical photographs? I was wondering if you can talk a little about your collection.

MATTHEWS

Well, I actually don't remember exactly when, but I didn't start collecting in a big way until after I retired, and not immediately after I retired. But in the early days when I went up to Bancroft [Library, U.C. Berkeley]— Now, I know I was in Berkeley in 1950, because that year I went to a convention of the

California Library Association in Sacramento. I allowed time to stop over in Berkeley for two or three days to do research since I was up that way. And that's how I can remember. Bancroft [Library] didn't have a lot of photographs on blacks. They've gotten more in recent years. But some of those early pictures like Leidesdorff Street and some of the people who in the early days weren't known especially to be black, or, you know, there wasn't a lot of talk about them at that time. Several others, I don't recall offhand just which ones, maybe missions where they may have had Negroes on the— Well, of course, it was the photographs where they had some soldiers who were part African descent. At any rate, I had gotten some as early as 1950 from Bancroft [Library]. And I had been to— I was at the [California] State Library, too, because I went early for the convention so I could spend time before the convention at the State Library. I don't think I went to the state archives at that time, but while I was serving on the [Los Angeles] Archives Committee, when I had a meeting at Sacramento, I would either go early or stay later. In fact, I think the first time I went, I may have stayed almost a week so that I could do research at the archives. Sometimes if our meeting was over early, I would make my return trip— A lot of people would get a 4:00 train, depending on which one was available and where they were going. And if I went straight home, I could definitely have left at 5:00, but I might take— Then it happened, while I was on the [California Heritage Preservation] Commission, I had Japanese friends who were both history professors. The husband was some kind of an assistant to the president of Cal State Sacramento, and his wife took a leave of absence to finish her dissertation for her Ph.D., even though she was a full professor before she got her Ph.D. and had been for a number of years. They were good friends, so I always stayed over to have supper with them before I would come back on the times when I was coming, you know, if I called them ahead of time to let them know when I was coming. I went to the Huntington Library in the early forties [1940's], but I don't recall getting any pictures from them, only documents on Leidesdorff and different ones. But I did the bibliography, I think I've mentioned earlier, at USC [University of Southern California], and finished it in 1944, on the history of the Negro in California, 1781 to 1910, an annotated bibliography. Originally, all I was planning to do was to seek out the sources. When I began they were so few, and you'd just find a page or a paragraph or just a very little amount. And I had heard, when I was doing that bibliography, from Titus Alexander that Pío Pico had some Negro blood, but Bancroft [Library] didn't put it in his pioneer register which gave background on people. In some cases you find that people, for one reason or another, don't want to embarrass a family or they may pay them not to put it in.

1.13. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side One (February 12, 1986)

MATTHEWS

To continue about the photographs and how early I acquired some of them, but hadn't thought about acquiring them on a big scale. When I had not been retired too long and borrowed the pictures from the Owens family—the Mason-Owens family. Of course, being married—I mean, joined together by marriage—I realized how important they were. I went to see Mr. Shackelford, who came fairly early and was an early businessman. James Shackelford. He had some interesting ones and one of them showed him. He had a furniture— First, a used furniture store and then both used and new furniture. He was riding his bicycle with a little small table on his back because that saved him paying twenty-five cents to have it delivered by an express wagon, which is very interesting. So I began realizing that pictures, you know, make a real good history. I mean, a story, you know, because you can see how they looked and how they dressed and so many things that just describing in words wouldn't do, and it would attract the attention of people who were either young or not the ones who would want to read a lot of text. So I would call some people that I knew had pictures, and wait until I had time to go in the trunk or the attic or the basement or wherever they kept their things. In some cases they died without my ever getting them. Some people I called maybe as many as three or four times, and then I'd wait until after Christmas or wait until after this time. In some instances, I was unfortunate to call right after they'd dumped everything. And when people would die, not necessarily suddenly, then I would hear about it. I used to be rather circumspect about mentioning it before the funeral. I found out in some cases, especially if they were children, or grandchildren, or nieces, or great-nieces and nephews, that they'd say, "Ooh, I wonder what they saved all this for?" Especially, I guess, if they came out from out of town and they were only going to be there for a few days, and then maybe the house would have to be sold or rented or something. They just started dumping things. So I would say before I even— Or on the phone, because sometimes when you go on a sympathy call, you don't want to mention in front of somebody else.

KELLEY

Right.

MATTHEWS

So I said, "Now, don't throw anything away—pictures, letters, documents or anything—without letting me see them, if you will." Of course, naturally, I'd have to ask their permission. I said, "Some of them may be very valuable, and if you don't want them, I will be happy to keep them for posterity." Or in some cases, you know, I'd like to have them copied so that, you know, they will be available later. In some cases, they had sense enough to know that things were valuable but they take forever to go through them; you know, they put it off and

