A TEI Project

Interview of James Taylor

Contents

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (November 18, 2008)

Stevenson

> Good morning. I'm conducting an interview with Dr. James Taylor on Tuesday, November 18 [2008]. First, could you tell me where you were born, something about your parents and grandparents.

Taylor

> I was born in Los Angeles, California, January 28, 1927. My father came from New Orleans when he was six years old, at the year 1900. My mother was born in Atlanta, Georgia, came to Los Angeles when she was, I think, five years old. That would have been about 1910. At the time of my birth, the family was residing on what was then called the Westside of Los Angeles. We were located maybe two miles west of the University of Southern California campus. Went to elementary school, junior high school, senior high school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. My father was at the time of my birth a truck driver. Later he became a mailman, letter carrier. I had an older brother and an older sister. We lived in a community that was very multi-racial. I enjoyed a pleasant childhood, and what's the next question?

Stevenson

> Okay. Maybe you could tell me about your mother's occupation.

Taylor

My mother was a homemaker. I always like to use that term, because my wife used to say, "Well, if she was a wife, that really doesn't explain what she was really about." My mother was a homemaker. She was also very interested in the community, interested in the schools. One of her great civic contributions was that she always ran the polling place in our neighborhood, and in those days everything was counted by hand. You used a pencil and you accumulated the numbers. I guess that's about the best I can say.

Taylor

Oh, no, that's right. She started the first--I always get confused on what terms I should use. I think when I grew up I was colored, and then I became Negro, then I became Afro American, then I got back to Negro, and I think now I'm African American. Okay. She started the first African American Girl Scouts group west of the Mississippi, or something like that, but a very unusual kind of situation. And it was an interesting experience for her, because at that time--this would be the early 1930s, middle thirties, about '35, the African American population, which at that time I'm pretty sure was Negro--there was an Eastside group and a Westside group, and you were known at that time as, did you live on the Eastside or did you live on the Westside. The Girl Scout experience was a kind of unique one, and probably among her Girl Scouts she included the young women of most every, quote, "prominent" African American family at the time, and they were a lovely group, they really were. Okay, that's about my mother.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about your grandparents?

Taylor

On my father's side, my grandfather was an American Indian, a Choctaw, born in Lafayette, Alabama. My grandmother was African American. I'll use that term. Is that all right? Want me to use Negro? Doesn't matter, doesn't matter to me.

Stevenson

That's fine, whatever you choose.

Taylor

I had no anxiety about any of the terms. She was born in Missouri, married my grandfather when they were living in New Orleans. My grandmother and grandfather were separated, so that when my grandmother brought my father, his twin brother, and two little brothers to Los Angeles, they came on a flatcar, which was always an interesting part of their story, on a flatcar that had benches on it. Of course, she was the provider. I didn't see my grandfather probably until after she had died, so I had no recollection of him. She maintained the family and was a very industrious woman and apparently a very bright and capable woman.

Taylor

My grandfather--the reason my grandmother and my grandfather separated as I understand it, was my grandfather had a problem with alcohol, as some Indians, I guess, did. And as I say, I never met my grandfather until the early thirties.

Stevenson

Could you tell me about your recollections of your particular neighborhood in terms of your playmates, what you did in your recreational time, that sort of thing?

Taylor

We lived directly across the street from junior high school, Foshay Junior High [School]. Our neighborhood was very multi-ethnic, predominantly minority, Japanese, a few Mexican Americans, African Americans, and a few whites. I looked recently at my junior high school graduation picture, and it was predominantly white, Anglo, but you could see the scattering of African American, scattering of Asian, and if you look carefully you find one or two Mexican Americans. My major playmates were Japanese. They lived on my street. They lived around the corner from my street. I remember a very pleasant childhood. What else?

Stevenson

So let me ask you this. You mentioned that most of your playmates were Japanese. During what years was that? Would this have been before World War II?

Taylor

Yes. This would have been the period of 1930 to 1941.

Stevenson

I see. So were any of your playmates and their families interned?

Taylor

Yes, my best friend.

Stevenson

Could you tell me something about that, or what your understanding was of it?

Taylor

Probably my closest playmate was a young man, a boy named Jerry Shigaki, and Jerry Shigaki had several brothers and a sister, one sister in that family. We just hung around together. Probably one of our most pleasant memories was our frequent trip in the summer to Exposition Park, where there was a beautiful museum. It was nice. I remember, at the end of our street, which was then called Exposition Boulevard, still called Exposition Boulevard, there ran a railroad track, and the railroad track went right by Exposition Park, which was, of course, across the railroad tracks from University of Southern California. Pleasant memories of our walking along the railroad tracks, going to the Museum of Natural History [of Los Angeles County]. One of the things we enjoyed most--because we were there so frequently, the people got to know us and were very kind to let us wander around--was there was a place in the very bottom portion of the museum where you could see the--what do you call them when you put a card in and it had this kind of thing, and you--it's got a name.

Stevenson

Oh, it has a name.

Taylor

Yes, okay. But we always enjoyed going there. Another pleasant memory was every now and then when we got a penny, and that wasn't too often, we would feel generous. We'd put the penny on the railroad track and let the freight train roll over it. Then you'd get a nice flat penny. Living across the street from the junior high school was always nice, because we always had a place to play. We either played on the playground, or on the front of the junior high school at that time were two beautiful lawns, and we'd play there. And they never kicked us off. It was always nice, because we played after school.

Taylor

The Japanese family was interned, I recall, in what was it, January, February, 1942, maybe March, somewhere around there. They went to Manzanar Relocation Camp in central California. Jerry, my best friend, eventually ended up enlisting in the Army and was in the 442nd Infantry Division that fought in Italy. One interesting experience. Jerry came to Los Angeles on a furlough and stayed with me. It was on a Friday night, and I was in high school at the time. He was of high school age, but because he was a year older than I, why, he had enlisted in the Army. We went to a neighborhood party that a Mrs. Pettigrew, that was her name, yes--she was interested in teenagers and all that sort of thing, throwing a party, and her husband was in the Navy. Jerry and I went to the door to go in, and she looked at Jerry and she said he couldn't come in. So I said, "Okay, good night, Mrs. Pettigrew," and we walked away.

Taylor

In senior high school, when I began that first year as a tenth grader, there were some Japanese students, but even before that semester ended they were all transported elsewhere. Okay?

Stevenson

At the time, did you have an understanding of why they were being interned? I mean, at the time?

Taylor

At the time I realized that this was something related to security and the war. At the time, I didn't really understand the depth of what this meant in terms of our national posture, in terms of what this meant intimately in terms of reshaping the lives of these people that were being moved. It was just kind of a sad departure, and it happened so quick. I think they were given two weeks notice or something less than that.

Stevenson

Did any of the families in the neighborhood take care of their homes, or anything of that nature?

Taylor

Jerry's family was very poor. They lived in a house just a block away from us. They had no windows. They had no possessions. My father owned a home a few blocks away that actually had been his childhood home, and it was rented by Japanese, and they gave my father numerous boxes which he kept. Only one of the families--it was such a big house that I think at least two or maybe three families lived in it, and they were gardeners. Only one of the families after the war came back and claimed the boxes. My father gave them all to them. But he never maintained somebody else's house or anything like that. The families that lived in that area, I'm not quite sure how many of them--the Japanese families--I'm not sure how many of them owned their homes.

Stevenson

Okay. If you could tell me something about the elementary school you attended, what your experience was like, were there any favorite teachers, or shall I say any memorable teachers, whether that was good or bad?

Taylor

I attended 36th Street Elementary School. It still exists. My kindergarten teacher was Miss Kuss, and I don't know why I remember, except she was tall. My fourth grade teacher was Miss Detrick, and I remember her because when she taught she walked around the class, and I can remember numerous times being slapped on the hand. She never slapped you across the face. She'd take that ruler and whack. Sixth grade teacher was Mrs. Lawson, don't remember why I remember her. They were all Anglo, white. Again, the school was multi-

ethnic, predominantly Caucasian. Again, my best friends there were Japanese. Then the other best friend was George Stevens. He was Negro. We walked to school several blocks, always a nice walk, not too many cars then.

Taylor

Junior high was Foshay Junior High. We lived across the street from the front door, which had a big disadvantage, because one of my--there was no parking lot for teachers, because there weren't that many cars. But on of the teachers, an English teacher, Mrs. Brandt, parked her car right in front of my home, and so I knew that if I ever did anything wrong it was just a step for her to call out. Fortunately, I didn't do too much wrong, because I never got in that kind of trouble. Foshay was then grades seven, eight, and nine. My closest student friend there was a Japanese young man, Iji Nagana. Oh, golly. Junior high was a pleasant experience. Nicest thing about living across the street from school, I was never late. That was about it.

Stevenson

Okay. Let me ask you something about the curriculum you were taught. I know you said Foshay was mostly white as well?

Taylor

Yes.

Stevenson

But you did have Japanese, Mexicans, African Americans. Especially in terms of the history, was there any type of curriculum or teaching about the contributions of the various minority groups?

Taylor

Absolutely none. [laughs] No, it was never mentioned.

Stevenson

Okay. I'd like to ask you, how young were you when you were aware of the concept of race?

Taylor

Six or seven, somewhere around there.

Stevenson

Was it a particular incident or particular conversation, or just when you became aware of race?

Taylor

One of the things that I remember quite vividly about that time--ours was not a wealthy family, but in terms of comparison at the time, we were never hungry. We never lacked for any essentials. But as a family in that status, the idea of eating out was almost unheard of. But we did maybe once or twice a year eat out, most of the time at establishments owned by African Americans. But once in a while, maybe twice that I can remember, we ate at a restaurant downtown. Now, downtown there were very few restaurants that would serve, but one of the restaurants that did was Clifton's, and I remember it because it had the waterfall in it.

Stevenson

Right. Exactly.

Taylor

Interesting side note. The son of Mr. Clifton who owned that restaurant chain lives two doors down.

Stevenson

Oh, interesting.

Taylor

Yes, he's Don Clifton, just a wonderful family, wonderful family. So that, I think vividly impressed upon me the fact that there were some differences here. Then, of course, as things progressed, we became more vividly aware that even at that time, the early thirties in Los Angeles, there were certain places you'd go, certain places you didn't go. In terms of movies and that sort of thing, fortunately we had two movie theaters in our neighborhood, and they, of course, accepted all parties.

Stevenson

And what were the names of those?

Taylor

One theater was called Western Avenue, and that was on Western Avenue. The other was called the Deluxe, and that was on Jefferson, and I liked that one best, because on Saturday, if I was fortunate enough to have--yes, it was a dime, it wasn't fifteen cents, it was a dime--you'd go to the Saturday afternoon program, and it began when you walked in and they handed you a candy bar. Then you saw two shorts, maybe cartoons, and then you saw a double feature. Yes, you saw two movies. And then when you walked out, they handed you a little ice cream.

Stevenson

Nice.

Taylor

I mean, it was really the Saturday afternoon thing.

Stevenson

Yes, that was nice.

Taylor

You'd go there about one o'clock and you'd get back home about five or something like that.

Stevenson

And so those were in the neighborhood.

Taylor

Well, they were within walking distance, that sort of thing, yes. So that was always a pleasant experience, and usually when we went to the theater, why, it would be Jerry Shigaki, Nathan Osajima, who else, oh, yes, Marco Peterson probably. Those are the names I can recall.

Stevenson

You mentioned about eating out and about some African American restaurants. Where would you go in those days for good African American food?

Taylor

Usually the Eastside. Even in those days, on the Westside there weren't many places. There was a place on Vernon [Avenue]. Oh, gee, can't recall, but the Eastside.

Stevenson

Okay. Well, since we're talking about recreation and that sort of thing, going out, could you tell me something about Central Avenue, which was such a--not just a Mecca for entertainment, but the businesses and that sort of thing. Could you tell me something about that?

Taylor

I was a Westside boy, so I didn't know too much about the Eastside. I knew that Central Avenue was a center place for much of not only Negro social life, but Negro business life. Gee, I just wasn't that involved with the Eastside.

Stevenson

Okay. You mention living on the Westside, and I know that in several of my interviews they've talked about the restrictive housing covenants. Did your family have any trouble buying in the area where you were?

Taylor

I don't recall that there was any problem. It seemed to me that my father purchased that home from someone he knew, a Caucasian, but I don't recall that they had any kind of a problem. On that street, I don't know whether my dad and mother were the first family there, but it was interesting. On our street, at one corner a Japanese family, next corner an African American family, next corner a vacant lot, the next corner an African American family, the next corner my dad and our family, and the next corner a Caucasian family, the next corner a Caucasian family, and the house on the end--now, this would be about 1935 or so--a Caucasian family, and then came the railroad tracks.

Stevenson

That's interesting, yes, because I, like I said, have had various interviewees discuss some personal stories of not being able to live past Central, but also as

you mentioned, there were some families that did manage to live on the Westside.

Taylor

Yes. The problems of housing in terms of purchase that I remember were west of Western Avenue and up around Adams Boulevard. Below Adams Boulevard I was not aware at that time of people having problems.

Stevenson

Could you tell me what role religion played in your upbringing?

Taylor

I remember going to Sunday school at 35th Street. What was it, Trinity Church Sunday school. My mother was not religiously oriented. My father, I think, was a very sincere Christian, but didn't go to church every Sunday. My early exposure to religion was Sunday school. I never joined a church until I was many years old. I remember that for a period of time my older brother and I, who at that time was driving, so this puts me in high school or in junior high, we went to a Christian Science church that was on the Eastside, and I'm not sure how we got there or why, but that was short-lived. I did not really become closely involved in any church until I was in high school, and then I became involved with a church called Lincoln Memorial Congregational Church, and that was because there was a girl there that I was interested in. She became my wife.

Stevenson

I see. Okay. Could you tell me what emphasis was placed on education in your home?

Taylor

A great deal. My father always insisted that school was a priority and that we were not to miss school in any way, shape, or form. Living across the street from the junior high school, of course, was very convenient, because he would on occasion talk with teachers. The teachers parked along the street, Harvard Boulevard, and so he got to know them. Even beyond that, a new principal came to Foshay, Gertrude Smith. It must have been about 1936, '37, somewhere in there. My dad was a very outgoing person and always greeted

people, and people knew him. And Dr. Smith, Gertrude Smith, who was a very wise lady, became acquainted with my dad. My dad was interested in school, and somewhere I've got a letter she wrote once many, many years later. When I became a principal, she wrote me a letter saying how much she appreciated my mother and father. She gave my dad a key to the school.

Stevenson

Interesting. That would have been unusual.

Taylor

There was no security patrol or anything like that for schools in those days, and she gave him a key to the school in case anything was needed, and on occasion he would open up the school for the police or fire department or something like that. But his proximity to the school I don't think was even the motivating factor why he made it very clear to the three of us that school was the thing for us to do.

Stevenson

Okay. Let's move to your high school experience. Tell me about your high school, memorable teachers. I'd also be interested to know what preparation they had for students that were contemplating college.

Taylor

I went to Manual Arts High School. It was at that time very multi-ethnic, predominantly Caucasian. Probably the single teacher that impacted upon me, and it was a dramatic impact, was a lady named Helen Miller Bailey, Dr. Helen Miller Bailey. She was a termite. Now, a termite was the name given to people who were subjects in a study by a man named Dr. Turman at Stanford University. He was studying genius, and she was one of his termites, and she was bright, very capable. At that time the Manual Arts curriculum included a course that they labeled--I think they called it social living. You had this social living teacher for three periods every day, and the social living teacher was to teach English, history, and biology.

Taylor

Dr. Bailey was a history major. We got lots of history, very little English, almost no biology. But she was a very, very fine person and probably was one of the

major reasons I went to college. I recall that during the period--maybe it was as early as the tenth grade--she asked me what I wanted to do, and I kind of, I guess, shrugged my shoulders and said, "I'm not sure." She looked at me and said, "You're going to go to college," and indeed I did. Manual Arts, the experience at Manual Arts was a pleasant one. Certainly at that point in time I became vividly aware of the fact that there was a school life, going to class, participating in athletics, participating in, in a sense, the student-government activities at Manual Arts, but the other element called social life, that was clearly different, distinct. There was no social life between my white friends on the basketball team or the other members of the study body cabinet and me. It just didn't exist. And it didn't worry me. I didn't feel any shortcoming because of the lack of that.

Taylor

The principal of the high school was a man named Floyd Hohn, Dr. Hohn. He, I guess, was the picture of the stereotype old high school principal, very straight and always spoke very deliberately. I doubt that any teacher that ever went through Manual Arts High School ever called him Floyd. He was always Dr. Hohn, there was no question of that. And I had an interesting later encounter with Dr. Hohn which maybe we can talk about sometime. In fact, I actually spoke at his funeral. The teachers there were always fair. I mean, I never encountered any--well, one experience that really upset me.