put it off, just like I have with my collection here. I've told you I've got it spread all over the place now. It's the kind of job that takes a little while, and so then you think, "Well, I'll wait till I have this time." Then if it's vacation time, you don't want to spend your whole vacation doing it. So I don't always have good luck that way. But once in a while I've gotten a little choice bit, even though it wasn't much. Just one little letter or book or something that gives me some new information that's valuable. I've enjoyed doing it, and when I miss, of course, it's too bad; but when I get something that's a real gem then I'm just like a person on the treasure hunt who's come with the diamonds and the gold. I find now that that's really just wonderful that I started doing this, because some of those people are dead and now, and some of them either— A few people gave me their collection because they didn't have any use for it, and they were getting up in age and felt that since I was doing it, doing what I was in preserving history, that it'd be better to be in my hands. I was trying to think of one case where something occurred in connection with the collecting. The thing I was going to mention, I had been just going to the early period, early part of this century, and not going through it. But through the years, when people, you know, ask for something old, they think of the thirties [1930's], forties [1940's], or fifties [1950's] as going back quite a ways. And so I began, in some cases, taking a lot of things that normally I would just not have bothered with because I was trying to get to the early period. One of the reasons I have that cut-off date of 1910 when I did that bibliography, the bibliography that I always expected to enlarge and publish, which I didn't. But at least it's been in the libraries of a number of the University of California units throughout the state, then at Bancroft [Library, U.C. Berkeley], and, of course, at USC [University of Southern California] where I did it.

KELLEY

UCLA.

MATTHEWS

So it has been used. But, you see, so many things have been published since that time. One of the local photographers who was a free-lance person for the Los Angeles Sentinel—Harry Adams—I happened to go to his office to pick up an order of some photographs he had taken at a party or a club meeting or something. And while he went to the back to get my order, I happened to notice he had a large barrel in his front office, and it was filled almost to the top with photographs and they weren't rumpled or anything. And I picked up some of them and saw Martin Luther King, Jr., and lot of people that I recognized in different pictures. When he came back, I said, "What are you going to do with these since they're in a barrel?" And he said, "Oh, I'm dumping them." And I said, "You're dumping them?" I said, "Do you mind if I go through them and select some for my files?" "Oh, help yourself." So it happened they were

tearing down that whole block. The building he was in was going to be torn down. This was a Monday and he had till Friday to get out. I asked him to let me take some of the boxes home at night. I went there every day that week going through. And the first day— See, he was working part of the time in the day going out on assignments, so he thought he would be working on them at night. So he didn't let me take anything, any of them home at night. I could have stayed up, you know, half the night going through them. I think I may have gone through all the boxes by the end of the week. But the other thing, when you go through a lot in hurry, you forget, I mean, if you go back a second time, then you realize that this is important. And one thing that I regret, the very first day, there were a number of street scenes. Sometimes it would be an accident, a corner sign. Sometimes it would show both streets and how the people were dressed, you know, crowd collects when there's an accident. I've had a lot of call for street scenes since, you know, in recent years. I do have some, and I did get some from him, but not nearly as many as would— And then strangely enough, throughout the week, a lot of things would come up again and again that I either had already selected or didn't need a lot of quantity. The few things that I had thrown away the first day that I would like to have seen again never did come up. And I said, "How do you happen to have so many duplicates?" He said, "People would order them and not pick them up." And I bet he didn't even charge them a deposit, because I don't remember him ever charging me a deposit. When you picked them up, you paid for them. Most people now, I think, charge a deposit before. You see, at least it will pay for their paper and the and the things they used to develop.

KELLEY

Yeah.

MATTHEWS

The only thing that I thought about later was that I should have said at the end of the week— He didn't even have time to go through all of them himself because of his work and not being able to stay up all night. He just dumped all of those. And if I'd only thought, I should have said at the end of the week, "Whatever you are dumping, I'll come and get it." Because, see, then I could go through again and then maybe later— Because, see, when people have asked me for for different things, I've gone through and found some things I couldn't remember. See those yellow boxes that you get film in? He had them all stored in those. And some of them he had stamped with the date, but nearly all of them had his name stamped on the back. I took the ones he gave me and sorted them by broad headings—politics, education, and, you know, various things, civil rights, and so forth, and churches. I haven't catalogued all of those and I haven't had copy negatives made for all of those because I don't even know how many I'll ever use. But it's valuable to have them. There had been some

people I didn't realize I had when I went into a certain box on a certain subject. The only thing, in most cases, there are some single portraits, but a lot of times, they're with other people. One or two cases, I've been able to have them cut so that you get just the person you want. Cropped, I think they call it. But the main thing is, if I'd only taken the whole batch— Because if I couldn't use them, somebody else could have used them. Right now, you see, the new museum possibly could have found a lot there they want or could use. Some of the duplicates that I didn't take that I have, you know, one copy of, they could have had the duplicates. So we live and learn. But even so, I still am happy that I just was lucky enough to be in his office and find out he's throwing all of those away, and to have saved them. And then the other thing I found out later, that it's important that in many cases, it's the photographer who has the copyright, you might say, on a picture to have the permission from them. You know, he died very suddenly last August or September. I think it was possibly the end of August or the first of September, because I'd been up in Seattle and I had just returned on the first of September. And the next issue of the Sentinel had a big headline. He was on an assignment. Dropped dead of a heart attack, just like that. So I had written to him, a statement for him to sign, to say that he had given me all of these photographs. I know there are more than a thousand, but I said some hundreds of photographs, and that I had permission to use them in exhibitions or publish them, always giving him credit as the photographer and courtesy of me. I think I may have, you know, even indicated that when either I died or before I died, if I was through with them that I could give them to any museum or library or institution. I got full business there and I'm glad I thought to do that because, you see, a lot of times you put it off and then, you see, he died suddenly like that, there's no chances. Even if he was ill, he might have not been able to sign, you know, and hadn't died yet. And you know, it's amazing to me how distant relatives can come along expecting to collect on certain things. Now one example is the art work at the Golden State [Mutual Life] Insurance Company which I will just mention this and go into that with the art part.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

But this particular artist was one of the two main people I assisted: Beulah Woodard. She died in 1955, I believe it was, and her husband and one nephew survived her. Those were the closest relatives. The husband died a year or two later. I don't remember when the nephew died, but he was a person who had a problem. He was retarded. I'm sure it hasn't been more than a year, and this was, you know, in the eighties [1980's]. Some relatives who called themselves—I don't know whether they were great-nieces or second or third or

fourth cousins or what—came to the Golden State [Mutual Life] Insurance Company and wanted to take this art work of hers. Now, he didn't know them from anybody. They had no papers to show they were related to her. She didn't leave them in a will. So, you see, if she had left them to any and all of [her] relatives, but it happened she didn't leave a will at all. But on her deathbed she told her best friend she wanted them given to a museum so that people could enjoy them. So when they talked to the person at Golden State, he told them that some of them, you know, had come from me. In fact, I don't know whether they— They didn't want to take all of them but they wanted to pick out what they wanted. I don't remember what. I was certainly happy that I had purchased some of them that I hadn't purchased from her while she was living. Now, the one of my nephew there I had her do. It's cast in stone. Right up—

KELLEY

Oh, that one there. I see.

MATTHEWS

I had four copies of that made cast in stone. But some of the other pieces, a man had gone to the house after she died before this friend had a chance to carry them all to her home. Either her husband or the housekeeper he had sold them to this man and I know for a song. He had them on display, in fact, after the husband died very suddenly. So this person and I went over. I don't know why she waited so long to go and collect the things. And then, she said "Where's the big sharecropper?" And the women said, "Oh, it fell over and got broken."

KELLEY

Oh, wow.

MATTHEWS

It was plaster. Made up tales about all these things. So this person was driving down Jefferson Boulevard [Los Angeles], which wasn't far from where she lived and here was a storefront that said "Afro" something, "African" something center. And she looked in there and here are all these pieces of Beulah Woodard's work in the window there. Not in the window but in the place, you know. She could see through the store window. She looked for a phone number under that name, but there's none listed in the phone book. She went by again and again and never could catch anybody there. After a while, all of a sudden, the store was closed. You know, I mean that in terms of moving all the stuff and being out of there. So after she died, we took them; I mean after the husband died, then we took what she had over to the L.A. County Museum of Art. And the man who was head of the department came out to the car to look at them and he said, "It's very fine work," and they would be happy to accept them as a gift, but he said they would be in storage most of the time unless somebody requested them for a special exhibition or something. I told

her we don't want to do that because no sense in having sit in somebody's basement. I didn't learn until they put the new museum on Wilshire Boulevard, [Los Angeles] however, that all big museums have as much as three-quarters of their holdings in storage, at all times practically. So then I thought of the Golden State [Mutual Life] Insurance Company since they had put the murals up and had a bust of the [company] president, the first president, done by a leading black sculptor. They said they would be very happy to take them. It turned out that they not only have them, they had school classes coming to view them. They gave out first very elaborate booklets for every child to take home. And you'd think, giving them to school kids, they might or might not get home with them. They thought the parents could be enlightened about it and so forth. It was wonderful taking them to the place. I'm trying to remember whether I talked with these people and told them that I had purchased them, and also that she had willed them orally to a museum and that we had carried out her last wishes. Of course, I wasn't. I was in Europe at the time looking at the place where she was going to exhibit. It was the other friend who was there when she died. It just shows you how strange things can be in terms of how people will want to come back. That's why I, you know, mentioned about having the signed statement from Harry Adams.

KELLEY

When did you first become interested in arts and supporting—?

MATTHEWS

In arts collecting?

KELLEY

Yeah, collecting and supporting artists.

MATTHEWS

We were on the photographs, and I might just say that the photographs have been in about four or five museums in addition to the May Company, in terms of being on display.

KELLEY

Can you recall some of these museums?

MATTHEWS

Well, I mentioned the [Los Angeles] Children's Museum, the California Museum of Science and Industry two years ago. That was my largest exhibition where there were at least 350.

KELLEY

Right, I saw that one.

MATTHEWS

The [Los Angeles] Space Museum and the Los Angeles County Natural History Museum. I didn't have the photographs, but I had some other material

at the Santa Ana, the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana [California]. I gave a talk on my black history photographs, using slides, at that museum.

KELLEY

Yes, I seem to remember—

MATTHEWS

And then I gave a talk using the slides at the Los Angeles, I mean, the Southern California Historical Society two years ago. Now I've done others, too. I also did it at the California Library Association annual meeting in Pasadena, I think in '81 or '82. So there's, you know, too many for me to even remember all of them.

KELLEY

Okay.