Taylor

Just an aside. The director of athletics, one of the coaches at Manual Arts, was a man named Sid Foster. Sid Foster had been around for a long time and was highly, I'm not going to say respected, but regarded. He was considered a powerful person in high school athletics at the time in Manual Arts High School. Now, remember, at that time there were, what, I don't know, fifteen or sixteen high schools, so it wasn't big like now. And one day I was at that time the boys' vice president of Manual Arts High School in the student-body cabinet structure, and Sid Foster, Mr. Foster, asked me into his office and said, "I want to talk with you, Jim." "That's fine, Mr. Foster." And to this day I don't know what it was he wanted me to talk about. But about that moment the phone rang, and I remember because it was the old-fashioned phone, those straight up and hook things? And he picked it up and he started talking with

the central office athletic department about scheduling games. Something, something, and then suddenly he said rather angrily, "But you're going to schedule us with those niggers at Jordan High School." And I kind of did a double take, and then he went on talking, and I paused for a moment and then I just walked out.

Taylor

And I remember this. I remember I walked over to--it was the social studies building or whatever they called it, and I went to Dr. Bailey's room, and she said, "Something's bothering you." And I explained to her what had just happened, and she said, "Jimmy, you're going to encounter that, and you've got to be able to handle it." That's about all she said. Well, surely enough, that was in the morning. By the afternoon I got a summons to go see Mr. Foster, which, of course, I go in to see Mr. Foster. He wanted to apologize for what he had said, and then he said the thing that really irritated me, and I was grateful that I was irritated, because of something that I learned later. He said, "I just never considered you a Negro." I don't remember what I said, except that I left. It became important to me, because later on--my wife's first cousin was Dr. Ralph [Johnson] Bunche, and when he was at Jefferson High School doing all of his outstanding things, one day, at the time of his graduation, I think, his grandmother, who was Lucy Taylor Johnson, a very dynamic woman, was at the graduation exercise, and Ralph at that time was valedictorian and all those wonderful things that Ralph Bunche was.

Taylor

And the principal, in talking with Mrs. Lucy Taylor Johnson, said to her, "You know, we just never considered Ralph a Negro." And she apparently, according to the way Ralph tells the story, she just tore him up the wall and down the wall.

Stevenson

Wow.

Taylor

And so I said, "Oh, gosh, that's good. She reacted that way, but she was much better at it than I was." Now, that's an aside. Okay. But we're still back at

Manual Arts High School. Again, it was a good experience. I found teachers supportive. I don't know what else to tell you about Manual Arts.

Stevenson

Okay. So how did they prepare you for college? Now, of course, it's very detailed in terms of helping students fill out applications and counseling. Did you experience any of that--

Taylor

Not that part. They were careful that I took all the required courses to meet the entrance requirements at UCLA, but in terms of specific counseling for preparation to college, no. Did they have--yes, they must have had counselors at Manual Arts at that time. I just don't remember ever meeting one.

Stevenson

Okay. So you did apply to UCLA. Could you tell me what influenced that decision? I know that Dr. Bunche went to UCLA in I guess it was the early mid-twenties. What were the influences on your decision to apply?

Taylor

Oh, they were very simple. It was the only place I could go. I didn't have the money to go to USC, though it was within walking distance. I wanted to go to a four-year college, and at that point in time for Negroes graduating from high school, if you wanted to go to a four-year college or university, almost without exception--I'm sure there were some Negro families that could afford and did send their kids to other colleges, black colleges, for example. But if you wanted to go to college and you were in Los Angeles and you had the grades, then the logical place to go was UCLA.

Stevenson

Interesting. So did you already know students who were at UCLA at the time that you applied or were ready to graduate?

Taylor

I knew a couple of students who were at UCLA, and at the time I applied there were several of us who applied that same year, including my wife. Jackie Robinson's wife, Rachel Isum, who was one of my mother's Girl Scouts, was

she at UCLA or did she just finish? No, she would be at UCLA at that time, I think. Melonee Temple [Blocker] was at UCLA, Josephine Burch. I remember these names, because there my mother's Girl Scouts as we called them. Jo Burch would have been there at that time, maybe Josephine Spearman. But it's interesting. I don't think I knew any men who were at UCLA at that time.

Stevenson

That's interesting you should make that comment, because one of my other interviews was with a woman that was at UCLA. She made that comment, that there were a lot of us women there in those years, but she said she didn't remember a lot of African American men. Of course, she partly attributed that to World War II.

Taylor

Absolutely. My brother probably would have gone to UCLA, but he was off fighting the war.

Stevenson

Okay. I know that a lot of families now, it's sort of a foregone conclusion that they send their kids south to the historically black colleges. Now, when you were getting ready to graduate from high school, there were probably families that sent their kids if they were able to the historically black--

Taylor

The only historically black college I think I was even aware of at that time was Howard [University]. But of any others--yes, I think at that time, yes, Howard was the black college at that time that I was aware of.

Stevenson

Okay. So you're graduated from Manual Arts now and you were accepted at UCLA. Tell me about your experience as a freshman. I know from another interview that there was sort of an informal network of African American students. Tell me something about that.

Taylor

Okay. Well, the first thing I could tell you is that when you were enrolling at UCLA at that time, you took an exam called Subject A, which was an English

exam. One of my best friends at that time was a Mexican American named Nash Candelaria, and Nash and I took the exam together, and then a day or two later, because it was very quickly, you went to another station and they told you whether you passed the exam or didn't pass the exam, because if you didn't pass the exam, you had to take a class called Subject A, and if you did pass the exam you could take something else. So we walked up to the table together, and it was a student, I'm sure, a graduate senior, and looked at us and she said, "One of you failed," because that was the pattern, that half of you failed. I looked at Nash and he looked at me, and I said, "English." And I thought about Dr. Bailey, who loved to teach history, so Nash got his card, he passed. I got mine and I failed, so I took Subject A.

Taylor

In terms of the black students, African American students there at the time, it was very close. There was a place called the Student Union, still I guess called the Student Union, but not nearly what it is now. It was kind of when you went in you went down some stairs. That's where you bought Cokes and light food and that sort of thing, and almost all of the African American students would gather around two tables. At one time I think my wife and I sat down trying to remember, and I think that this would be June 1944. Why did we come up with the number thirteen? I don't know, mostly women. Let's see. Clayton Moore, myself, I'm trying to think who the other man was. Oh, David Carlisle was there for a very brief period. He then went off to West Point. I'm embarrassed that I can't remember. But that was it, maybe two or three tables at most. All of us were just focused on meeting the academic requirements.

Taylor

You know, people sometimes talk about the great college days and how much fun we had. Well, we didn't do that. I mean, we went to school. There was no housing on campus for not many students at all, and certainly no African American students. So for us, at least for me, college was getting that bus early in the morning on Western Avenue, traveling as far as Pico, get the P Car to the end of the line, and at the end of the line get the bus that took us to Westwood, and then reverse it and come back home.

Stevenson

Quite a trek back and forth.

Taylor

It was, it was. But you know, it didn't seem like a hardship. I think of my granddaughters. If they have to ride a bus, that's a hardship. And I don't mean to disparage them. They're lovely girls, they are, truly. But again, UCLA to me was just hit the books and do the things you've got to do. I found a very comfortable spot in the library and studied as much as I could there, then went home and studied some more.

Stevenson

Could you tell me about your interactions with Anglo students, and just students in general?

Taylor

Yes. I went to UCLA in 1944, June. I was there until July of 1945 and then I got drafted. I think during that first year, UCLA at that time was on a three-semesters-a-year system. They just went one semester, another semester, another semester. So actually though I was there one year, I got in three semesters. In terms of interaction with white students, virtually none, except I had a good friend in the math department who was also a student as I was, Merv Muller, and our interaction was totally academic. We'd study together in the library. My friend Nash Candelaria was there at that time, and he was a chemistry major. I was a math major, but we would study together. My focus at UCLA was just study. I mean, that's all you did. Social life--athletics weren't that great then, because all the good guys were off fighting the war. But I do recall there was an occasional football game.

Taylor

And, of course, at that time my tuition at UCLA was twenty-seven dollars, and that included the student activities card, which got you in for free to everything.

Stevenson

Wow. That was a semester, twenty-seven?

Taylor

A semester.

Stevenson

Wow.

Taylor

Yes, twenty-seven dollars for the semester.

Stevenson

Wow. Wow. Interesting. It's like I think maybe 7,000 now or something. Very interesting.

Taylor

Something like that, yes. That was about it. Now, I went off to the war in August 1945. I re-enrolled at UCLA after being discharged from the Army in December 1946. I re-enrolled at UCLA in January, in time for the third semester of that academic year. They were still on three semesters a year. Because of that, even though I had lost more than a year, I was still able to graduate in 1949, because we continued to go three semesters a year. When I came back, a little bit different kind of situation in terms of social interaction. A lot of the people coming back then were veterans. The G.I. Bill was my gateway. They paid for everything. Coming out of the Army, I think, had it not been for the G.I. Bill, I'm not sure I would have been in a position to return to UCLA, although I had every intention. By then I loved going to college, even if it was just study, study, study.

Taylor

But I think the atmosphere there changed. I did make additional Caucasian friends. By that time there were more African American students, more males, Ernest Lightner, Clayton Moore. By the way, Ernie Lightner might be someone you'd like to meet. He was an elementary school principal about the time of your dad. I'll bet your dad knows him. I'll bet your dad knows him, yes, Ernest Lightner.

Stevenson

Okay, I'll ask him.

Taylor

And he's still around. I'm not sure how it occurred, but there was a Caucasian student named Jim Thayer. I know how it occurred. He was having trouble with math, and I tutored him. I mean, he found our spot in the library and he'd come over. Jim Thayer became a big man on campus, and through him I was invited to become--what was the name of the men's group [Gold Key]? Oh, come on. You know, in high school they have the knights and the ladies, that kind of thing.

Stevenson

Right, right.

Taylor

And we did all that at Manual Arts High School. But he invited me to participate, and I think I was the first African American to belong.

Stevenson

Maybe I can get that from [unclear].

Taylor

Oh, come on. What was the name of the group [Gold Key]? Anyway, Sherrill Luke later became a part of that group. But here even still now, okay. There was that kind of interaction, but in terms of like interracial dating or anything like that? No, that didn't exist. But now there would be a social event and I would be invited to attend. What else about UCLA? It was wonderful. My wife--we were engaged at the time, pleasant memory but an aside, I'm sure. If you know UCLA, there's the Administration Building and then there's that long walk that you walk across? Of course you know UCLA, you're there every day. And there's the flagpole? Okay, that long walk used to be a bridge.

Stevenson

Yes, yes.

Taylor

Okay. She would bring the lunch and we would go down in the gully where there were some benches and things, and we'd have lunch.

Stevenson

Right. That's subject was covered on a Huell Howser some years ago.

Taylor

Is that right? Oh, it was great. I loved UCLA in those days. I go out there now and I'm just overwhelmed. But again, if people ask me what are my most vivid memories of UCLA, it was I just worked my tail off. I was grateful that the math department was nice. They graduated me with honors and gave me a teaching-assistant job in my first graduate semester there. Yes. I took the bachelor's degree in math at UCLA. I knew I wanted to teach, and that's an interesting kind of aside, because I think about the time I was preparing to leave Manual Arts and decided I was going to go to UCLA, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach. So in addition to majoring in math, I did the necessary education courses, and I graduated in January of '49. I did the required practice teaching and all that kind of stuff, and that took a year, so that in January of 1950, having completed a year of graduate work in mathematics and doing the teaching preparation, I went into teaching.

Stevenson

Okay. Let's backtrack just a little bit. Could you tell me about your interactions with faculty members with whom you took courses at UCLA?

Taylor

Yes. Probably my best advocate in the math department was a man named Clifford Bell. In my second semester at UCLA I took an analytic geometry course from him, and I got an A. I never had another course from him, but I was always kind of grateful that even when I came back from the Army, and that was more than a year later, he would see me and he'd say, "Hi, Mr. Taylor." And that just [whistles]. I had very little interaction with other math department teachers. Some of them I remember to be very congenial. Some of them I remember to be very hard-nosed, but sometimes from the hard-nosed ones you did a little better, because you had to struggle a little harder. Not that I advocate hard-nosed teachers, because I don't believe in it.

Taylor

It was Dr. Bell who recommended me to be a teaching assistant in math, and just an aside. I remember [laughs], well, I guess I must have been--our classes then met three days a week, and it must have been in the second or third week of the class that I was teaching, what did they call it, business algebra at that time, something like that, and Dr. Bell came into my classroom. You know, that's the guy who supervised teaching assistants. That was his job. And I remember that I was kind of taken back. One of the students asked a question, and I had one of those blank moments, and so I said--I knew who the best student in the class was by then, and so I said, "Mr. Jones, how would you attack this problem?" And he started with maybe one sentence or two, and then it came to me. "I know the solution." So I said, "That's right, Mr. Jones," and then I go ahead and finish the problem. Well, later I saw Dr. Bell and he said, "Mr. Taylor, excellent. You brought that student involved in the teaching," and I wanted to say to him, "That student was saving my life." But yes, Dr. Bell would be one of the teachers I remember, and I remember some others, but not nearly in as positive a way.

Stevenson

Okay. Before we move on, could you tell me about your brief stint in the military, what unit you were in, what were your impressions of your service?

Taylor

People always ask me what did I do in the military, and I tell them I fought the battle of the Mississippi River, I fought the battle of North Carolina, and I fought the battle of South Carolina. I never went overseas, which was one of the big disappointments. I was sent to Aniston, Alabama, Fort McClelland, for basic training. It was infantry basic training and it was sixteen weeks, and at the end of that sixteen weeks we knew we were getting our orders to ship out. We lined up one morning and they started reading the names. "Here, you go here, you go here." It was a company, three platoons, I guess thirty guys, something like that. My name wasn't called, so I go up to the Master Sergeant Davenport and I say, "You didn't call my name." And he was a hard-nose. He was a hard-nosed S.O.B. [laughs] And he says, "You're staying here." I thought, oh, no, don't do that to me. The war was over.

Taylor

See, I went in in August of 1945. The war was over within a month, so of course they're continuing the basic training, because they were saying, "Well, you've got a lot of things that are going to have to be done here, there, and everywhere." But I wanted to go overseas, because the shooting was all over and I wanted that travel experience. "Nope, you're staying here." Well, they had found out, because of numerous times in that basic training the company clerk would get behind, and one day they asked if anybody knew how to type and I foolishly raised my hand. And I'd go in after hours and I'd help them with some stuff. So after I finished my basic training, I became the company clerk. I was the company clerk for about three or four months and then became a corporal, and about a week after that I became the supply sergeant. That was one of the better jobs in the military, because the guys wanted a special pair of boots or something like that, and it worked out real nice, because, well, actually when I became company clerk I would go to breakfast or to the meals for mess, and the staff sergeant who was the chef, he said, "Oh, you don't eat with the rest of the men. You come in afterwards and we fix your meals." It was kind of nice at that point in time.

Taylor

So anyway, that was Fort McClelland, Alabama. I was then transferred, because now they were consolidating units, and they were eliminating this whole unit of infantry basic training, and I was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Oh, I'm still back at Fort McClelland. After I became supply sergeant, one day I was called to the colonel's office and he said, "You're going to become the battalion information and education specialist." I didn't have the slightest idea what that meant. Well, it meant two things, that if there were guys in the military, and there were very few of them at that time, who were taking correspondence courses through the very excellent program that the Army had at that time--I took one with a very nice lady math teacher at the University of Wisconsin. She used to, whenever I'd send a paper in, she'd write back after correcting the paper, "You do your work so neatly," and I always attributed that to a drafting class I had in high school. I'm really flashing back and forth.

Taylor

But anyway, so I became the information and education specialist for the battalion. Well, what did that guy do? In addition to helping people sign up for correspondence courses, they were still doing some training. They had a series of indoctrination films called "Why We Fight." They would bring the new trainees into the auditorium there, which would seat maybe two or three hundred guys at a time, and they would show these films. Well, I introduced the films, and then afterwards it was my job to tell them what they saw, a teaching practice I never forgot. First of all, you tell the students what they're going to see. Then they see it, and then you tell them what they saw. When you teach school, you do the same thing. You tell the student what they're going to learn, you teach it, and then you tell them what they learned, hopefully. Well, I did that, and then we got transferred to Fort Bragg. Now I'm nearing the end of my military career, because we were at Fort Bragg for two months and I don't remember doing a thing.

Taylor

Then they transferred us--now, the us was different guys going different places. They transferred me to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and I was in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for six weeks, and again just did nothing. Then I got discharged, and that was December seventeenth, 1946.

Stevenson

Let me ask you this. I know at some point President Truman desegregated the armed forces.

Taylor

Long after I left it.

Stevenson

Ah, so it was segregated while you were--

Taylor

Oh, yes, very much so. One of the big disappointments--well, I can't say that, because I understood the facts of life. When I was at Fort McClelland, my sister was married to a fine young fellow who was at Tuskegee, training to be an Air Force pilot, and I wanted to visit, go from Aniston, Alabama, where Fort McClelland was located, to Tuskegee, Alabama, where she was, and I

remember, I don't know, at least three weekends when I had the time to do it. I would go to the bus station, and in those days the buses had a section toward the back for Negroes. I think we were called Negroes then. I always get confused, but it never worries me. And I can remember waiting until all the white passengers were on. And the problem was that if the white passengers exceeded their section, then they just didn't have a section for Negroes. They just filled it up with white passengers. That happened for three weekends in a row and I gave up.