MATTHEWS

And, in terms of my being interested in art, I've never taken a single course in art. When I finished college, I said, "Someday I'd like to go back to college for a year just to browse." Just take any course that appealed to me, not worry about degrees or what it would lead to. And I don't know why, I said one of the courses I would like to take would be art appreciation. To this day, I haven't taken a course in art appreciation, so all I know about art, in terms of my collecting and everything, it's been from a casual reading of art books, some of which I own or borrowed from the library, from conversations with artists or art gallery owners and visits to art galleries; and attending art lectures and antique shows and antique dealers. And then during my travels in Europe and South America and to the Far East, I have viewed all types of art and cathedrals and art galleries and museums and in some cases, purchased a few pieces. So all of mine has been by, some people say by osmosis, but without any, you know, formal training or any concentrated reading in terms of that. But a few people that I respect their judgment and knowledge of art say that I have. They feel I've shown good taste. So that makes me happy. But main thing, I've just chosen things that I would enjoy having. Once in a while, I'd buy it because it was by a particular artist who had a reputation. But for the most part, they're just things I would enjoy having. Now, I've been to galleries and museums and seen something that I admire very much but I wouldn't want it in my home. So I wouldn't purchase it for my home. If I were purchasing it to give to a gallery or a museum, then that would be different. And so it was in the mid-thirties that I became active in promoting the arts locally. And my work was first attracted by this friend, Beulah Woodard, who was one of my good library patrons at the Vernon Branch. I was at the Vernon Branch from '34 to '44. And it was early during my time there. So I had her sculpture on display and would arrange books in connection with it. And there was one piece, a wood carving that I would've loved having for my collection. But one of the heads of a gallery

wanted it for the gallery, and I feel it always, I would always even give up something I had already purchased if a gallery wanted it or a museum because then that enhances the artist's reputation. And, see, I'd want to help them in that way. And as a matter of fact, with, of course, all of the things that I had of Beulah Woodard's were either loaned or given to the Golden State Museum. At least they say don't call it museum, they call it collection. But with Alice Gafford, I have given some of her work to the Long Beach Museum of Art; the Bowers Museum; Santa Ana; the Sojourner Truth Home; the Locke High School I gave a portrait of Abraham Lincoln; and to the Natural History Museum. And so none of these places— Of course now the school might be an exception because they are not specially worrying about quality. But most of the museums will not accept anything as a gift if it doesn't have quality. And so when Beulah Woodard was still living, she wanted to give something to the anthropology department of the Natural History Museums, but she was ashamed to go and present it herself so she got me to present it as a gift from me. And when we talked to the man who was head of the department, he said, "You don't need to be embarrassed by offering a gift, because the museum won't accept it if it isn't up to quality standards." And he said, "Some of the biggest names in the country give their own work to museums." Because, see, the museums don't have enough money to buy everything they might want. Even the big people like to have it in a museum and be happy to present it as a gift. And so, I learned that too. And then I also [saw on] TV one night a man who was a multi-millionaire with a huge art collection was at a gallery that I had attended, you know, I mean I've been there and I bought some small items. And he bought several things and then right on T.V. he says, "What discount are you going to allow me because it's going to be in my collection," thinking they, like the people in a hotel say, "George Washington slept here," they'd say, "Mr. So and So has bought this artist's work for his collection," you see, and then wants the gallery to give him a discount. With all of that money. And then a poor person wouldn't think about asking what discount you're going to give [him/her]. Now I arranged some exhibits I mentioned at the Vernon Branch Library and used books in connection with it. And then eventually there was a Los Angeles Negro Artist Association organized at the prompting of the Twenty-eighth Street branch of the YMCA. And I was on the board of directors of that, and Beulah Woodard was both an artist and a person who helped with the management end of things. In fact, that was the one thing she was very unselfish and did everything she could to help black artists generally, even though she might even neglect her own work to do it; you know, not have time to stay home and finish things. And so this was the first organization which was organized in 1937 to encourage young Negro artists with talent to help develop and to help develop public appreciation for the work of Negro artists. And so,

the first reception they had was at the renowned Stendall Galleries on Wilshire Boulevard [Los Angeles]. And the [Los Angeles Negro Artist] Association presented the exhibit with a very elaborate reception. I was chairman of the reception. And the owners of the Gallery said, after the reception was over—and I guess this was their first experience with a largely black audience, of course there were some white people who came the first day—said it was the most elegant and beautiful reception they had ever had at their gallery, which I thought was quite a compliment. And they had over 2500 people to view the exhibit the first week.

KELLEY

Wow, that's a lot.

MATTHEWS

And Merle Armitage— now Beulah Woodard was responsible for getting Merle Armitage, who was a well-known impresario, to arrange for the jurors and the prizes. And I think she got second prize for her sculpture. But they didn't have a prize for painting and sculpture and so forth. They just had three prizes, I think, because her work was superior to anybody's there. And the one they gave first prize to was a painting. I don't know why. Nearly always in exhibits, they'll give the painting the top prize and the sculpture, you know, the second or the third or whatever, if they have only one group of prizes and not, you know, some for sculpture and some for painting and some for the other categories. And I don't know why sculpture shouldn't rank with oil painting. In fact, I think in many cases if they're a good sculpture it should take much more skill and be more difficult to do. But at any rate, this organization [Los Angeles Negro Artist Association] lasted several years, maybe three or four years. I don't recall what caused it to sort of fall apart. Oh, I should mention while I'm speaking of Beulah Woodard, after she had an exhibit at my library [Vernon Branch Library], I was responsible for getting her to the Central Library for an exhibit because they have a whole area of cases on the first floor. And it attracted so much attention there that it was sent to the— not sent immediately from there, but she was asked to do a one-man show at the L.A. County Museum [of Art]. And she is, to my knowledge, the first black artist ever to have a one-man show there in those days, you know. Oh, and even recent years, they've been fighting to even have them shown or to have them in the collections too, at some of the museums, especially the Art Museum. And at the time the Art Museum was in Exposition Park, but I think her show was in the [Los Angeles County] Natural History Museum because she did these papier maché masks of African tribes. And just the heads but it was so realistic. When I had them at the Vernon Branch Library, the children thought they were decapitated and stuffed like you do animals and put up there. You know, they

were so realistic. And then that show was in all of the metropolitan newspapers, and one of them had several of them with large pictures across the front page.