Taylor

I did not venture off the base in Alabama. Well, I did venture off the base once at Fort Bragg, but nothing exciting about it. But I knew the nature--I knew, at least I thought I knew the nature of the South at that time, and I wasn't interested in going into town, because there wasn't anything in town anyway. But it was a very much segregated army and a segregated society in that whole area.

Stevenson

Okay. Another question I'd like to ask, and if you could think back to your childhood and your upbringing, is your awareness of or your encounters with the light and dark skin color dynamic within the black community.

Taylor

And it certainly did exist. Our family was a light-skin, dark-skin family. My mother was very high yellow, I guess that was the term they used at the time, as was my sister, as was my brother. I reflected my dad. We were fortunate in terms of our immediate family and the families with which we had a close association at the time, that it was not an issue. You were keenly aware of it, no question to that, but it was in our social sphere not an issue. Sometimes we felt that the tension between Eastside Negroes and Westside Negroes was in part because many high yellow, light-skinned African Americans tended to live on the Westside.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Taylor

Now, it wasn't exclusively that. My wife--I don't have a picture of her at hand--who was gorgeous and beautiful, was very fair-skinned. My brother's wife, same, and they lived on the Eastside. So it wasn't a clear delineation.

Stevenson

Not necessarily.

Taylor

But you knew that it existed. And my mother's Girl Scout troop was a beautiful rainbow, light skin, dark skin, medium skin, all that kind of thing. But you were keenly aware that it did exist, there was no question of that.

Stevenson

Did that extend to social networks, clubs, this sort of thing? I ask that because in some of the interviews I've conducted, this was very pronounced in the South, say in Louisiana, so on, so I'd like to know your awareness of maybe if some of that was carried over here in Los Angeles.

Taylor

In terms of my experience, again, you were aware of it, but I can't recite an example of where I think it was a factor. Certainly not in the churches that I attended. I wasn't aware really of social clubs until after the war, when we became, I guess, kind of involved in that respect. But prior to the war I was not aware of it, except that I knew it existed.

Stevenson

Okay. If we could move to your first teaching job, you graduate from UCLA and you're applying for your first teaching position. If you could talk about that.

Taylor

At that time, teachers coming into the system took an exam. When you took the exam, then your name got listed numerically. I took the math exam. I was lucky. I scored number one out of 200 people that took the exam, so I said, "Hey, maybe a job." Nobody seemed interested. A man named Bryce Taylor was a teacher at Jefferson High School at the time and a very good friend. He knew the principal at what was then called [George Washington] Carver Junior High School, a man named Robert Purdy, and he mentioned me and made an

appointment for me to see Mr. Purdy. I went to see Mr. Purdy and we had a very nice chat, and he said, "Gee, I'm sorry. I just don't have an opening." But he said, "I know another principal, a man named Lloyd Prante at Adams Junior High School, and I want you to go over and meet him."

Taylor

So I went over and met Mr. Prante. He said, "Gee, you look promising, but I just don't have an opening. But give me your phone number and let me see if something develops." Two days later I get a call from Mr. Prante. He said, "Come on in." And he said to me, "Do you know what place you were on the exam?" I said, "No, I don't know." He said, "You were number one." He said, "I'm going to hire you." So I got a job teaching at John Adams Junior High School. I taught seventh and eighth grade math, ninth grade math, and first-year algebra, not that first year. The algebra classes were kind of premium, so I didn't get those till about the third year I was at John Adams.

Taylor

But Lloyd Prante was a very interesting individual, and I must credit him as being one of the persons who sent me into school administration, because when I went into teaching I had no interest in school administration. I was going to be a teacher, and my wife at that time was already teaching. She graduated a year ahead of me, and she was teaching at Hollenbeck Junior High School. So here we were, two young teachers, and we figured that was the path of life we were going to pursue. Lloyd Prante had an interesting, I'll call it avocation. He liked to train administrators, and at that time he was keenly aware of the system that existed for getting people promoted into administration. There was a very well-defined examination system that was involved then, the same system that Owen went through and your dad went through. You took exams, you went into interviews, that sort of thing.

Taylor

But Lloyd Prante said that one of the ways you were able to be successful is not only to pass the written exam, but to have a background of experiences that made people say, hey, this guy or this lady can do something. So he outlined a series of experiences, not just for me, but there were half a dozen other people there who later became school principals, assistant

superintendents, all that kind of stuff. And so I went through the procedures. I became a counselor. A counselor in those days, it's not the beautiful word that sat with a student and talked about, "Now, how are things going?" He made up a master program of classes and then he, by hand, drew out the little program. "This is for Johnny. This one's for Mary. This one's for Susan." He just read them off. So I was a counselor, okay, and that got included on the resume.

Taylor

Then there was a position at that time called the registrar, and that was the person who monitored the attendance, and he saw to it that I had that experience. And I was a coordinator of this and a coordinator of that, so it kind of made a nice list of things. So I was at John Adams for five years, and I took the exam. Now, at this time I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine, something like that, and I didn't pass it. Okay. You rarely passed it the first time. That was the rule of thumb. But at that time I thought, too, that maybe I needed an additional kind of teaching experience, so I applied to teach at Hamilton High School. I went to Hamilton High School in 1956, September.

Taylor

Let me backtrack a little bit on John Adams. It was a wonderful experience. I really, truly enjoyed teaching. The classes were predominantly minority, African American, Asian, Chinese then, not Japanese, because not many of the Japanese had returned to that area; Mexican and Caucasian. I look back at that first--in those days we had a thing called homeroom, and you had an all-boys' homeroom or an all-girls' homeroom. Mine, of course, was an all-boys' homeroom, and I can just see that picture of those kids there. It was such a beautiful rainbow. When people talk about integration, it was the kind of thing that you'd say, "Now, that's a beautiful integration picture." It's interesting. I guess there's still one of those kids in my original homeroom class--this is 1950, January, February--that I still have contact with. Anyway, I enjoyed it very much.

Taylor

I applied to teach at Hamilton High School and was accepted. I went to Hamilton High School, and again, probably one of the most enjoyable teaching

experiences I ever had. Now I was teaching primarily academic. I was teaching primarily algebra and geometry and had one or two what they called basic math classes. Interesting enough, I went to Hamilton. The boys' vice principal was a man named Homer Eaton. He happened to be the commanding general of the California State National Guard. So Homer Eaton frequently went off for two weeks, and the principal at the high school then was a man named Richard Nida, who interestingly enough had been the boys' vice principal when I was at Manual Arts High School, and so I knew Mr. Nida.

Taylor

And whenever Homer Eaton went off to do his National Guard stuff for two weeks, Mr. Nida would bring in a substitute teacher to teach my morning classes, three morning classes, and in the afternoon I was to be boys' vice principal, acting boys' vice principal, or interim or whatever you want to call it. Now, it's interesting to note that in most cases, especially in later years, the boys' vice principal position was not only a full-time position, it was a time-and-a-half position, because you handled all the discipline and anything else, the athletic program, all that stuff. But at Hamilton High School, which at that time was really among the elite high schools--they had all those good kids from Cheviot Hills and all that kind of stuff--being boys' vice principal, now, let's see, what did you get once in a while? You'd get the study-hall teacher sending you some kid who was sleeping. [laughs] I'd always get that kind and we'd laugh, because, "He's sleeping? Let him sleep." Now, that's probably not the right attitude. Anyway, it was a soft-touch job.

Taylor

The part that I really worked at was doing the athletic-coordinating part, and I enjoyed that, so that didn't amount to too much. So there I was at Hamilton High School teaching math, and then came September 1967. Homer Eaton by that time was about ready to take off to go to Korea, because the California National Guard was doing something there or something, and so Mr. Nida had me teaching, I think, one or two classes, but taking over the acting vice principal stuff at that time, and by that time I had taken the vice principal's exam and passed it, and then I was number three on the list that year. No, I wasn't number three, I was number twelve. I was number twelve.

Taylor

And one October day--this was 1967, school had only been in session about six weeks--I got a call and they told me I was being assigned to Polytechnic High School. Now, Polytechnic was an interesting situation, because Polytechnic High School was the second high school opened in the Los Angeles school system, and it was at Washington and Grand, where Trade Tech is now. But so this wasn't that Polytechnic High School. This was what we called the new Polytechnic High School, which had opened in January of 1967, brand-new high school opening at that time, and it was in Sun Valley in the San Fernando Valley. The community was called Sun Valley East. It's the East Valley. They said, "The principal there is a man named Robert Lewis,"--I think this was a Tuesday--"and you're to report there on Thursday." "Yes, Mr. [Robert] Kelly." So that night my wife Jane [Taylor] and I and my parents got in our car and then we drove out to see where this place was.

Taylor

And it was night, it was not day. It was night. But here was--we didn't go on the campus. We drove around it. And here was this magnificent campus. I still feel it is one of the most beautiful campuses in the system. And we drove around this--man. So the next day, Wednesday, I'm at Hamilton High School and I get a call. "Mr. Taylor?" "Yes." "This is Bob Lewis. Can you be here tomorrow morning early?" "Yes, Mr. Lewis, I surely will." So the next morning, Thursday morning, I said, "I'm going to trick this guy. I'm going to be at that campus at seven o'clock in the morning. Now, the gates may not be open, but as soon as they open I'm going to be on there." I got there at seven, gate wide open. I drive into the faculty parking lot and I said, well, maybe I ought to sit here for a while. But there was another car in the lot. It was interesting, because there was a spot marked "principal," okay? But the car wasn't there. It was maybe a couple of spots over, and I was a couple of spots over from that.

Taylor

So, oh, gosh, I'm not going to sit in the car, I'm going to walk around. So I walk and right near the faculty parking area was the administration building. The door's wide open. Wow, I said, I think I'll kind of tiptoe in, walk in and see what--well, I made some noise coming in. Down the hall right inside, about midway down, a door wide open. Somebody hollers out, "Is that you, Mr.

Taylor?" I said, "Yes, I am." So I go in there and there's Bob Lewis, one of the most dynamic people I ever had the privilege of working with. He said, "Sit down." I had put some three-by-five cards in my pocket and a pen, and I said, okay, now I'm going to get, "Here's what you're going to do." So I kind of take out a card, slyly, and put it in front of me. And he said, "We're glad you're here, Mr. Taylor." "Oh, thank you, Mr. Lewis." He said, "You've got a difficult job ahead of you." "Yes, sir." Pulls open his drawer, throws me some keys. He says, "Your office is right across the hall." "Yes, sir."

Taylor

"Let me give you just a word of advice." Okay, now I'm ready to write. "Mr. Taylor, whenever you get a chance to pee, pee." That was it. That was it. So I go off across the hall and there's an office, and that was my beginning at Poly High School. But I'll never forget the man and am eternally grateful to him, because he was always so capable of cutting through--I use his word--the crap, and talking about what's good for kids. How do kids feel about this? He had great confidence in the ability of students to address whatever circumstance they'd found themselves in and felt that his role was always to be there to help them. He had quite a reputation throughout the district as being kind of a maverick. That's not a bad word, even though John McCain or whoever used it. And I can see why. Because his door was always wide open, something I appreciated and adopted; door was always wide open.

Taylor

He had so many interesting habits. The Poly High School campus was beautiful in the sense that it had a central quad and all the classrooms, all single-story, branched out from it like the spokes of a wheel. At noon the quad had a little stage on it, and it had an outlet for microphones. At noon he would sometimes bring his chair out there, sit near a microphone, and the kids were wandering all over the place, and he'd, "Hi, there, George! Don't forget we've got a big game Friday." He was that kind of a guy. So anyway, that was my introduction to Poly, and I spent five years as the boys' vice principal and five years as the principal.

Stevenson

Okay. This will be a good place for us to-- [End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (December 4, 2008)

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm continuing an interview with Dr. James Taylor on December 4, 2008. First I have some follow ups from our last session. You talked about the Japanese American families in your neighborhood that were interned. What did your friend Jerry tell you about his internment, or did he discuss it very much?

Taylor

He was interned in Manzanar, which was the big internment center in central California. He talked about the crowded conditions and lack of privacy. I'm not sure how long Jerry was there, because he joined--well, let's see, I can figure it out. If they left in early '42, well, they must have been there at least a year or so, and then he joined the Army and was part of the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] Japanese American division. I guess that's about it.

Stevenson

Okay. Do you recall what your parents or grandparents may have said about coming to Los Angeles in, what was that, the early 1900s?

Taylor

My dad came in 1900. My mother came about 1910 or something like that. My dad remembered that they came from New Orleans on a flatcar. The streets he remembered were mostly dirt streets. They lived for a short time--now, this was my grandmother with four young kids--in a stable. She became a person who took in laundry and that sort of thing. He became a helper to a man who pushed a cart and sold fruits and vegetables. He did attend school at 37th Street School, which is still a school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. I don't believe my father ever attended beyond the seventh grade, or sixth or seventh grade, and yet he was very well read, very actively involved in the issues of the community and of the time.

Taylor

I don't remember much about my mother's coming to Los Angeles, except that her stepfather was a railroad porter, and that's how they eventually came to

Los Angeles. His travel brought him here, and when he married my grandmother, why, they decided that this was where they wanted to establish a home. That's about all I remember at this point.

Stevenson

Okay. My last follow up, what would you say were the greatest influences on you deciding to teach as a career?

Taylor

Probably the single greatest influence was a high school teacher named Helen Miller Bailey. I had no aspirations toward college, and when I was in the tenth grade, why, she one day said to me, "Where are you going to college?" And I guess I had not thought much about it prior to that time, and it kind of evolved from there on. She would continue with the questions and in a sense was a person who gave me guidance to be sure that I took the right courses, so then, yes, I decided I was going to go to college. I loved mathematics, and so when I decided to go to college I said mathematics would be my major, and what would I do with it? Well, I'd teach. And that was about the size of it.

Stevenson

All right. I want to talk about some larger issues related to the series. One, in the fifties and the sixties on the nationwide level we were seeing the Civil Rights Movement, great changes in the South, and I want to find out locally about your involvement and what was going on in the city, let's say the late fifties, early sixties, in terms of civil rights.

Taylor

I don't recall that in the late fifties or early sixties that there was a great deal of local activity relative to the Civil Rights Movement. There were people in Los Angeles who had become active in the Civil Rights Movement in the South, James [Morris] Lawson [Jr.]; I'm sure there were others. But locally, I guess it was a situation in which we kind of monitored what was going on, but I don't recall that there was immediate, active involvement here that was impacting upon what was happening in the South, and in terms of any efforts here to do anything significant in terms of desegregation, other than the issues which

arose about red-lining housing districts and that sort of thing, I don't recall that there were other active movements.

Stevenson

What could you tell me about some of the movements against the restrictive housing covenants, and as you said, red-lining?

Taylor

Well, we had an interesting experience in the home here where we live now in that regard. We bought this home in 1965. We had come to know this neighborhood because we became active in a church called Mount Hollywood Congregational Church in this community. I was then at that time principal at Poly[technic] High [School], and we were living on Second Avenue near what was then called Santa Barbara [Avenue], now called Martin Luther King, and so it was a nice drive out to the Valley every day, and we decided it would be nice if we lived a little closer and the drive was a little shorter. Since we were attending church in this area, we began to look in this area. We saw this house for sale, called and made an appointment with the realtor to view the house, a lady realtor. We came. The house was in a state of somewhat disrepair. It was vacant at the time, somewhat a state of disrepair. But we decided this was where we wanted to be, and so we submitted a bid on the house.

Taylor

About two or three days after submitting the bid we did not hear from her, and we called her and she said very abruptly, "I'm sorry, I cannot sell you the house." And we said, "Why?" and she said, "My company would not permit me to sell it," something of that nature. It was the Wolfe Company, W-o-l-f with an E on the end of it. So we in a sense started to abandon the idea, and I happened to mention it to a teacher at the school, and he said, "Well, why don't you call the owner directly?" And I said, "I don't have the owner's name." He was involved in real estate, and he said, "I'll get you the name." It was a man named Vitti, V-i-t-t-i, and I called him and asked him--I told him we had made a bid but advised that they could not sell us the house. And he said, "I don't know why that's true. I don't know why that's true. I want to sell the house."

Taylor

So we started in directly with him, and we purchased the house. But as part of this whole experience, we decided we'd write the--come on, what was the state agency? It was [Department of] Fair [Employment and] Housing. So we had an exchange with them, and they gathered all the information, and then the final point of all this interchange was they simply said, "Well, since you eventually got the house, we don't feel the need to pursue it any further." But it was interesting, because I think, oh, maybe it was a year or so later and we were here now, the lady who said she couldn't sell us the house came by to pointedly tell us she was no longer working for the company, the Wolfe Company, because she felt that they weren't dealing fairly. But it was an interesting item of experience.

Taylor

It was interesting in this sense, too. The day of the 1965--now, let me call it right. Was it the rebellion, the demonstration? People didn't want to use the word "riot."

Stevenson

Rebellion. Rebellion, I think that's what they're calling it.

Taylor

Okay, uprising, whatever we want to call it. We moved into this house on that very day.

Stevenson

Oh, interesting.

Taylor

And, of course, there were no other African American families on the street, and so I recall my wife was anxious that the kids should stay in the house all day. This was summertime, August.

Stevenson

Right, right.