KELLEY

Wow.

MATTHEWS

And so she got a lot of publicity and then it went through—what is the—? There are two or three national hook-ups. Press— You know, associated press and so forth. It got on that and got in papers across the country. And then the Los Angeles Times had a feature article with her picture on the front page of their Sunday Times section, you know, magazine section is what I'm trying to say. And then she was on T.V. shows in the very early days, when they picked a person of the month or something of the sort, and was on radio. And she also— As a result of that museum show, her things were shown in the schools and they were even trying to get them put in the schools as a regular teaching item. They'd have to change the school state law and so they never did get that accomplished. But she spoke at schools from elementary grade to universities and attracted a lot of attention and had commissions to do several busts. One was of a Jewish philanthropist, a bust of Irving Lipsteitch, who was a noted Jewish philanthropist. And that was arranged by Floyd Covington who at that time was the executor or executive secretary of the Los Angeles Urban League. And then she was in a show, a group show, at UCLA. And just on the strength of the few pieces she had in the group show, she received a commission to do a bust of the man who had been head of the University Religious Conference for, oh, a long time, over twenty years. And she had never met the man and his wife, only had two or three photographs which weren't the best to work from. And the wife would come over and watch her as she progressed with it. And she said, "Oh, he's smiling too much." "Now he's not smiling enough." And she said it to Mrs. Woodard when she said, "Next time I come I'll bring my own shotgun," you know, because she— But when it was finally unveiled by the bishop, an Episcopal bishop, everybody who'd worked with him for years thought it was just a perfect likeness. And for her never to have seen him and only working with some pictures and having the wife say make him this or that or the other—

KELLEY

What was his name now?

MATTHEWS

Now, at the moment, I can't recall the name of that person. I'll perhaps think of it later. But he was, as I said, head of University Religious Conference at UCLA. And then she also did a bust of one of the supervisors. And he was supervisor for many, many years. And I'll have to put on my thinking cap to think of his name. And some group in Hollywood, I think, must've gotten the

money to finance that commission. And I tried my best to track it down because it was given to the [Los Angeles] County some years ago. And even the people of the family didn't know what had happened to it. So it could be, if it was in some particular place or when they were building a new county building, it could've been put down in the basement. Or somebody could've carried it home. You just never know what might happen. John Anson Ford was the name of that supervisor and he was a very liberal person and did a lot of nice things for poor people and for people belonging to minorities. And then she was—I was responsible, because the man who was doing the Wilshire Methodist Church annual Madonna shows—it was on Wilshire Boulevard [Los Angeles]. And they used the parish hall and the church proper. They had an enormous show of all types of art—painting, sculpture and you name it. And they did such a beautiful job of arranging it. And I'm happy the man sent me some of the things that Mrs. Woodard exhibited on different occasions because her piece of sculpture would have a beautiful bouquet behind it or somewhere that set it off. And so she was used not only as a exhibiting artist, but also as a demonstrator and was on the exhibition committee. You know, sometimes they had artists doing demonstrations, and so she did all three. And so all of these things naturally helped increase her stature. So eventually there was a League of Allied Arts organized in the late thirties [1930's] by Dorothy Vena Johnson, who was a schoolteacher. And it was organized to sponsor all forms of the arts in the Los Angeles community. And I was the— She was the first president, in fact, I guess she was president for twenty years and I was vice president. And the first four art exhibitions were sponsored by the League [of Allied Arts] in the Vernon Branch Library. And, actually, they got after me because I was having exhibits and not having them do it and give them credit and then I would write little articles for the newspaper telling people to come and see it. Well, when I finally told them that Mrs. [Alice Taylor] Gafford had enough paintings for the first exhibit, it happened I told them on a Sunday morning at a meeting and I had already— Oh, I had had the president call the executive board to get permission to have the exhibit. And so I had been to Val Verde [California] where she lived, the day before, to pick up the paintings. And that morning at the meeting I asked some of the people come help me hang Sunday afternoon because Monday was the beginning of the Negro History Week and we thought that would be a good time to have it. Guess who showed up? Beulah Woodard, who was her good friend and was the one [who] told me she had enough paintings for an exhibit, and the president [of the League of Allied Arts] were the only ones who helped hang the show.

KELLEY

Oh.

MATTHEWS

We didn't have an opening reception because hanging it like we did on Sunday afternoon and we always like to have those on weekends. So the next Saturday, when we had the reception, I had made the cookies and the punch for the reception. And I did get a little, it wasn't exactly a catalog, but a list of the things she [Alice Taylor Gifford] had on exhibit done by a public stenographer. They were mimeographed. And so everybody had a turn to be a hostess, and most of them were schoolteachers, so they would not be able to come till mid-afternoon. So some of them had an afternoon assignment, some of them evening assignment. Practically none of them showed up for their assignments to be hostess. The exhibit was down in the basement in the auditorium and I couldn't leave the door open. And some people came—after seeing the publicity—from as far away as Pasadena to see it, so I couldn't tell them it's closed. So here I had to sometimes neglect [library] patrons in terms of doing reference—and definitely neglected my paperwork. And with very little help, really it was almost a one-man show, except for the president. She cooperated. And I shouldn't say, "Except." One or two others did too. So the next meeting, I put in a bill for five dollars for the mimeographing. And I didn't put a bill in for my gasoline, going clear to Val Verde twice. I didn't put in a bill for flowers or for the refreshments and all of that. And would you believe, with my doing all of that, on my own, I heard somebody behind me saying, "Do it first, then ask for the money." Five dollars. Now can you imagine with all I did free and then later on when we had another exhibit and I had to go to Hollywood or somewhere to pick up all the things for the artist because he didn't have a car. And at the last minute he called up and here I was getting ready to open the library for the people to come—the afternoon of the Sunday opening. And he had just done a new painting and it was still wet and he didn't have a car, wanted somebody to come pick him up. So, naturally, I couldn't go. I had to call somebody to do it. She put in a bill for her gasoline to pick up one picture and I picked up the whole batch and had taken them back, too. And so it's amazing how some people operate. But to go back to the [League of] Allied Arts, of these first four exhibits that were held in the [Vernon Branch] Library, they were Burr Singer, Alice Taylor Gafford, Malcom Thurburn, and Calvin Baily. Two of them were Negroes, one was Jewish and the other one was of English extraction, but he was living in America at the time. And so we [League of Allied Arts] were being broad-minded in terms of having the various ethnic backgrounds represented. And at the exhibit for Calvin Bailey, I suggested that they get the teachers in the area to send the best work from elementary schools, junior high and senior high schools, and to get some small prizes for them. I collected all the prize money. And Calvin Bailey did a portrait of the girl from high school who got the first prize. And at the next meeting I told them to invite her to come and have everybody bring two dollars

and then we would give her a summer scholarship to Otis Art Institute to take a course, which was done. So the first scholarship was done at my suggestion and also the matter of bringing children into the picture. And so they made a—I mean, the organization [League of Allied Arts] is still in existence and they've made a tremendous contribution to the cultural life of Los Angeles and is still active and doing, you know, good work. But I'm no longer a member. Lots of times, you know, I've worked in something for certain length of time and I have too many things. And I don't like to overweight myself with organizations that I'm not going to be really active in and just say I'm a member. That's the way a lot of people—they just are a member and that's all. And then in 1950 the Eleven Associated Artists was organized and they established an interracial art gallery in downtown Los Angeles in the building where the Mayan Theater is still standing. And now the Belasco Theatre was right next to it. And I don't know whether those were separate buildings or whether it was all the same building, because they had offices as well. And I read recently in the paper that they were going to try to preserve the Belasco Theatre, because someone had talked about tearing it down. Both of them, I think, were turned into Mexican movie houses later on. But during this period, they wanted to— Because white galleries generally didn't take Negro artists or exhibit Negro artists or sponsor them. To set an example, they selected artists for exhibition on the basis of talent, not race. And they did have a small gift gallery, I mean not a gallery but balcony, where the artists would give small items to be sold to help support the gallery because they had to pay rent and utilities. As a matter of fact, if it hadn't been for Beulah Woodard, they wouldn't have had any utilities because the organization [Eleven Associated Artists] didn't have any backing. So she and her husband had to sign for the lights and heat and everything. And she served as director during the two years that it [gallery] was in operation. And there was no place for her to do her work, so she actually was serving without having an opportunity to carry on her regular art work. But It did help people know that artists need help, and it gave them some exposure in the community. And the other artists were William Pajaud, Curtis Tann, William E. Smith, Alice Taylor Gafford, Massod Ali [Wilbert] Warren, William Cobb, Marie Doggett Jones, Artie Parks, Lenora Moore, and Constance McClendon. And these pioneers deserve credit for giving Negro artists and others a little push forward. And, of course, today, the picture's quite different when a number of Negro artists now are represented by the leading art galleries on La Cienega Boulevard [Los Angeles]. Most— In fact, I don't know that they've yet had a black gallery on La Cienega Boulevard.

KELLEY

Yeah, I haven't seen it. I haven't seen it.

MATTHEWS

And then of course some of these artists now are being represented on the East Coast. Now Bill Pajaud had a large show in Boston last year, late in the year. And I was surprised when he told me that that gallery doubled the prices he got here [Los Angeles] for his work and sold 75 percent of the show.

KELLEY

Wow.

MATTHEWS

And then I found out it's a black gallery and he said, "They're great businesspeople and run a really first class gallery." Some of them have been shown on the East Coast, you know, in white galleries as well.