Taylor

And she was very anxious that the kids stay in the house. As it all worked out, it was beautiful. It was an ideal circumstance for our kids, because on this block there were seventeen children and young people, because our youngest daughter, Nancy, was only three, but our oldest son was twelve, I guess, or thirteen, and in that age span from about three to fifteen, there were seventeen youngsters, so it was a wonderful street to grow up on. But that was an interesting incident relative to our purchase of this house.

Stevenson

Okay. I actually was going to ask you about the '65 rebellion or uprising, and in retrospect your impressions of it. Had you given any thought, either before or even after the rebellion, about the causes? And what were the effects on the schools at the time?

Taylor

At the time I was at Poly High in the Valley. There was no direct impact at that school, because it was 96 percent white. I think there was anxiety, of course. Most of the tension had been somewhat reduced by the time school started in September, so that it was not significant there. I guess I became more aware of the impact of that experience when I was asked to take the principalship at [Alain] Locke High [School]. It was a brand-new high school opening, and then, of course, it became right in the heart of some of the tensions that still existed, and that was now 1967. But in terms of our immediate school experience in the Valley there, nothing significant. Our kids were starting middle school, then called junior high school, and elementary school in the neighborhood. I was not aware of any tensions that existed in the schools they were attending, [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] Junior High [School], Franklin Elementary School. Now, across the city I'm sure there were some tensions, but pretty much centralized in the Watts-South Los Angeles area.

Stevenson

Okay. In terms of the aftermath or the response to some of the issues brought up and the needs in the Watts community, were you involved in any of the many efforts, responses, organizations that came afterwards?

Taylor

Not until I was transferred to Lock High School in 1967. Then we became very much aware of some of the tensions and pressures. When we get to Locke High School, maybe I can expand on that.

Stevenson

Well, we can talk about that now. I'd like to know about what the impetus was for creating Locke High School, and I would like to hear what you can tell me about that.

Taylor

Well, Locke High School was created because there was a need. There were students in [John C.] Fremont High School and Washington High School and [David Starr] Jordan High School, which served that community, were overcrowded, and so there was a need to put a new high school in that area, and they decided to put it--where were we, 111th and San Pedro, or 108th and San Pedro? Gosh. Anyway, where it is. The school therefore was built there, and I don't know what the process was to identify it as Alain Locke High School, but I came to know who Alain Locke was. And the community there, I think spearheaded by a lady named Ablyn Winge--I remember Mrs. Winge, a fine person, very fine person, seems to insist that the new principal, because the student body was going to be 98 percent African American, that they should have an African American principal. I was very happily ensconced at Poly High School, and my experience there was just magnificent, but we get to Poly later.

Taylor

So the associate superintendent for senior high schools called me one day when I was at Poly, and he said, "Jim, we'd like you to leave Poly and become the new principal of the new high school, Locke High School." And it was interesting because in the years preceding that particular experience, when administrative assignments were made and I was involved, they didn't ask me would I like to. They'd say, "You are going to go to such-and-such." But that happened, I think, "Would you like to take this principalship at Locke High?" because probably a year earlier there had been considerable disruption in the Hispanic community, Boyle Heights. The school district wanted to send a Mexican American principal who was then at Birmingham High School in the

Valley, to Roosevelt High [School], and he told them no, he wouldn't go. So I guess that's why they didn't tell me, "You're going to be transferred." They asked me would I go.

Taylor

And I have to say, Poly High was an idyllic situation for me, marvelous faculty, great student body, very supportive community. So I said to him, "Can I have twenty-four hours to think about it?" "Oh, yeah, Jim, that's fine." So I came home and I talked with my wife Jane, and she looked at me and she said, "You know you really don't have any choice." And I said, "You're right." So I called him the next day and said, "Sure, sure, I'll be glad to go to Locke." Now, where are we and where are we going from there?"

Stevenson

Well, I have a follow up, though. You were talking about Mrs. Winge. Was she head of a PTA or a parents' group?

Taylor

She was head of kind of a community group. She was very active in the community. I remember she was on the advisory board of the King Drew Medical School, and I'm sure she was involved in many other things. Her husband was an architect as I recall, and she lived on San Pedro about two blocks from the school. I remember her because she was very supportive, and I've always been grateful for her support. That's about all I can remember of her.

Stevenson

Okay. So was there a pretty high level of parent involvement at Locke?

Taylor

No.

Stevenson

No, okay.

Taylor

Aside from--Ablyn Winge and Dorothy Rachelle are the only two parents that I think I ever met more than once at Poly. Now, there were some very active groups. I became acquainted and somewhat friendly with Ron [Maulana] Karenga, who at that time, I think, was doing the US group, and I actually had a very interesting experience related to Ron at Lock High School, because I got investigated by a state senator. Ron was supportive and helpful. There were other groups not nearly as well organized as he, but I mean, you almost would call them gangs, who created some problems for us at Locke. But in terms of community support, there wasn't much in the way of community.

Stevenson

And the gangs, what type of problems did they cause, and how did you address those?

Taylor

Well, it was interesting, and I do make comparisons only because there's a basis of comparison. When I was at Poly High, first as boys' vice principal, we used to have the understanding that in terms of Poly High students and their behavior in the community, they wouldn't dare do anything that would reflect adversely on the school within five blocks of the school, because if there was a fight, we'd go and we'd try to resolve it. We didn't have any fights at Poly High. When I got to Locke High School it didn't take me long to realize I was lucky if we could control our side of the street. One of the our big problems was one of the kind of gangs would park theirselves across the street from the entrance to the school. It was interesting, because the houses there, the front yards were such that--you've seen it--right off the sidewalk there's a little concrete raised area and then the lawn comes if there was a lawn. They'd go over there and they'd sit there, and the police didn't want to fool with them. There were still the tensions of the Watts area.

Taylor

And the police captain for--it wouldn't have been Newton Street then. Maybe it was Newton; I don't know, because that was part of the area. It was interesting. He would come and he'd stand on our side of the street, and we'd look at the situation, and he'd talk about it and explain that until they did something, they didn't dare want to bother them.

Stevenson

So it was hands off unless something happened.

Taylor

Yes. Essentially, because that person happened to retire from LAPD and then became a chief of the police force for the school district.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Taylor

And we had a great relationship. But considering all, I was grateful that that year at Locke went well. I think we would say that in terms of opening a brand-new school, we were fortunate to have some really fine people, and we had students who I think were excited about the possibility of being part of something new. I tried to think about that year, how many fights did we have on campus? Three or four, which was, I felt, just marvelous. Now, we only had about 1100 students, because we had grades ten and eleven. We had no twelfth graders. But we had an energetic faculty. A number of people who were on the faculty at Poly were kind enough to come over to Locke and assist us. We had a team of great administrators. Louis Johnson was our boys' vice principal. He later became principal at Jefferson High and after that left the Los Angeles School District, went up to Sacramento and became, I think, the chancellor or something of the community college up there.

Taylor

We had a lady named Marge O'Hanlon as the girls' vice principal, who was an ex-Marine captain. Marge was quite a gal, quite a lady. Had a fellow named Roger Dash. Roger's someone you might want to interview someday. Roger did not go into a great deal of administration in the L.A. school district, but he did some very exciting things at Cal[ifornia] State [University] L.A. and elsewhere. He lives in Palm Springs now, I think. But anyway, it was a strong, strong group, and I felt we got off to a good start.

Stevenson

Okay. Just one last thing. You mentioned Ron Karenga and US organization. What kind of support did they offer? Just an example.

Taylor

Ron's headquarters was located probably less than a mile from Locke High School. I think he was on San Pedro Street. He had literature which the kids would bring to school. He did come and talk with me about what we were trying to do, a very positive kind of interview. And I explained to him, for example, that one of my problems was this group that would hang across the street and just sit there and kind of look. And he came one day with some of his people and cleared the street.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Taylor

Of course, two days later the people were back, but that's all right.

Stevenson

Of course, yes.

Taylor

But I got into an interesting situation with Ron, because since so many of the kids were aware of Ron and were listening, I assume listening to him, I decided that our faculty needed to have a better understanding of what Ron was about. I was not endorsing Ron Karenga in any way. So I scheduled a faculty meeting, optional attendance. You could come if you wanted to. If you didn't want to come, you didn't need to come. And I invited Ron to come and speak, because I felt we needed to know what he was selling the kids. We had student teachers then from Cal State L.A., and a couple of them came to me and asked if they could come, and I said yes. The student-body president came and asked if he could come, and I said, "No students. It will be just faculty," and then these student teachers.

Taylor

So Ron came and it was very dramatic. We had a very nice, small auditorium. It accommodated 120 people, and it was pretty full. I'll bet we had a hundred,

because most of the faculty came. I had faculty there at 3:15 or whatever time we had agreed on, and Ron wasn't there. But within five minutes of the time he was supposed to be there, first come in two great big handsome guys, bald-headed, dressed in suits, and then right behind them comes Ron with his flowing African stuff, and I introduced him and he spoke, just spoke nicely, spoke about the importance of education and spoke about aspiring to do something, to be something. I remember one thing he said about--he said, "There's an old African proverb that if you stumble, it's only the beginning of falling forward," or something of that nature, trying to say to the kids, hey--it was a good message, okay. So, fine. We had a good session.

Taylor

Then about three weeks, four weeks later, I get this letter from Senator John [L.] Harmer, wanting to know why it was that I had this revolutionary or whatever his language was, in the school, and insisting that the board of education investigate this situation and see what I was up to. Well, it was interesting. John Harmer happened to be the state senator who worked right here where I live, for this area, and folks in the church, our church, found out about this, and he received a deluge of letters about, "What are you doing? This guy is--," whatever the things they said. So I guess it was a couple of weeks after I got the letter, I was asked by the superintendent to come and explain to the board what this was all about, because they got the letter. So I went to the board and told them exactly what had transpired and why I had done this, reaffirmed that no students were present, and that faculty attended only at their choice, and it was not a command-faculty kind of meeting.

Taylor

And I remember at that meeting that after I had finished I sat down, and there was a member of the board then by the name of Georgiana Hardy--

Stevenson

Yes, yes.

Taylor

--and she went on to extol my virtues, and I said, "Who's she talking about? That's not I." She said something about, "I wish all of our principals were doing

this kind of outreach," or something like that, and it was the end. I mean, after that I never heard another word from any board member, I never heard another word from John Harmer, but I always enjoyed it, because it was an interesting kind of experience.

Stevenson

Okay. I wanted to ask you about the effects locally of the Civil Rights Act that was passed in Washington in '64, which gave injunctive relief against discrimination in various arenas. What did you see that some of the local effects of this national legislation was, and did any of it effect or filter the schools?

Taylor

Well, because there had never been overt discrimination--no, wait, never been, that's a strong phrase. Because at that time there was no overt discrimination in terms of pupil assignment--if a minority kid lived in a school's residential area--remember, that's how we--kids went to the school in their particular residential area.

Stevenson

Right, right.

Taylor

They went to the school. There wasn't any question about that. Didn't say they were going to have a good time. Didn't say they wouldn't meet some problems with the kids in the school, but there was no discrimination of that sort. Our own experience here, when we came to live here, at Marshall High School, King Junior High School, at Franklin Elementary School, whatever, I don't know, handful or so of African American kids--there were a considerable number of Asians, very few but some Hispanics, and our kids encountered no problems whatsoever. Two of our kids became student-body presidents, and this was now in the sixties. Carolyn was student-body president, Peter was senior-class president. I mean, they were all very accepted, still have those friends from those days. So I think that there was no immediate impact in what transpired at that time.

Taylor

Now, that was not to say that subsequent to that, when we had the Crawford v. Los Angeles and we were mandated to integrate the schools, which was a folly from the beginning. They wanted to make--I guess I'm digressing--

Stevenson

Yes, but that's absolutely on my list of questions, so, yes.

Taylor

The courts and the people in general, the ACLU, they wanted a salt-and-pepper mix, and there was lots of pepper but the diminishing enrollment of salt said, "You can't do it." Yet we were imposed--and I always regret it, and Diane Watson doesn't like me for this. It was such a splendid opportunity to do something for minority kids without having to push them up there and bring other kids in here. We had a voluntary integration program called PWT, Permits with Transportation, and it was really accommodating a lot of minority parents, African American parents, who wanted to get their kids out of the inner-city schools. It was a program that it was all one way, okay, but it was a program that was widely accepted in the Valley, which was, of course, the direction it was going, and to a degree West L.A., widely accepted there, because their enrollment was going down, and we were actually in the process at that point in the L.A. city schools of closing down some schools in that area, the valley. And we were overcrowded in the inner-city area, so it was a good thing, and we could have enriched that program so. But no, they wanted a salt-and-pepper mix, and, of course, it really never got off the ground.

Taylor

Diane Watson was irritated with me because when she was doing her dissertation for her doctorate at Claremont [University] or Pomona, one of the two, she asked me, what did we gain out of the integration experience? This was years after the thing. It was now 1980 or sometime. And I said, "Diane, in terms of the benefit to kids, we gained nothing that we couldn't have had without having to try the salt-and-pepper mix." Certainly among the things that came out of the integration experience was the preschool program, for which my wife wrote most of the curriculum. This was the parents of kids three and four years of age--and the Magnet School Program. But both of

these things we wanted and requested and could do completely independent of busing kids from the Valley to the inner-city.

Taylor

And then, of course, the other adjunct portion of that was to integrate teachers, and that was really a mess. Oh, we wasted so much time and energy on that, bringing teachers into the inner-city who didn't want to be there, forcing some of our really outstanding minority teachers--they were willing to go. They were willing to go into a new situation. And some of the teachers, I confess, from the Valley, Caucasian, were willing to come in, but most of them didn't want to. And it was interesting. If the Caucasian teacher in the Valley could show that they were of minority heritage, then they didn't have to move. Man, we had some of the most interesting cases of people who would say, "My grandmother was Spanish, part." But I consider that period a time when we had a great opportunity and instead we wasted our energy and resources on something that wasn't going to work from the beginning.

Taylor

Now, Diane was always critical of me, because she said, "Well, if you had that attitude, you didn't help it very much, did you?" And I said, "No, I guess you're right, Diane. I guess I didn't."

Stevenson

Okay. So I think what I'd like to do--I'm planning on probably spending a whole session on the whole integration and segregation, so I think what I'd like to do--I have one more question in terms of the larger city, and one, in the early sixties I know, between '60 and '65 where we're seeing the first African Americans in local government, such as Councilman [Gilbert W.] Lindsay, [Thomas] Bradley and others--what were the implications citywide, both for African American citizens and for the whole city?

Taylor

In terms of education?

Stevenson

In terms of education, but also just in terms of their impact, of these first black--

Taylor

Well, I think in a sense, and I especially focus on Tom Bradley, it served as an awakening. I know that there were those that preceded him, Gus Hawkins and some others. But in a sense it, I think, served as kind of an awakening to what African Americans could aspire to in terms of politics and government. He was such a dynamic kind of person that I think it had a tremendous impact in bringing to many people an interest in that kind of involvement. In terms of the schools, which is what I was most familiar with, there was some dramatic activity in the--it began in the early seventies. Prior to that there were not a large number of African American administrators in the district. I guess prior to 1967, '68, Isaac McClellan was the only black secondary school administrator that I was aware of. Isaac had been principal at Jordan High School. He was a fine person.

Taylor

There were some elementary people, but I'll bet Owen would know them better than I would. Josie Bain didn't come along until a little after that. But Owen would know the elementary folks better than I would. But in the early seventies, no, in the late sixties, '68, there was an arising tension in the South Central area, and in order to accommodate some of the requests/demands of activist groups--and I say activist not demeaning them in any way. Some of the activists were good people. Some of them were just out for their own agenda, but I guess that's going to be the case in any kind of a situation. But in light of that life, the board created a rule called [Rule] 4214. Prior to this rule, administrative appointments were made off of eligibility lists. You took an exam and you ended up as a number on a list, and when your number came up then they'd try to assign you to a school.

Taylor

But because of the need to get minority administrators--at this point, the focus was on African American administrators--the board created a rule called 4214, which would permit the superintendent to make a direct appointment to a school, bypassing the examination process, and I remember the first of that appointment we made was to Fremont High School with a guy named Don Bolton. I don't know if Don's still around. But we were riding on the freeway, and a man named Graham Sullivan was then deputy superintendent,

and I was his assistant, and he said, "We've got to do something at Fremont, and we're going to use this new board rule 4214." And he said, "Where can we look?" And I said, "I can tell you a guy that's down in that area right now who's, I think, pretty strong." And so they appointed Don Bolton, and that was the first of a number of 4214 appointments. In fact, they came pretty rapidly in the next four or five years.

Stevenson

Were there particular issues at Fremont that maybe they were addressing with this appointment?

Taylor

They were the issues that also had arisen at Belmont [High School] and Roosevelt, and it was a group of young people who were saying, "Our schools aren't what they should be. We complained about our teachers. We complained about the physical facility. We complained about the books," very active young people and had some legitimate complaints. And because a series of white administrators at Fremont and at Roosevelt and at Belmont didn't seem to be able to control the situation, why, some other actions were felt to be necessary.

Stevenson

If I recall Mr. Bolton, was there some controversy surrounding his appointment? As I recall from some of my research there were some, maybe a community group or two that were even trying to remove him. I don't know what you know about that.