1.14. TAPE NUMBER: VIII, Side Two (February 12, 1986)

MATTHEWS

While planning the new home office building for the Golden State [Mutual Life] Insurance Company at West Adams and Western, the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company decided to give commissions to two Negro artists, Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff, to paint two huge historical murals featuring the history of the Negro in California. Titus Alexander and I were the two research consultants appointed to give guidance to the artists. In addition to conferring with the artists before they traveled throughout the state to visit the historic spots, I furnished them with a copy of my annotated bibliography on the Negro in California from 1781 to 1910 which they used as a basis for their research. Permission was granted to the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company public relations office to quote freely from my bibliography in the brochure, which they published after the murals were installed in the lobby of the institution. On the fortieth anniversary in 1965, the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company dedicated its present Afro-American art collection. In the beginning, it was the two large murals at the end of the lobby and the one bronze bust of , who was the first president and the founder of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. So, after, in '65, they opened with the display of art pieces and approximately one-third of the art pieces on display at that time were from my personal collection. And they appointed me. I was very surprised to head the art committee that was to build this collection up. And the Golden State allowed a certain sum of money each year to be spent for that purpose. And I happened, I guess, to be the main one who wasn't working, and so I haunted the galleries and even visited the artists at their homes to look at their work. In some cases, you know, they would give a special price if you go to their homes. They don't have to pay a gallery fee.

KELLEY

Right.

MATTHEWS

And so they, the committee, met, oh, I don't know, maybe a year or two, and then eventually Bill Pajaud just took over the selection of the new art pieces. Now, today, my personal art collection includes several hundred items of every description. Oh, maybe over a thousand, I don't know. I haven't catalogued it, so I don't even know. And, you see, when you look at the pieces that I have that are not paintings or sculptures, just artifacts that are in— I only have three cases and one case has jade and rose quartz and stone pieces, but some of the others have a mixture of things. And so I have paintings, drawings, original prints, sculpture, porcelain, jade and ivory, and artifacts of all kinds acquired principally in the past fifteen or sixteen years, maybe twenty years, I'd say. And although the collection includes artists of every ethnic background, the principal emphasis is on the work of American Negroes, Africans and Orientals. Some of the leading Negro artists in my collection include Romare Bearden, Charles White, Henry Ossawa Tanner, William Pajaud, Samella Lewis, David Bradford, Curtis Tann, Yvonne Meo, Herman Bailey, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Suzanne Jackson, John Riddle, Melanie Blocker, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, Richard Hunt, John Outterbridge, Dan Concholar, Bernard Wright, Alvin Hollingsworth, John Biggers, I think I've mentioned Bettye Saar, P'lla Mills, and a number of others. And so I just give you a cross section of what I have. And I have helped promote the careers of several artists, but principally Alice Taylor Gafford who is mainly a painter, but she also worked in the graphic arts and did some ceramics, and Beulah Woodard. Those were the two I helped the most. [Woodard] was the outstanding sculptor. And Beulah Woodard started taking painting lessons from Alice Gafford before she died. And Alice Gafford got lessons from her in sculpture. I presented their work in exhibitions, helped sell their work and took care of getting things framed and wrote and secured publicity for them. And I took care of their correspondence and getting their work in exhibits and being accepted by museums. And then there were one or two people I did maybe one project for. Herman Bailey— When he first came back from Africa I got him put in an exhibition and helped him with framing and that sort of thing and took pictures of the works so that they would have copies of some of them. And then I personally made gifts to the Bowers Memorial Museum in Santa Ana, the Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, Howard University gallery, Alain Locke High School, Sojourner Truth Club, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company and others. And so I'm still purchasing items and then I have displayed—not the whole collection, although at one time practically the whole collection was shipped to San Bernardino for a county-wide display of art by— Almost everyone in the community was participating. And I should say, then, of course, it was all my black artists and

African pieces that I sent there. But I have exhibited selected items in the new California Afro-American Museum and at the Urban League National Convention that was here recently. And on various occasions have given selective items for display.

KELLEY

Wow, it's really impressive.

MATTHEWS

But it's a rather interesting hobby, I call it. And my brother [Charles H. Matthews] was always asking me when I was going to stop buying, but it's just like the people who gamble. They keep throwing their money away. And I think at least if I buy I'm helping the artist and I'm also enjoying the work every day, and so it just increases the beauty in my life.

KELLEY

Exactly. I'm curious. We sort of covered your entire life. What are you up to right now at this moment? What kind of activities are you involved in?

MATTHEWS

Well, I'm still serving on two or three boards, but I've indicated that I should— And I am, of course, getting busy getting my research papers in some kind of order and trying to get them filed and then getting indexes made to them, and I hope perhaps get them put on computer because then it'll be easy to know what I have in a hurry—than to even go through a card file. And then I hope this year to get a pictorial history of Los Angeles done. I had planned to call it Black Angelenos—no, not Black Angelenos, Afro-Angelenos.

KELLEY

Oh, okay.

MATTHEWS

Because I don't care, really, for the term "black," but, you know, we get in the habit of using whatever is in vogue. But I'm going to say "Afro-Americans and Afro-Angelenos" for this particular one and then put, colon, "A Pictorial History." And try to emphasize the early period, and I will use as a basis for it a lot of the pictures which were in that exhibit two years ago at the California Museum of Science and Industry. But I'm presently serving on the El Pueblo Park Association board of trustees and their purpose is to help finish restoring the buildings, the historic buildings in that vicinity, and to also make them better known and have people visit them. And I also am serving on the Los Angeles City Historical Society board. And I'm a member of Women on Target, although I'm not officially on the board, which is doing a lot of good work in the community for people in need and to even just improve the community generally. But they're especially interested in the educational institutions and what they're doing for young people and for the people who need help who are too poor to, you know, do the things that are necessary in

daily living. And I was on the Community Health Association board for many years and when Dr. [Ruth] Temple died, who was responsible for organizing—first she called it Disease Prevention Week and then she changed it to Health Week—but when she died, the organization died with her, which is unfortunate. And I'm also a member of the California Afro-American Museum Foundation board of trustees. I joined that recently because they felt that I could help with the library and the books that they either have or maybe should acquire, and partly perhaps with the art, too. And then I should mention that I've had perhaps more—even though I had a few honors earlier—more honors given me in the last, well, let's say seven or eight years, than in all the years that preceded them. The older I get, the more recognition I get. But I still am keeping busy so I guess they recognize that. And during the [Los Angeles City] Bicentennial, I received a resolution from Mayor Bradley which emphasized the work I had done for the two bicentennials [U.S. and Los Angeles City]. And then I was declared Gran Dama the city and county of Los Angeles in 1982, I believe it was, and received very elaborate citations from the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors and the [Los Angeles] City Council. And then I also received an award from the California Historical Society in 1982. And I was the only Southern Californian who received one that year. And so I thought that was rather interesting. And just recently I received a Founder's Award from the Century City chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, of which I am a member—not of that chapter, but I mean I'm a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. And I was one of the founders of Pi chapter, which was the second chapter on the [West] Coast and the first chapter in Los Angeles, which was organized in 1923. And then I was vice president of that chapter. When I moved to Berkeley in 1924 to continue my education there—University of California, Berkeley—I was president of Kappa chapter, which was the first chapter on the Pacific coast but I wasn't there when it was founded. And then I became the second regional director on the West Coast and—oh, they called it Western Regional Director. And I organized the first graduate chapter on the Pacific coast in Los Angeles in 1929. So I have been active. And then I was general chairman of the first two scholarship balls they [Delta Sigma Theta] had in Los Angeles after I finished college and came back to Los Angeles—and was active for a number of years and also served on the National Standards Committee but—I was even nominated for national vice president, but I declined because I didn't want to spend the time at that time for that purpose. Oh, and then I served on the Consumer Advisory Council of the Pacific Telephone Company a few years ago—it was a year's assignment—to help them decide what to do about adding different languages to— They were already having Spanish statewide as a second language, I mean, that is one that people could get information from. And in San Francisco in the Chinatown

area, they had Chinese. But they wondered whether they needed more languages or less, because they found out—in the beginning, they didn't have so many calls—that the people were abusing the Spanish ones. They could speak English but they could call—it wasn't an emergency—and get somebody talking in Spanish. They'd rather talk in Spanish. And it happened they had the person who spoke Spanish in Omaha—either Omaha or Denver, I forget which. So the call had to go there and then they would keep two operators on the line. And so now that they're coming to the 911, they take care of all emergencies. And that was really what they had in mind in the beginning. If the house was burning down and maybe the husband was the only one who spoke English and he's at work, the mother home with the children would be able to get some help right away—or if the baby had to go to the hospital and all of that— But they were, you know, not using it for emergencies. So now that they have an emergency number I don't know what they're doing, because they had some final recommendations about what to do. And some of the people on the committee [Consumer Advisory Council of Pacific Telephone Company]— I was amazed at one man who was a judge suggesting that they use it to increase business by having Japanese and so forth— The Oriental countries— Well, those Japanese who are in business, they have plenty of people to speak English and you don't need to have the phone company go out looking for business in other languages. They can do it without that. And so it's strange how things happen. Let's see what else. Well, I think those are the major things I'm working on now. And then I also received 1985) Woman of the Year from Women on Target in December. And then I have received in recent years citations, beside the Gran Dama and the one from the [Los Angeles] Mayor, various ones from the California Heritage Preservation Commission when I retired from the commission, which was signed by the [California] Secretary of State March Fong Eu. And then I received the first Titus Alexander Historical Award from the [Los Angeles] Department of Water and Power commissions. And there's several— Oh, and then the National Association of Media Women gave me an award in '75, I believe it was, and when I first retired, the Los Angeles Sentinel declared me Woman of the Decade in literature. And so there are a number of early ones from the [Los Angeles] Urban League and various persons. But I'm surprised that a number of these have come along recently, you know, since I've been retired so long—and still recognizing what I am doing. Oh, and the California Afro-American Museum named me one of the— Well, whatever they called it. They selected fourteen people statewide to honor a couple of years ago and had a catalogue and huge pictures and collected some of their memorabilia to show on that occasion. And then I have been noted in at least a dozen volumes—that is, my biography—including Who's Who Among American Women, Dictionary of International Biography, Who's Who on the

Pacific Coast, Who's Who in Colored America, The Living Past Volume II, The Schlessinger Library Black Women Oral History Project, and several others. Oh, one book that's— Let's see, what did she call it? I think she included people who were first in some area. Ora Williams was the name of the editor of it. I don't recall the title right now. There was one other thing I was thinking of mentioning. Oh, some publications. I don't have many, you know, everything except articles published in scholarly periodicals, because I keep postponing the book. But I have assisted in some cases people who are publishing, and they've given me credit in their book for having helped them with their research. So all in all I have managed to keep busy and still have a large agenda to complete before—I always say—before I die. And so I hope that some of the things I've done, you know, will be of use to people who live on after me.

KELLEY

Yes, it's definitely that. Very appreciated interview. And the Oral History Project appreciates, you know, taking the time out to give us your life story. So, thanks a lot.

MATTHEWS

My pleasure.

KELLEY

Okay.

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