Taylor

I don't recall that to be the case. Don was, I felt, a very strong individual, went to Fremont and at least seemed to quell the embering fires or whatever at first. Now, I left the district from '68 to '69 to participate in the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Advancement [Southwest Regional Education Center] or something, and when I came back, Don was still principal at Fremont, and I was not aware that there were pressures to try to get him removed.

Stevenson

Okay. I think I'd like to pick up now where we left off at the last session. You were vice principal at Poly, and to discuss your experience there. You also became principal, and maybe you could discuss that a little bit.

Taylor

Well, let's see about getting first to Poly. I mentioned about the PTA meeting the night before I started and how the principal had said, "I'll take him if he's good"?

Stevenson

Right.

Taylor

Okay. Well, I was fortunate because--Bert Eidner, you'll never forgive me--the man who preceded me as vice principal was a man named Dr. Bert Eidner, very learned kind of guy. He was leaving because he was being appointed to the new high school in Pacific Palisades, Palisades High School, and he was the ideal person for it, a man who never took off his coat. I mean, he wore a coat and tie, never took off his coat, and he was very--let me be complimentary--he was very scholarly, very scholarly. But Bert didn't quite fit the picture of a vice principal who was dealing with kids who were involved in smoking on campus or ditching or anything like that, and I say it because in a sense I had no way to go but up. I became vice principal at Poly, a number of faculty I remember being kind of cool. Fortunately there were two teachers there whom I had taught with at the junior high school level, and I think they were helpful in getting me at least reasonably accepted.

Taylor

It was a very warm kind of school situation, because the principal, Bob Lewis, was a very warm and gracious kind of person, and he set the tone for the school. As vice principal I just did what vice principals do. You deal with kids who are having--young men, not all kids, who were having problems. You had charge of the athletic program. You managed those kinds of events with whatever was necessary. I guess the teachers at the school--the school was only one semester old. It had opened in January of 1957. I went there in October of '57, so one semester had passed. The teachers at the school, I was

told later, had become accustomed to the fact that you never sent any recalcitrant youngster to the boys' vice principal, because he did nothing, and so when I started with some, not too frequent, but started getting some referrals to the office, we dealt with them. We, quote, "counseled" the young people and tried to do things.

Taylor

I can remember even once using a paddle, which I resolved I'd never do again, because I always feel--I said when I used a paddle it meant one of three things: I wasn't smart enough to handle the problem another way; I didn't know how to deal with the problem another way; I didn't have the patience to deal with the problem another way. And I said, "That's a mark on me, not on the kid, on the young person." But anyway, I guess I had been there, I don't know, five or six weeks, and one day Bob Lewis comes to my office door and he kind of leans against the doorway and he says, "I just can't tell you what I think of the job you're doing here." And, oh, I just swelled up. So I went home that night and I told my wife Jane, "That's what he said." And she looked at me and she said, "What did he really mean by that?" as if to say, hey, you can take that one way or the other. But I took it the positive way.

Taylor

But after it couldn't have been more than a semester, I felt totally accepted. I can always remember, again, Bob Lewis. We were walking together on the campus. I rarely--if I could avoid it, I always got out of my office. I walked the campus. It was a story that got around. I like to whistle, and I whistled when I went on campus. I always checked the restrooms. In those days we could actually have towel racks on the wall, and toilet papers in the dispensers, and soap in the dispensers. But I'd always go in the restroom. The kids would throw the towels in the wastebasket, but they'd never step them down, so they'd begin to overflow. So one of my routines was to go in a restroom, put your foot in the thing. But the kids used to say, "Mr. Taylor, you're never going to catch anybody smoking in the restroom, because you're whistling and they always can hear you coming." And I said, "You know something? I do that because I don't really want to catch them. I just want to scare them." And I'm digressing a lot, but maybe this--

Stevenson

No, keep going.

Taylor

Okay. Within a semester at Poly I felt very thoroughly accepted by the staff. I fortunately, in terms of encounters with parents, had only one difficult experience. It was the only parental complaint that I think I had in the ten years I was at Poly. At least it was the only one I was aware of. But again, one day Bob Lewis comes into my office and he leans against the door and he said, "Do you know what Tex Williams just said to me?" Well, Tex was a U.S. history teacher from Texas. That's why they called him Tex. And he really wasn't a very good teacher. He frequently sent the kids--and I learned with the young men that Tex would send me. I'd listen to their side of the story and then I'd say, "John, do you want to know how to pass Mr. Williams' class?" "How, Mr. Taylor? How?" "Keep your mouth shut and at least look like you're trying to do something." Tex's style of teaching was at the beginning of the period he wrote "page thirty-one to fifty-eight" on the board. "Answer the questions on page fifty-seven." Now, that was it.

Taylor

But anyway, so Tex seemed satisfied when I sent a young man back to his class that the young man was behaving properly, and one day he said to Mr. Lewis, he said, "You know, that Jim Taylor," he said, "I'd walk the river with him." I said, that has to be the best of all. The faculty were really nice. I think Mr. Lewis--I don't think it, because he told my wife this. I think Mr. Lewis decided that when he retired I was to be principal at Poly High, as if he had the authority on his own, which he didn't. But he did such things that it almost made it impossible for the central administration not to assign me to Poly. I had passed number two on the principal's list. He had over a period of--I guess beginning the third year I was there, he turned over to me almost every major responsibility he had, and I didn't resent it. I welcomed the opportunity for the experience. I worked with the head counselor to make the master program. I did the textbook budget. I handled all the student-body finance affairs.

Taylor

He would come to faculty meeting, and he and I shared the same philosophy. You only had a faculty meeting when you had to have a faculty meeting, which

means we had two a semester or something like that. But he'd come to faculty meeting and he'd say, "All right, glad you're here, folks. Now, Mr. Taylor has the agenda." He'd leave. He'd just go. So for the last three years before I became principal, I was doing most of the principal stuff, and I didn't say that boastfully or resentfully. I appreciated the experience, and I realize this was part of his conniving that I was going to be principal of Poly High. And, of course, he worked the community for me. He had me invited to join the Optimist Club. He had me represent him and the school on a Panorama City Community Hospital Advisory Board. I don't know, he did several other things. He wrote a lot of letters, some of which I have copies of.

Taylor

One letter I remember, he said to the superintendent in charge of secondary schools, who would be an assistant superintendent, "I'll do anything legal or illegal, as long as it's not immoral." And then he said, "Smile." He said, "If you want me to take an illness leave early, if you want me to retire early, I'll do this if we can make Jim Taylor principal at Poly High." And then he had faculty writing letters. All of this I was somewhat aware of, but really not aware of the extent to which he had done this.

Stevenson

It was a campaign of sorts.

Taylor

It was, it really was. He even had some student-body presidents write letters, and they all went to the associate superintendent in charge of secondary schools. So in June of 1962 I was appointed--Mr. Lewis was retiring, and I was appointed the principal of Poly High. It was just a great relationship, supportive community, great student body, wonderful faculty. We had a few not so good teachers, and I used to--interesting. When I was vice principal, kids would be referred to me from a particularly poor teacher, and we had some. I'd say to them, "You know John, this semester you've got six teachers. If you're lucky, two of them are outstanding, three of them are pretty good, but one of them is not so good. And I don't know which one it is, John. I don't know which one it is. But part of your process of learning in high school is that you learn to deal with all kinds of people, including all kinds of teachers. And

even if it's a teacher you don't like and you don't think is real good, you've got to learn how to adjust to it," this kind of stuff. But that was true of our faculty in general, by and large.

Taylor

Well, gee, by the time I had left--we had a student body at one time, I guess this would be--I left in '67, so this would have been about '65, when we reached our peak enrollment of 3,600 kids, and we had a faculty--

Stevenson

That's large, huge.

Taylor

Oh, it was a large faculty, yes, of about 140, and gosh, 20 percent of them were just outstanding teachers, which is just tremendous. The great majority of them were good teachers, and there were about ten or fifteen maybe, maybe more nearly ten that you just kind of had to live with. I can recall Miss Hall, she was two years away from retirement, I said we'd just live with it. Ken Moy got drunk, so I said, "We've got to get rid of Ken." But those were the few, not the large. So Poly High was just a tremendously wonderful experience. The kids were doing well academically. We had a very enriched academic program. We had teachers who were innovative, willing to try different things.

Taylor

I always tended to feel that one of the strengths of an educational program was to have a good program for those kids who weren't necessarily academically oriented, and this meant have a good industrial-education program, have a good home economics, because that's what they called it in those days, and we were excited. Had a school nurse named Jewel Ward. Jewel was probably the best high school counselor I ever knew. She was the nurse, but she was the best. I mean, she was a counselor in the sense of a counselor. If kids had problems, they'd come to see Jewel, and they weren't just the academic problems. But I said to Jewel, "Why can't we do something for some of these ladies who might be interested in going into nursing?" So we established with Kaiser Hospital a student nursing program, like a CNA, a

student nursing-assistant program. We had it for two years and it was great. Then it got taken away from us.

Stevenson

Why?

Taylor

The community colleges wanted it. They were better equipped to do it, there was no question of that, but we had the girls. They went to Panorama City Kaiser Hospital every day, and it was great. Then we had another lady in our home-economics department who recognized that there was a whole need for people trained to work in preschool nurseries, childcare situations, so we set up a childcare program, and our industrial-arts department did all the construction of constructing game facilities and remodeling in one of the bungalow-type classrooms so that it had shelves and things for kids. It was a great program. That lasted two years and that got taken away from us, again the community colleges, which were better equipped to do it, there was no question. But I cite that as an example of people who were tremendously creative and fully energetic.

Taylor

I think today about the difficulties, or what I hear about, because I don't know anything about today except what I hear, of getting teachers to take on what we then called co-curricular assignments. "Would you supervise? Just sit in the bleachers at the basketball game. We have night football games. Would you come to the night football game?" Never had a problem. I can remember one or two cases where teachers would say to me, "No, I really don't want to do that." "Oh, okay. Fine." But they were just a tremendous faculty, and people will say what a wonderful ten years Poly High experienced, and they could legitimately give credit to Bob Lewis, but no credit to me, because the credit went to just a great staff. The best thing I could do was, in a sense, stay out of their way and try to give them all the support I could.

Taylor

I used to say that education took place between a teacher and a student, and my responsibility was to do everything I could to make that teacher's

responsibility as simple, as easy as possible. And again, I enjoyed the experience at Poly, the ten years. I think it was a successful experience, but no so much for me, but because of the people we had there.

Stevenson

Okay. So you were reassigned. You obviously had mixed feelings about leaving Poly.

Taylor

Yes. [laughs]

Stevenson

Anything else you'd like to say about that? I mean, did you have mixed feelings, and did you view your reassignment maybe as a new adventure? What were your feelings?

Taylor

I looked at the assignment to Locke as something which I was supposed to do. There was no question in my mind. They wanted an African American principal. I was at that time the only African American principal in the district, and I felt it was my responsibility to go. Yes, there was no question of that. I didn't go with any bitterness or anything of that nature.

Stevenson

Okay. We've already discussed your experience at Locke, but maybe this is a good juncture to talk about, how was the issue of getting more African American principals addressed, and who were the people addressing it? Maybe you could talk a little bit about that. How was that accomplished?

Taylor

The most immediate impact came with the board rule 4214. Don Bolton was the first one. Then was there Alvin Hayes? Oh, my gosh. Now I'm not quite recalling in what sequence they came, but between 1972 and about 1977 there must have been appointed at least five African American secondary school principals and some elementary school principals. I was much more familiar with the secondary school situation, because I had come out of the senior high school kind of involvement. We continued the examination

process. Actually, that process continued until, I don't know when, about the 1990s, when communities began to demand, "We don't care whether you've got a list or not. We want to tell the person we want to be principal," which has its advantages and its disadvantages.

Taylor

But through that process of using 4214 and continuing the examination process, a number of very fine black administrators came to the fore. Oh, golly, George [J.] McKenna [III] at Washington [Preparatory High School], and again, I keep focusing on secondary because that's what I was most familiar with.

Stevenson

That's fine.

Taylor

Owen will know the elementary ones. Let's see. Lou Johnson at Jefferson [High School] was a 4214 appointment. Eugene McAdoo. I can't remember whether Sid [Thompson] was 4214. I think Sid Thompson came by the regular examination process. But in that period from '72 to 1980--no, wait a minute. Sid preceded that, because when I went to Locke, and another guy, a Caucasian was at Crenshaw, and about a year or two after that it didn't work out so well, and then Sid went there, so I'm almost sure Sid came off of an examination list. But you ask Sid. He'll remember that. But then after that period of kind of a surge of black administrators, it kind of leveled off and then came a period of the middle-eighties or so, and that's when we began to see the communities demanding that they can take their own pick.

Stevenson

I know that black teachers were trying to help get more black principals, more black administrators. Were there people or organizations in the community also helping this effort, or advocating for more black principals, black administrators?

Taylor

I'm sure there were. That was a time of great agitation. I'm trying to think. Urban League people, that was John Mack, I think. I can't remember who was

NAACP at that time. Was it [H. Claude] Hudson? The pressure, in a sense, generally tended to be localized. It wasn't that we were trying to get the whole district, but we wanted a black principal at Fremont, we wanted a black principal at Washington, we wanted a black principal someplace else, and again, I'm focusing on secondary, because that's what I remember most acutely.

Stevenson

Okay. I think a couple more questions for this session. One, we talked earlier about some of the first blacks in local government, and you mentioned Gus Hawkins. Maybe you could tell me about what the impact of some of his legislation was, particularly on student achievement, and particularly African American students.

Taylor

I couldn't, because I'm not sure what legislation we'd be referring to. I only remember my dad was a friend of Gus Hawkins', and he spoke so very highly of Gus Hawkins, and I remember that Gus Hawkins once sent me a congratulatory note. I guess it was when I was at Poly. That's about it.

Stevenson

Also, just in general during this time period in the sixties, what was being done to increase the achievement levels, test scores of African American students?

Taylor

Not enough. There was so much unrest in the schools, inner-city schools, at that time that you didn't focus a whole lot on test scores, but you talked about how to get campuses to be quiet, how to have calmness on campuses, how to get good teachers into those schools. I remember that one of the problems we faced--this would be 1972--we couldn't get a physics teacher to go to Jefferson High School. Now, at the time, Jefferson High School only had, I think, eleven kids in a physics class, but we couldn't get a teacher to go there, and I got into a little bit of trouble because I had been asked to speak at a school in the Valley, Granada Hills High School. This was at the time of not only pupil integration but the attempt to integrate teaching staffs. Granada High School had either two or three physics teachers, and, of course, they had

about four or five physics classes. But potentially they had three teachers, meaning fifteen periods of teaching opportunity and only had four physics classes, and I made some kind of comment about maybe that wasn't fair, and I don't know. Anyway, the faculty there wrote a letter to the superintendent complaining about my comment, and I'm not sure to this day what I said that was wrong, but they resented it. So I know that in terms of the inner-city schools, that was a problem.

Taylor

We didn't focus on test scores so much, and maybe we should have focused more, but we did focus on the need for smaller classes, for more counselors. I think that was the thing that we talked the most about, if we'd just had more teachers and could create smaller classes. I guess the assumption was if we had that, the test scores would improve. I do remember, because this was a concern of mine that one year I was at Locke, that we were, all of us I think in that situation, anxious to get more black kids into college-prep programs. When I went to Locke I asked our counselors, who were reviewing the cumulative record cards of kids who were coming into that very first semester, I said, "You identify for me one hundred kids who have shown some indication of academic achievement," because they could look at their ninth-grade scores, their marks, not test scores, look at their marks, ninth grade, tenth grade, and the group of eleventh graders. So I said, "You identify for me a hundred kids, and we're going to group them." And this was opposed by a lot of people who said, "Aw, you're just trying to deal with the elite," or something like that. "But we're going to group them," and I picked the teachers who would--I picked the teacher who was going to teach U.S. history to the eleventh grade that year. I picked the teachers who were doing tenth-grade English that year, and we kept these kids together, and I guess I never knew what came of them, because I left after a year.

Taylor

But that's something that I've always felt strongly about. I'd like to believe that we can save the whole world, but I think the place to start, and I know there are people who really strenuously object to this and really are down on me for it, but I always remember, was it William E. [B.] DuBois who said about the talented 10 percent?

Stevenson

Talented tenth, yes.

Taylor

And in a sense, that was part of our philosophy when we started the Young Black Scholars Program. We knew we weren't going to save them all, and we'll talk about that, I guess, later.

Stevenson

We will, yes, we'll talk about that. Okay. I think this is a good place to-- [End of interview]

1.3. Session 3 (January 8, 2009)

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm continuing an interview with Dr. James Taylor on January 8, 2009. I'd like to spend this session talking about the integration, the segregation of the L.A. Unified School District. First, there were two court cases. The first, less known, is the Westminster v. Mendez in Orange County, and that was a Hispanic family who sued the Westminster School District for their child to attend a white school. She was denied entrance, and the court ruled in her favor. As a result, then-governor Earl Warren mandated desegregating not only schools but public places, and then that led to the more well-known Brown v. Board [of Education] in 1954, which ruled nationally that segregated education for blacks was separate and unequal and therefore unconstitutional. What would you say the effects of these cases were on the L.A. Unified School District?

Taylor

I think if we look at the background of schools in Los Angeles, and I would be, I think, somewhat familiar with schools going back to certainly the 1930s when I was in elementary and then junior high and then senior high, there was not a great movement toward desegregation. Schools in Los Angeles then as now were generally attended within a given residential district, and so minority kids, to my knowledge, never had any difficulty in being admitted to a school. Certainly it was not an integrated school district. There were the residential

concentrations of the minorities, primarily African American. I'm thinking now up to the 1950s probably, and then prior to the war, concentration of Asian students, primarily Japanese. I don't think there was ever any issue raised about a student being admitted to a school. I'm sure there were small numbers of African American students who attended predominantly white schools, Los Angeles High School on Olympic Boulevard probably.

Taylor

Interestingly enough, prior to the war Polytechnic High School, which at that time was at Washington and Grand--and I don't think there arose, to my knowledge, any cases of a minority student not being admitted to a school. Post-World War II and now approaching the fifties and into the early sixties, there began to be some interest in integrating some schools. I like to take a little distinction between integrating a school and desegregating a school.

Stevenson

What is that distinction?

Taylor

Oh, desegregation just means mix the numbers. Integration means really introducing a whole new educational approach that is designed to be sure that students coming from various backgrounds are getting the kind of comprehensive educational experience that they need. At no point--I'm projecting a little ahead--at no point in terms of Los Angeles did we ever really do anything in integration. We struggled along with desegregation and failed, in my estimation, but we never really got to--integration was a step well beyond desegregation, and we never got to that point.

Taylor

But again, following World War II and now I'm into the fifties and early sixties, there was some interest in having minority students, primarily African American, have an educational experience in a predominantly white school. This interest, I think, occurred primarily among upper-middle class blacks, who felt that the educational experience that would be provided in predominantly white schools might be more enriched than what they were currently receiving. Out of that interest came what we called the PWT Program, Permits

with Transportation Program, and this was a program that really initiated with, I think, Brentwood Elementary School. I think this was related to the entertainment industry, where some liberal-minded people in that industry were interested in, in a sense, having their children have an educational experience which involved minority students. So there was an arrangement developed where students were in predominantly minority schools, African American--I don't think there was any focus on Hispanics or Latinos or Asians, but primarily African American students from--we then began to talk about the inner-city, attending a number of West L.A. predominantly white-student schools.

Taylor

The program was well received. Minority families enjoyed it, and because the receiving families were the ones who almost in every case initiated the program, there was a good atmosphere and people enjoyed it, and what began as a one-school kind of operation grew significantly in the early sixties. Josie Bain was very active in that program. Now, where do we go from there?

Stevenson

Well, in terms of this PWT Program, you mention whites in the entertainment industry desiring their children to have an integrated educational experience. Were there any particular individuals?

Taylor

I don't recall the names of any individuals.

Stevenson

Or organizations for that matter, because you also mentioned the Westside, because I know there was support on the Westside for integrating the schools; any particular individuals?

Taylor

I can't name any individuals. I'm trying to think of the school-district people who were responsible. When I became deputy superintendent, most of the responsibility for PWT was operated out of my office by a very fine young man named Marv Borden. Marv was a school principal, high school principal, who really as an outgrowth of some of the activity related to the desegregation

court cases--we expanded PWT significantly. I mention Marv Borden because I thought he did such an excellent job. Later, of course, Ted Alexander took over that responsibility. So.

Stevenson

Okay. Well, in terms of calling for desegregation and integration, what were some of the groups within the African American community that were calling for this or were supportive of this, and also those that were opposed, whether that was parents, particular community groups, even educators, black educators?

Taylor

This, of course, was an outgrowth of the Crawford case, and I'd say most of the district effort in terms of desegregation prior to, where are we now, early 1970s when Crawford came to bear? Yes--were focused on the PWT program. I don't think there were any other district-initiated programs that were focused on desegregation of schools prior, other than the PWT Program. When Crawford came, the court mandated that the school district do something about desegregation. We went to court, and the court of Judge Paul Egly, I think--I know it was Egly, I think it was Paul, a very fine gentleman, very fine gentleman, and the district was compelled, it was directed to come up with a plan for desegregation.

Taylor

Throughout all this, I'll emphasize the word desegregation, because I think regrettably, we never got to even talk about integration. Now, where do we go from there?

Stevenson

Well, maybe you could tell me what led up to Crawford v. Board, well, actually going to court. Maybe you could tell me the background of that.

Taylor

The Crawford child was, as I recall, a student at Jordan High School, and the parents--I can't remember whether they wanted her to attend another school, or whether they were just objecting to the fact that Jordan was so predominantly one race. But the court heard the case and mandated that the

school district desegregate. The tragedy, I think, of all of this was that now we're into '73, '74 maybe--the major concept of desegregation at that time I always describe as mixing salt and pepper. The thing about it was, we were having an increasing amount of pepper and a significant reduction in salt, and some of us in the school district wanted to use an approach which didn't focus so much on desegregation, that is, just mixing kids, moving them all over, but wanted to focus on an educational experience that had as its major identity integration. By that, one of the plans that we suggested was what we called Multicultural Educational Centers. We would not move students in lots from inner-city to the Valley, or from the Valley back to inner-city, but we would establish, in a sense, mid-sites where groups of students from minority schools and all-white schools would meet on common projects.

Taylor

An example, I always remember this one. Fifth grade at that time, the major social-studies emphasis was the westward movement, and one of the things we used as an example would be these integration or multicultural centers, where students would come together in common projects in which they did things like built a teepee or had constructive educational activities where the minority kid, who was coming out of an educationally disadvantaged circumstance, wasn't always, in a sense, at a disadvantage because they didn't read as well or they didn't compute as well. We were not trying to minimize the significance of that kind of quality instruction, but we were trying to feel that if we provided positive integration, multicultural--interchange the two if you like--experiences, that there would also be some very definitive basic-education achievements that we didn't necessarily feel were going to be obtained by moving kids from inner-city to Valley, Valley to inner-city. It bombed out. We spent three days in the court, on the stand in Judge Egly's court, trying to describe this, but the focus of ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] and others was, "Nope. Integration meant mixing salt and pepper."

Taylor

We projected studies that would show how the pepper was growing and the salt was diminishing, and I always remember them because our people did it so graphically with color charts. They'd show--we went back, I guess, to about the fifties, and here you could see the dark green, which was minority, and the

lighter green, which was non-minority, and the dark green kept getting bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger. But all of that was, I think, to no avail. I guess you get from my tone that I felt our desegregation experience in L.A. wasted time, money, energy, and talent, because there were so many other directions that we felt we could go, other directions, some of which were adopted. The Magnet Program, which has been so successful, was an outgrowth of this. It was a component of the desegregation effort. The Early Childhood Education Program, preschool I called it, where we had three- and four-year-old children with parents going into schools in instructional kind of education programs. These things we could have done without getting into the hassle of moving kids.

Taylor

Now, I can't think of the names of groups in the minority community who were actively involved in promoting the desegregation effort, and certainly in terms of the courts the primary people were ACLU. Nice people, we enjoyed--still see some of them occasionally. In terms of opposing it, oh, yes, those bus stop--what was the lady's name? Come on. A board member who was actually--

Stevenson

[Roberta] Weintraub?

Taylor

No, oh, no.

Stevenson

[Bobbi] Fiedler.

Taylor

Fiedler, Bobbi Fiedler, yes. She was elected to the board by leading the charge against desegregation. And then, of course, there were the local school sites, and I remember dealing one day with a situation which we sent the bus to pick up the kids in the Valley. They were coming to school. I remember the school. Clayton Moore was principal of the elementary school in the inner-city, only it wasn't in the inner-city. It was what we used to call the Westside, kind of near Leimert Park. I'm trying to remember the name of that school. I'm sorry, I'm

rambling. But I remember we had some parents who not lay down, they sat down in front of the buses and they wouldn't move, and so the buses couldn't move. But there was, I think, great resentment in, it would have been the Valley, because that's where most of the salt was coming from.

Stevenson

Right.

Taylor

I don't think the program really ever got off its feet. There was so much opposition and so many hurdles that it just didn't work. It folded within, I guess, a two- or three-year period. Now, not the magnet school, not the preschool. Those kinds of things were universally accepted and felt to be desirable. The other component of the desegregation effort was the order by the court to desegregate faculties, and that one was, well, from my point of view, because that was an area which I held primarily responsibility for, that was a headache and a loss. Again, it just didn't work. I remember going to Granada Hills High School at the invitation of the principal, to talk about the faculty desegregation program, and I got kind of, oh, I don't know, I wasn't harassed, they were polite in their way, when I used an example, because I had studied the situation a little bit beforehand.

Taylor

At Jefferson High School we couldn't get a physics teachers. This would have been 1975, I guess. We couldn't get a physics teacher. Interesting enough, we only had, I think, eleven or twelve physics students, which didn't speak too well, but it was a fact of life. At Granada Hills High School they had three physics teachers, not all teaching straight physics. They'd teach physics and chemistry, or physics and general science, or something like that. I mentioned this. I said, "We'd sure like to have one of the physics teachers here at Granada Hills volunteer to go to Jefferson. Those kids deserve a physics teacher also." And you hear kind of a "rrrr" murmur. They didn't like that idea so much.

Taylor

It was interesting, an aspect of that teacher-integration focus. If teachers could prove that there was minority in their background, then they would be exempt from being moved. This always was the move from the Valley to the inner-city. And parenthetically let me mention, some of our very wonderful inner-city teachers, willing to participate, went to the Valley. In that exchange we lost significantly in the inner-city. We had good teachers--primarily this was at the elementary level--going into the Valley, but we weren't getting the same thing out of the Valley into the inner-city. But anyway, if a teacher--this was focused primarily on the Caucasian, white teachers in the Valley--could prove that there was minority in their background, "My mother was Hispanic," which is pretty good, they could pretty well establish that. What became so interesting, "My grandmother's sister married a Hispanic, and therefore we had this--," that kind of thing. The cases became so ludicrous they were almost amusing, of people trying to avoid the situation. That folded, too. It never got off the ground.

Taylor

And after a while the feds, who would come to my office once a week and want to know, "How many teachers have you moved?" etc., etc., they began to realize that it wasn't working, and they backed off. I remember so abruptly that they were coming frequently, and then it seemed to be, hey, I realized and my secretary mentioned this, "When's the last time I saw Mr. Roberts?" "Oh, it was a month ago." "Wow. They gave up." My impression, and Diane Watson just hates me--that's a strong word. Diane Watson doesn't agree with me on this. My reaction to our total desegregation effort was, as I mentioned a moment ago, a waste of time, effort, energy, and money, money that could have been directed toward making a dramatic improvement in our inner-city school situation. If we had taken the millions of dollars that we spent on the desegregation effort and put it into lowering class size at the elementary level, in introducing more counseling, supportive programs, especially at the middle school, and then called junior high and high school level, if we had introduced an additional financial incentive for some of the expert teachers to come into inner-city, there were so many things we could have done that if we had used the money for that I think we would have come off better.

Stevenson

So the quality of the academics for inner-city children was really compromised?

Taylor

Oh, yes. My impression, that the things that we could have done, we never had a chance to try. Yes.

Stevenson

I see. Going back to Crawford v. Board, I know that you were one of the individuals who gave a deposition. How were you chosen to give the deposition, and what do you recall about giving that deposition?

Taylor

I was the deputy superintendent of schools at the time, and they didn't ever, I don't think, depose the superintendent, but the school district relationship between the deputy superintendent and the superintendent at that time, and his name was Bill Johnston, was one I was always grateful for. Bill Johnson loved the board of education and getting out in the public and dealing with the legislature and dealing with the individual board members. I hated it. I loved to get into schools, and Bill said, "That's great. You do that part and I'll do the other part." So when it came to the day-to-day actual operation activities of the schools, then I was the point man, and therefore in the court I was among those deposed. The associate superintendent of instruction, Harry Handler, was deposed. There were other individuals deposed; I can't remember a name.

Taylor

But it was an interesting experience. The team--that's interesting, I've got to go back now. Now I'm in March 1977. I had a heart episode in 1977, and it was about the time that we were very much involved in the beginnings of the integration court dialogue. I was out for six weeks, and so some of the proceedings in that court case were delayed for that six-week period until I came back to work. I sometimes think that our school district people--we had hired O'Melveny & Myers, the law firm, to take the defense for the school district. I think they just used that as an excuse to kind of stall things along. But I came back, and I always remember Paul Egly for this, because the first

day I was on the stand I'd been testifying for, I don't know, two or three hours, and he kind of looked over and he said, "How are you feeling?" And I said, "I'm doing fine." But I always felt that was very kind of him.

Taylor

Yes, we had an interesting dialogue. I remember one interesting part. The primary ACLU guy, starts with an R, he lived in Echo Park, he was the lead attorney for the ACLU program, very bright and very good. Also on that attorney team was a guy named Goldberg. His sister [Jackie Goldberg] later became a member of the board of education. He was an attorney, and I remember one day in the interrogation he said to me, "You talk about the difficulty in desegregating schools." He said, "My kid goes to Micheltorena [Elementary] School not too far from here." Then he said, "Now, there's an example of an integrated school." And I said, "Mr. Goldberg, you are so right. We, too, live in that general area, and you know as well as I that that community is desegregated." And I said, "If you want to look for a nice, desegregated school situation, you're absolutely right. It's beautiful. But we didn't move a single kid to achieve that kind of integration." I remember he sat down and then I never heard from him again. But it was an interesting experience. As I say, we said what we had to say, but when it was all said and done, Judge Egly said, "Move kids," and so that's what we set about to do.

Stevenson

I'd like to ask you in the calls for desegregation, as you put it, did the dialogue, the tone, the dynamics change when busing was mandated, and how did it change, just the whole dialogue on integration?

Taylor

Well, when busing was mandated, the whole focus became, how do we physically achieve this movement of kids? And I can't recall any significant discussion related to, what do we do after they get there? How do we integrate? We can desegregate, but because so much of the energy and effort and time and money was on how many buses to go from here, how many kids to go from here, that not much focus was put on, what do you do after you get the kids there? I remember visiting Clayton Moore's school when this program was in progress, and there were not a large number of Caucasian

kids, because the parents who didn't want their kids to go just wouldn't let them get on the bus, and that's when, of course, the private school movement took off. We were out on the playground and I don't know, maybe two in ten kids were white, and Clayton said, "They're nice kids and they get along fine." But he said, "There are not that many of them," and he said, "We sent, of course, many more to the Valley."

Taylor

No, I think again one of my disappointments was that because there was so much focus on moving kids, we never got around to talking about integration, the nature of changing your curriculum, the nature of providing the kind of interaction, educational experiences that would help kids grow not only in terms of the fundamental principles of their education, but to me what integration means, to give an opportunity to focus on developing a positive attitude toward other people, and we never got around to that.

Stevenson

You mentioned Micheltorena School being integrated largely because the neighborhood is integrated.

Taylor

Not now, but it was then.

Stevenson

But at that time was part of the problem in this whole just say call for desegregation is that the neighborhoods were not integrated?

Taylor

That's why they requested desegregation, because we were not legally segregated, but it was the nature of the residential patterns that caused the segregation.

Stevenson

Right. And that's certainly something out of the control of L.A. Unified.

Taylor

Right, right.

Stevenson

Okay. In the black community were there groups opposed to the busing? And what was the basis of their opposition?

Taylor

I was not aware of any organized opposition to the busing. What I think was clearly lacking, there was no strong support for it. These parents didn't want their kids moved either. I think they favored the idea of a desegregated--although I think in terms of their eyes they would say an integrated experience, but they weren't that anxious to have their kids move around.

Stevenson

How would you say your own background and education affected your views on desegregation/integration?

Taylor

Throughout my own educational experience in the Los Angeles Unified School District, from 36th Street Elementary School to Foshay Junior High School to Manual Arts High School, I attended integrated schools. Now, change that word. I attended desegregated schools. However, they were schools where at no point in time when I was in those schools was there a really strong, large minority population. The minorities were African American and Japanese, a few Mexicans, and I specifically say Mexicans because at that time we didn't have the El Salvadorans, the Guatemalans, all the others. The Hispanics were Mexicans. We got along fine.

Taylor

One of the things we advocated during the course of all the desegregation activity was what we believed studies had shown, and we could at that time cite the studies, that when your combined minority population was less than 30 percent of the student population, you got along fine. There were no problems, or insignificant problems. When it went beyond that, then you began to get kind of conflict. I was never in a school during my own experience where the minority population got anywhere near 30 percent. We lived on the Westside a mile or so from USC, and we were probably--our

concentration of residents were African American and Japanese, but never in such numbers that we caused anybody any concern about anything.

Taylor

Out of my experience certainly I believe that desegregated schools in that kind of circumstance, where the minority population did not exceed 30 percent, could indeed be integrated schools. I felt at that time as I did for a long time, that not enough attention was given to the instructional or educational-ambition needs of minority kids. When I was at Manual Arts High School, I can't ever remember meeting a counselor. In fact, I guess there were counselors at Manual Arts at that time, but I never met on. The counseling I got as a high school student happened to come from the lady who painted that picture which I've got to someday get reframed, and I felt always in that period of time, now looking back on my own educational experience and beyond that now, thinking of the schools that I was aware of as a high school principal--of course, I was a high school principal for ten years at a predominantly white high school. When I went to Locke, to open Locke High School, and I was there for only one year, we tried--I'm rambling here a bit, I'm sorry.

Stevenson

No problem.

Taylor

But we tried to address the counseling situation, because I felt it was so important. I'm rambling like crazy. One of the things I always felt was important in terms of counseling was that the counselor address the kid more than that once a semester when we talk about, what classes are you going to take next year? So when we opened Locke, I insisted that all our counselors readmit students in the morning when they come to school. In other words, if you were absent, you didn't go to the Attendance Office and talk with the attendance supervisor. You talked with your counselor. And sometimes it was, "Oh, John, you were out yesterday. How's that cold?" Boom, you're off to class. But other times you met and you'd say, "You know what? This is the third absence." If your counseling is set up as it traditionally was, the

counselors were off in a little cubicle, and they didn't even know if the kid was absent.

Taylor

Anyway, we tried that, and it's the kind of thing that I felt even today, from what little I know about what's going on today, and I've got to emphasize that--what do I know about the L.A. School District? Only what I read in the newspaper. But I ask my neighbor kids, "Who's your counselor?" "I don't know." That to me is not good counseling. I know that a counselor can't sit in their little cubicle and every day go through who's here and who's not here, but when they had to readmit kids after an absence, they met the kids who by and large were having problems. The 100-percent attendance kid may have some problems, but they weren't with school. They might be at home or someplace else. I'm digressing so much that I may be missing the point. Where do we go from here? You're getting all this long-spent, buried educational philosophy.

Stevenson

Okay. When did L.A. Unified realize that the busing was not going to work? When did they really start to abandon that?

Taylor

By 1980, maybe '79. It never got into the eighties. It just wasn't working. And all of the people who were screaming for it just kind of faded out into the dust.

Stevenson

And certainly by that time the demographics were changing in terms of the increased Latino--

Taylor

Significantly. Right, right. And many of those predominantly white schools were so diminished in attendance that we had to close some of them. There was an interesting side on that. I had the privilege of getting to know the secondary school principals very well. I knew your dad and I knew a few other--and the few other elementary people, but because I had come out of the senior high situation, my focus was primarily on secondary schools. There

were a couple of--these were middle schools, then called junior high school principals, who would come to me and say, "Jim, can you get us some students?" Because their enrollment was--the white parents were just taking their kids out, and the student population was going down so, they were in danger of closing the schools.

Stevenson

And they were taking their kids out into private?

Taylor

Yes. Yes, they were concerned that they weren't going to have their kids bused. So it was a point at which we did considerable expansion of the PWT Program, because these principals and their communities, that is, their supportive parents who wanted their kids to stay in that school, were saying, "Send us some minority kids. Send us some minority kids." And we did. We expanded the PWT Program significantly during that period of time. But that was, to me, an interesting kind of thing, because here again my comment about if you don't exceed a 30 percent number you don't have any problems. Well, we never could reach anything near 30 percent in terms of bringing kids into these schools, but we did bring a significant number of kids. I'm thinking of one particular junior high school where I think at one time we had four buses of kids, about sixty kids per bus. We had a couple of hundred kids going to that school, and they come out fine.

Stevenson

You mentioned some studies at the time that you consulted and cited. Were there school districts in other parts of the country that were sort of models or that you could look at at the time?

Taylor

Prior to the beginning of the Crawford case, Sam Hammerman, who was at that time--mention that name when you talk with Verna [Dauterive], because Verna worked for him for a while, and the focus was on the issue of desegregation. Sam Hammerman and I visited or talked with people from Cincinnati, Chicago, New York, four or five schools. None of them had had a completely successful program. The place where I think desegregation had the

optimum chance of succeeding, and I'm sure it did in certain situations, was a school district of less than 100,000 students, because the distances were short, communities were well identified. When we were transporting kids, we were transporting kids for fifty minutes one way, and you did that twice. In the small school districts it was a fifteen-minute bus ride, that sort of thing. But no, we could not find anyplace where in a major urban community there had been successful desegregation.

Taylor

And again, we learned early on to quit using the word integration, because even in those schools where there was a considerable effort in this regard, we couldn't identify anywhere where there was a really successful integration program. We found places where they were able to meet the demands of desegregation, but again I felt what little I knew about the other situations was they experienced the same thing we did. You dedicated so much effort and time and energy and resource to just moving the kids that you didn't have the other most important part of, what do you do when you get them there? So we never found an example to duplicate.

Stevenson

Okay. I think in our next session I'll probably have some follow ups, but what I'd like to do for the rest of this session is talk about Dr. Frederick Dumas. I know that he was one of the founders of COBA, Council of Black Administrators. I also know that he worked in urban affairs for a time, but also that he created I guess what would now be called a diversity or cross-cultural program. I think it might have been in the Valley. So if you could talk about Dr. Dumas.

Taylor

I think the place I'd be limited to is that one day in '69 maybe, or '70, Fred came to my office. At that time I was assistant to the deputy superintendent, and we talked about the need to kind of get some kind of singular voice emanating from black principals, vice principals, and we sat in my office and we wrote out a statement which was to become the statement of the Council of Black Administrators. We went to the organizing meeting, and Fred suggested, "Since you're downtown and because of your physical location

don't appear to present a field limitation," he said, "why don't you just kind of back off?" "Okay, if that's what you want." I was a member of COBA, but I never was a spokesman for COBA. I remember the board meeting when Fred came to initially introduce in a sense, because we felt this was [unclear] to identify for the board members that this was an organization, this Council of Black Administrators, and he read the statement of purpose, which has--I can almost remember the words, "Because we are in addition to school district administrators, we are a part of the community that we serve--," something like that.

Taylor

The board meeting, and, of course, he was well received, and that was probably the major extent of my involvement with COBA and Fred. Fred was an outstanding elementary school principal. His work, I think, in terms of central administration, came after I left the board. I left the district in 1982. Fred hung on for a lot longer, as your dad did.

Stevenson

I see. Could you in a nutshell tell me what the basic mission of COBA was?

Taylor

Yes. I think as we talked about it, the major objective we had was to try and from the perspective of not only school administrators but black school administrators, identify the crucial needs that were being experienced in schools in the inner city, and COBA as we saw it was not just because we were trying to focus on and improve upon the efforts of schools that were predominantly African American in their population, but our focus was on inner-city schools. Now, maybe it changed over the years, but at the time that we saw the contribution that COBA could best make, it was in identifying the primary needs of inner-city schools. Now, at that time those inner-city schools were predominantly African American, but very rapidly, of course, they became more focused on Hispanic than African American.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the Black Education Commission [BEC] and how that was created and by whom?

Taylor

The Black Education Commission, the Mexican American Education Commission, the Asian American Education Commission--were those the three, or did they get a fourth one in there? No, I those were the three--came about because of community activists who came to the board and said, "You're not hearing us. You're not hearing what we're trying to tell you." The African American commission was the first one, but, of course, once they were established the Hispanics had to have their day, and then the Asians also. The commissions served a role in trying to get messages across to the board. In some cases, the effectiveness of the commissions, in my opinion, were completely relevant to who was the--what would they call it, was it the chairman of the commission? But the primary member of the education commission.

Taylor

When you had some people who felt that the best way to achieve some objectives was not so much to pound on the lectern, but to come up with constructive thoughts and to work with school-district people, I think they made some positive contributions. On the other hand, when they came and shouted and screamed, or as they did come into my office, my nice little office, with fifty people they try and crowd in, and to tell me that, "Blood will be on your hands if you don't do this," and so they weren't worth much of anything. I'm trying to think of some of the people, because there were some really good folks. I'm sorry, old age has caused me to lose my memory. Of course, that goes back, what, now almost forty years. No, not forty, come on. It goes back thirty years.

Stevenson

So the Black Education Commission and the others, the Mexican American Education Commissions, these were groups that were sanctioned by L.A. Unified. Is that right?

Taylor

They came about because the board said, "We authorize the identification of this commission," and I guess the district paid the person who was in charge. What were they called, the secretary of the commission? I'll have to get out an

old directory and see if I can find out what they called them, because they appeared as a specifically identified activity of the school district, and they appeared in the directory of the school district.

Stevenson

Okay. Also in terms of working with community groups that were interested in the achievement, particularly of African American children, can you recall some of your interactions with some of these groups that might have been memorable?

Taylor

I can think of individuals, but I can't think of individuals who significantly, in my estimation, represented groups. Unfortunately, so many of the activists out of the black community--let me modify that, some--some of the activists out of the black community I don't think ever had the best interest of African American kids at heart. They just wanted the platform and had other interests. Now, there were exceptions. Margaret Wright, very, very active and articulate, and I don't think I ever had any occasion to question her sincerity of what she was about. But I can think of three or four others who just liked the forum, who liked to be feeling they were in the spotlight, having their several times fifteen minutes of fame, so to speak and I'm not sure they did much of anything for themselves or for the school district. But that's not to say there were not people who were very active and very concerned. Oh, come on, what was Alice's name? "Sweet" Alice [Harris].

Stevenson

Harris.

Taylor

Harris? Yes, was wonderful. Margaret Wright. Again, I'm sure there were two or three others, but I can name some that I didn't think, but I wouldn't do that.

Stevenson

Okay. Maybe we could get back to the trajectory of your career. Now, you were deputy superintendent between what years and what years?

Taylor

I became deputy superintendent in 1972. I served till 1978. I then became associate superintendent for planning, and retired in 1982.

Stevenson

Okay. Maybe this would be a good-- [End of interview]

1.4. Session 4 (February 4, 2009)

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm completing an interview with Dr. James Taylor on February 4, 2009. Could you tell me about the background and the impetus for the Young Black Scholars Program?

Taylor

Yes. Spring of 1984, Winston Doby convened a group of people at UCLA. There was great concern about the fact that that year the number of African American students enrolling as freshmen at UCLA was exceedingly low. I don't know if it was an all-time low, but it was exceedingly low, and he brought together a group of people to see what could be done about the problem. And in the course of some group discussions, I suggested that one approach to addressing the problem would be to identify academically promising black students at about the ninth-grade level and then providing a program of support for them through high school graduation, with some kind of incentive award at the time of graduation if they met specific goals.

Taylor

There wasn't too much enthusiasm expressed at the meeting, but Winston asked me if I would write it up. So I wrote up the proposal. Winston felt it had merit, and we met and talked about strategies to do such a program, and we agreed that there was needed some kind of identifiable community-support factor. Winston called Dr. Warren Valdry, who was then president of the One Hundred Black Men and asked him if he would join us at a meeting. He did so, and again we outlined the proposal, and Warren enthusiastically said, "Yes, yes." As president of the One Hundred Black Men he would take the proposal to them and seek their enthusiastic support, which he did.

Taylor

We began in the academic year 1985 to focus our attention primarily on the Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD] and the Inglewood [Unified School] District, Compton involved also, Pasadena involved somewhat. Dr. Harry Handler was superintendent of the district at that time. Harry and I went back many, many years, and I asked him if he would loan us a district person to serve as director of the program. This would be a fully funded L.A. Unified Position. He agreed to that and there was a very outstanding college advisor at Los Angeles High School named Judy Mays, and we asked Judy to take on this responsibility, which she did for one year, and we began the program.

Taylor

Because at that time I had not been too far gone from the school district, I was able to probably not quite legally, but we were able to do it--go into junior high schools in the predominantly black area, [Samuel] Gompers [Junior High School], [John] Muir [Junior High School], [Horace] Mann [Junior High School], [John] Adams [Junior High School], any junior high that had a significant African American population. The illegal part was they let me examine the cumulative record cards. I identified students who evidenced a B average in academic classes. We then generated a letter of introduction to the program, which by now had been identified as Young Black Scholars. We tried several names before that, but couldn't come up with anything we liked. I think first of all we called it Young African American Academic Achievers, but that didn't have an acronym that was short, so YBS was generated out of that.

Taylor

Over the course of beginning in 1986 and continuing at least for the next couple of years, we enrolled about 2,000 black students. The objective of the program was to have these youngsters graduate from high school meeting University of California entrance requirements. Now, the program was not designed specifically, although it was certainly in mind, to have all these students go to UC campuses. But we knew that if they met the University of California entrance requirements, they probably would meet entrance requirements for any university in the country. Over the course of 1986, '87, '89, and completed in '90, we conducted on a monthly basis, seven months of the year, because it was always during the academic year, workshops,

workshops generally focused on subjects that these youngsters were in at that particular grade level.

Taylor

When they were tenth graders, we focused on algebra and geometry. Most of the students at that time were in algebra, which, of course, was too bad, because they should have taken their algebra in the ninth grade, but some were in geometry, and we would have workshops in that. Most of the students were taking Spanish, and we conducted Spanish-language workshops. My wife was a teacher of Spanish and at that time we were very active in the Ralph Bunche Scholarship Program at UCLA, and we had met a number of Latino students who had applied for scholarships and became acquainted with them, because it was just a wonderful experience for us. And my wife drafted, I guess, oh, almost a dozen of them and when we had the workshops one of the things--I'm digressing a little bit, but--

Stevenson

No, go ahead.

Taylor

One of the things my wife always said was, "Gee, if we could just help these kids with pronunciation they would feel more at ease." So we had our workshops at L.A. High and a junior high in Gardena. Anyway, I guess the attendance at those was 200, maybe 300, and after an additional part of what she conducted, she'd have the students break into little groups, and she had indicated to the Latino UCLA students who were helping us, "Focus on pronunciation. If you do nothing else, and they can end up after an hour improving their pronunciation." I say that because they were fun workshops. The kids seemed to enjoy them, and I sure enjoyed watching them. We did a workshop when they were in eleventh grade on chemistry, did it at Southwest College, and at that time Linda Ferguson was our director, and her father was a chemistry teacher at the community-college level. That was a fun one, too.

Taylor

What else did we do on an academic area? Oh, we did a workshop in composition. I'm trying to remember who did that one. I think it was at UCLA.

Winston was tremendously supportive on this thing. He made available to us resources I'm sure underwritten by UCLA, that were really terrific. And Warren was extremely supportive all the way along, encouraging, providing some limited financial resources. But the important thing was that he had generated an awareness in certain parts of the community anyway, that this was a program and what it was trying to do.

Taylor

One of the primary objectives in this, in addition to the academic achievements, the SAT scores and the GPAs, was to give some indication to those young scholars that they were not alone, that there were other African American kids, that we could somehow raise the image of an academically achieving high school student who was black. It was an enjoyable four years. I never had a moment when I didn't feel encouraged by this experience. I had by that time been some years away from actually being on the high school scene, and the high school students, in spite of whatever problem may occur, always reassured me they're basically good kids who had great futures if we could just help them go in that direction.

Taylor

At the conclusion of the program, 1990, I call this the first cadre, first group--it's gone on, of course, since then, but I left the program in 1990--we had enrolled something in excess of 2,000 students. Our best effort at collecting appropriate data--because periodically along the four years we'd ask them to send in grade reports. The best estimate that we could come up with was that 863 or something like that had indeed met the requirements, which were a combined SAT score of 950--remember, at that time the SAT score total was just 1200--and a GPA of 3.2. We felt that that was an encouraging response. The young people went all over the place, from local colleges, UCLA. Winston, of course, was tremendous there. He generated 1,000--oh, we had promised the kids that if they met these goals, they would be subsidized with a $1,000 scholarship, and Winston must have provided sixty or seventy of them from UCLA, and because of his associates in other campuses of the UC system, youngsters went to [University of California] Santa Barbara, to [University of California] Berkeley. Those two are the ones that come mostly to mind. I don't

remember if there was anybody at [University of California] Davis. I think we had a couple of people go to UCSD [University of California, San Diego].

Taylor

Anyway, it was tremendous in supporting their--many of the black colleges and universities, again through Winston's influence, when these youngsters applied, and Winston, I guess, had somehow or other alerted them, they also provided a $1,000 scholarship. Now, for those who went elsewhere, there I was a little bit disappointed, because I'm not quite sure that the Hundred Black Men met the commitment they had made, which was when a scholarship wasn't available through some university, they would pick up the balance. But they did, they helped, so I have no misgivings about that.

Taylor

Overall it was just a fine experience. One of the things we did, we took I guess about the best, what we considered among our top thirty, and Pepperdine University loaned us some facilities over a weekend, and we called upon African American professionals to come and serve as scholarship interviewers. My wife and I had by that time, I guess, been on the Bunche Committee at UCLA for ten years, so we used the questions that we used to use when we interviewed candidates for the Bunche scholarships, and the outgrowth of one of those, I'm almost sure, was a kid went to Yale [University], and I'm not quite sure what some of the other outcomes were. But overall, it was one of the most satisfying experiences of my life. I know the program continues to today. It still exists. I have not maintained much close contact with it, and that's about it.

Stevenson

Any guess on how many young people over the years have actually gone to college as a direct result of the program?

Taylor

Of the 863 I can't give a number, but a sizable--I mean, I'd like to say 100 percent. No. As a culmination activity in the program, Linda Ferguson, who was just a very fine person, got the amphitheater at Universal Studios, and we had a culminating program, and it was a lot of fun because each student who

had completed--and we invited them to come--was called to the stage, and it was a little, simple process. They'd come to the stage, their name would be called. They'd walk to a microphone in the center of the stage and they'd say where they were going, and it was the first time I'd ever heard the experience--come on, the black college in Atlanta for men?

Stevenson

Morehouse [College]?

Taylor

Morehouse. The first time I'd ever heard the experience when these young men would walk up and say, "I'm going to be a Morehouse man." They didn't say where I'm going. They'd just say, "I'm going to be a Morehouse man," and everybody understood that meant Morehouse. I was always fascinated by that. Oh, I know we had kids at Howard [University], Bethune, a couple of Texas colleges. I was always impressed by the number of our kids that selected black colleges and universities. But I wish I had a definitive number; I just don't. But it was a good experience.

Stevenson

Were there spin-offs or shall I say other community groups that created similar programs as a result of the success of Young Black Scholars?

Taylor

One of the spin-offs came about through the One Hundred Black Men, because out of the Young Black Scholars Program there was--I guess there are organizations of a Hundred Black Men in numerous metropolitan areas, and the One Hundred Black Men in New York identified a similar program, not exactly the same kind, but a similar kind of program, and Warren said there were other One Hundred Black Men who, using this as kind of a motivation, generated some kind of scholarship-support programs.

Stevenson

Could you speak a little bit about raising the awareness of how important education is among African Americans? I think Young Black Scholars went a long way to doing that, but still, every now and then education is somehow

seen as not cool, and how do we get past this? I think it's a lot better now, but how do you get across the importance of education to our young people?

Taylor

Well, I had a point of view that sometimes people criticized me for, but it was my point of view. I guess I tended to adhere to the W.E.B. DuBois comment about the top talented 10 percent [Talented Tenth], and I liked the idea that we're going to take every kid and we're going to shoot him up there, but I didn't think it was realistic. I thought especially considering where we started, that our best bet was to identify the most talented kids we could and just push them as hard as we could. Something an old associate of mine remarked to me, "If you take this group of kids and you just push them hard, and people would say they're the cream of the crop." But he said, "You know what happens? When that cream moves up, some other cream moves behind it." And that's the approach that I've kind of adhered to, yes, even to some degree today.

Taylor

I think that as early on as we can identify talented, academically talented African American kids, somehow or other we ought to put a tag on them and just be sure we're tracing exactly what they're doing. So for me, the idea was to somehow generate a situation in which these talented youngsters did not feel isolated, did not feel condemned, so to speak. Part of our Young Black Scholars Program was that it was not unusual for us to have twenty, twenty-five, maybe more than that, kids at a single high school, all Young Black Scholars, and we encouraged them within their own group to formulate study groups.

Taylor

Winston once pointed out to us that a study done at the University of California, Berkeley, about why did Asian students do so well in first-year calculus--they examined and they examined, and the only thing they found that was significantly different from others was that the kids studied together. There was this peer support. And so in the Young Black Scholars Program we tried to identify for students a little outline of a plan where, "Identify other students who are taking geometry that year, and form a group of three or four

and study together." And we gave them some study hints and that sort of stuff. We sent the kids a lot of paper, and maybe sometimes too much, and every time they'd come to one of our study groups, we always tried to have something in the way of a little souvenir.

Taylor

Walt Hazzard at that time had some kind of affiliation with the Dodgers, and I remember on one of our sessions he brought us just boxes of Dodgers' socks, you know, the athletic kind that had Dodgers written on them? So we'd give gifts like that. We had another friend who was a former board member named Tom Bartman, and Tom had some kind of identification with a stationery store, and he gave us boxes of nice, yellow, number-two pencils with an eraser on it. They were very minor, small things, but we tried to give the kids something in the way of a material item each time they came.

Taylor

When we had one of our workshops at UCLA, and this was one of the nicest days that I remember, we had purchased--Linda did this, and I never figured out how she did it, because we didn't have a big budget. We bought them windbreakers, and they were gray windbreakers. Our colors were gray and maroon, and in maroon right here it said Young Black Scholars. And I don't know, maybe that day we had 400 kids, and she had 400 jackets and they all wore their jackets. It was that kind of an experience.

Stevenson

Okay. I'd like you to tell me about serving on the national committee of Upward Bound, and could you for people not familiar say a little bit about the background of Upward Bound itself, that program itself and how it was formed, its background?

Taylor

Well, I can only give limited information, but the program, of course, was designed to provide through usually summer programs at local colleges, academic support to selected minority students. This again was kind of in synch with this concept of the talented 10 percent, because these students were identified by having local schools recommend to the Upward Bound

people students who could benefit by such an experience. I taught one session of Upward Bound one summer at Occidental College. What did I teach? Geometry, I guess it was. It was some academic math subject, which is the only thing I could teach. It was a national program. I'm not even sure that it is prevailing today, but that was the basic concept. Identify, or actually have schools identify promising students and recommend them to the Upward Bound program.

Stevenson

What year were you involved in the program?

Taylor

I was involved in terms of just kind of the process of identification when I was still with the district. The one summer I taught I had retired, so it would have been about '83 or '84.

Stevenson

Okay. Also, could you tell about your role in the underrepresented minority outreach program, scholarship program at UCLA and your involvement with that?

Taylor

That was primarily the Ralph Bunche Scholarship Program. Ralph Bunche was my wife's first cousin, so when, I don't know, somebody became aware of that, they invited her to become a part of the committee that reviewed applications, and I guess since I went along all the time, well, then they eventually invited me to be part of this, too. We participated in the program, both of us, for about ten years. It was a fine experience. You read these scholarship applications. At that time you probably would read maybe a hundred, narrow it down to about twenty that you would interview, do the interview process, then when they were selected be on hand to shake their hand when they were awarded the scholarships. In those days, the scholarships were somewhat limited, ranging from $1,000 to 5,000, but those who were identified as winners in the Ralph Bunche Scholarship Program then also became eligible to participate in the university-wide freshmen scholarship

program, in which we were giving $10,000 scholarships. We met some very fine young people, and it was just a very enjoyable experience.

Stevenson

For those not familiar with Dr. Bunche, could you tell me what the importance is of having this particular scholarship named after him?

Taylor

Dr. Bunche has been frequently recognized as a UCLA graduate of significant importance. Bunche Hall--I'm sure there are other Bunche items at the university. I think the identification of the scholarship in his name was pointedly designed to attract applications from minority students. The Ralph Bunche Scholarship is identified as a scholarship for underrepresented minority students. Caucasian students don't apply. And I suspect his name on that scholarship was an effort to identify it in that specific direction.

Stevenson

You've been involved with the UCLA Alumni Association. Could you tell me about your involvement with that group over the years?

Taylor

Very limited. I served for one year on the UCLA Alumni Association board of directors. In terms of identification with UCLA, that has fallen primarily to two of our offspring who graduated from UCLA, our son Peter [Taylor] and our daughter Nancy [Taylor]. So I can talk about their involvement more than I can talk about mine. Peter was president of the UCLA Alumni Association. As that post, he served for a year on the University of California Board of Regents. He later became chairman of the UCLA Foundation, which is the primary fundraising organization for UCLA. We always laugh about it, because when he was Alumni Association president, we used to make contributions, all this sort of thing, so when he became president of the UCLA Foundation, why, I said, "Peter, Peter, you're going to motivate me. I'm going to write you a check for $50." And he looked at me and laughed and he said, "Dad, if you'll add four more zeros to that, we'll look forward to it." Because the foundation primarily is looking for the big donors. Peter served in that capacity for two years. He

still is on some kind of advisory board for the UCLA Foundation and other things.

Taylor

You spoke of the Alumni Association's effort, commensurate effort about enticing new students to come to UCLA who had been awarded. Peter was the initial effort, two years ago, in raising 1.5 million dollars to subsidize that program. Nancy's primary involvement--the College of Letters and Science has a chair, the Ralph Bunche Chair for International Studies, or something like that. There was a problem three years ago in getting funding. Nancy, who is involved as an attorney in the entertainment industry, generated some people to help develop a little twelve-minute video about the Ralph Bunche Chair that was used as a primary fundraiser for that. Nancy still serves in some capacities, I think, in the scholarship program at UCLA, as does Peter. They both are still active there. But since I retired, well, actually, since my wife died and we were no longer involved in the Bunche committee, my personal involvement at UCLA has been very limited.

Stevenson

I see. Looking back on your career in L.A. Unified, two things. One, reflecting back, what were some of your most memorable and significant involvements, things that you look back on proudly?

Taylor

That's easy. I enjoyed teaching junior high and senior high. I confess I look back with a little bit of pride on my ten years at Poly[technic] High School. I went into a school that was 96 percent white, 1-1/2 percent Asian, 1-1/2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent African American. I think the people in administration headquarters downtown were very apprehensive about the possibility of putting a black administrator in an all-white high school. They did not exist. The only other black administrator I think at the time was Isaac McLellan at Jordan High School. I felt that in the ten years I spent there it wasn't so much what I did. I guess I just in a sense inherited a wonderful situation. I was there because the man who was principal of the school, Robert Lewis, had an interesting background himself. He had served as principal at a junior high school, middle school that no longer exists, called

Lafayette Junior High [School]. And Lafayette Junior High, all I remember was that it was located very close to the Coca-Cola plant in Central, not in South Central, in Central L.A. And I don't know whether that somehow had impact upon Robert Lewis' attitude toward race, but because the downtown office was so apprehensive about assigning me to Poly, they had called him and said, "Would you be willing to accept a black--," the position then was boys' vice principal. And he said, "I don't care what his color is. Just tell me if he's any good." And I got the job.

Taylor

It was an interesting situation and one I confess at which I had some concerns about how was I going to be accepted in what was essentially an all-white high school. I guess after I was there for three or four weeks, I realized it wasn't an issue, because he had set that tone. This was not an issue. As time went along, Mr. Lewis gave to me more and more responsibilities, which were primarily principal responsibilities, plant management, teacher selection. One that I enjoyed most of all probably was building the master program with the head counselor. That was always a lot of fun. When he was about to retire, he wrote the downtown office, and I'd say that he gave me these responsibilities, because in his letter to the downtown office he said, "For my last two years I've done essentially nothing as principal. I gave all the responsibilities to Jim Taylor." He was writing them to say that--I had by that time been identified as I guess the number-two person on what was then the principals' promotion list, and he said, "If you don't appoint him to this principalship," he said something, something, something, I don't know. But he did quite a campaign of getting community support. He even had the faculty write letters. All of this I was unaware of until after he retired, he gave me some of the correspondence.

Taylor

But I'd like to think that the ten years at Poly High were maybe the most productive years I had in the thirty-three years I was with the district. I'm sure I'm biased. I'd almost want to say that Poly High in that period of ten years was a great high school. I can say without reservation it was a good high school, and I'd almost like to say it was a great high school. We had tremendous community support, students enthusiastic. [laughs] I got a little

irritated one year. Some radio station, a disc-jockey kind of radio station, they did a contest as to who was the most popular principal in the Valley, and gosh, when was this? This had to be about '62. Because the way you voted was you bought a penny postcard, and you wrote the principal's name on it, and you sent it to the radio station. And I wasn't aware of all this, but the students would come to school and the teachers would let them, and the kids who were really the main ones behind this, they would come with a stack of fifteen or twenty penny postcards, and the kids would buy them and sign them. So I won the contest. And it's nothing that I think was worth putting in the newspaper, but I say that only because I felt such a good relationship with those students, and it only served to underscore my confidence in high school young people, if you can kind of give them a chance to feel involved and participating.

Taylor

The next most satisfying experience, I guess, would have been the year I spent at [Alain] Locke High School. I was principal at Poly High, just feeling great and things were going along beautifully, and I got a call from the associate superintendent in charge of senior high schools, a guy named Bob Kelly, and he said, "Jim, we've got the new Alain Locke High School opening in South Central L.A. We'd like to assign you there as principal." And I was interested because he said, "We'd like to." Usually they're going to say, "You've been transferred." And I realize why he said it that way. About a year earlier, Roosevelt High School had been in some degree of turmoil, and there was a Mexican American principal named Bill Zazueda. I remember Bill. He was principal at Birmingham High School in the Valley, and they called and said, "Bill, we're going to transfer you to Roosevelt." And Bill said, "No, you're not. I love it here at Birmingham High School in the Valley. I'm not going." And he didn't.

Taylor

So I guess that was why when Bob Kelly called me and didn't say, "You're going to Locke High School," he said, "We'd like to transfer you to Locke High School," at that very moment I knew I was going to go, but I said, "Well, Bob, can I call you back tomorrow?" So I came home, talked with my wife Jane, and we kind of laughed because she said, "I know you're going to go. I know you're

going to go," and I did. This was at a time following--you call it the Watts rebellion, I call it the Watts incident, whatever you want to call it, and there was tension, but some of the community people there demanded that they assign an African American, a black principal, and I was uppermost on the list. I'm trying to remember who else was--were there other black principals in 1967? I guess Sid[ney] Thompson was a principal then. Yes, Sid was a principal then, but I'm not sure there were any others. The flurry of black secondary school principals began about 1968, '69.

Taylor

So, I was assigned to Locke. That was where I became acquainted with Winston Doby. Winston was a teacher of mathematics at Fremont High School, and when we opened Locke we had the right to--because most of our students were going to come from Fremont [High School], Washington [High School], and Jordan [High School], we were kind of in the middle of that kind of a triangle--we had the right to request certain teachers. In fact, I knew about Winston because when Winston made application to teach mathematics in the Unified School District, I was on the committee that approved teaching assignments and actually tried to get Winston to come to Poly, because I was principal of Poly at that time, but he didn't. So Winston was kind enough to come to Locke and serve as our math department chairman at that time. But it gave me a chance to really get to know Winston and, I guess, for Winston and I to become very good friends, as we are today. That's an aside. Anyway, so we opened Locke High School with some outstanding teachers.

Taylor

Okay, let me go back to Poly. There were numerous people who said Poly was such a great school, and they would say, "Great leadership." That wasn't--I had the best faculty I could ever want. I used to tell students who were having a problem with the teacher, and they'd come in and I'd say, "George, you've got six teachers. Two of them are outstanding, three of them are great, no, two of them are great and one of them is good. Now, that last one, not so good. But," I said, "part of your learning experience is to learn to get along with it." Well, at Locke not nearly as strong a faculty, but that's understandable because it was new, a few outstanding teachers, yes, there were some outstanding

teachers, some of them good, unfortunately, too many of them just satisfactory, and some that shouldn't be teaching probably. Those were the ones that from Jordan, Washington, and Fremont the principal would say, "Okay. You took Winston Doby? You're going to take George Smith."

Taylor

The one major concession that the downtown office gave me was they let me have a third vice principal, and the three vice principals I had were just outstanding. One was Louis Johnson, who later became principal at Jefferson High, and after he left the school district he went up to Sacramento and became an administrator at a community college in Sacramento. The girls' vice principal was Marge O'Hanlon, who--Winston was black. Marge O'Hanlon was white and was a retired lady Marine Corps major, I think something like that. She was terrific. The third one was the one which when they gave me the position was a man named John McMahon. I told John when I asked him if he'd join us, I said, "John, there are going to be three vice principals. Louis Johnson is going to handle all boys' discipline and other things. Marge O'Hanlon is going to handle all girls' discipline and other things. All I want you to do is to focus on instruction, and if you get involved in a single discipline case, I'm going to try to get you fired." And he smiled and said, "Fine."

Taylor

I say that to underscore that I think our opening year at Locke was very successful. We had only one major incident. I felt that the level of instruction was about as good as we could get in a first-year effort, and I credit John McMahon for that, because if a teacher said, "I need a piece of chalk," boom [snaps fingers], teacher had it. If the teacher said, "I want to take these kids on a field trip," pow, John arranged it. If a teacher said, "I need a certain set of textbooks," it was the kind of thing that I felt every school ought to have. They ought to have an administrator whose sole responsibility is instruction. We say to the principal, that's your responsibility. The principal's got too much other crud to deal with. Here I am, I'm digressing. I haven't done this for a long time.

Taylor

But again, the first most satisfying experience had to be Poly High. Second most satisfying experience was teaching, especially at the high school level.

The third most-satisfying experience was Locke High. The year went by. We opened well, had good people doing some just great stuff, and it's interesting, because the people who were doing the great stuff didn't stay there very long. They got picked up and went elsewhere. I remember Roger Dash was kind of our special coordinator of activities, and Roger ended up going to--oh, one of the things Roger did was coordinate a program with Cal State L.A., where we got student teachers from there, and Roger ended up going to Cal State L.A. and serving in some kind of capacity there. But that would be my third most satisfying experience.

Taylor

Then when you get beyond that, I didn't enjoy downtown. I worked with some wonderful people, oh, just terrific folks, but I didn't like the political atmosphere. I didn't like the fact that the quality of board membership, though they were people whose character I don't want to question or anything of that nature, but they weren't people who had the perspective of what's good for the school district that other board members had. I can remember board members that I thought were just tremendous, Georgiana Hardy, Art Gardner, Hugh Willett, I guess some of the other names I just can't remember. So the downtown experience, though I treasure the association with some just outstanding people, I'd rank fourth among the satisfying experiences in thirty-three years with the school district.

Stevenson

One follow up, do you think your success at Poly had any influence on the district placing more black vice principals and principals?

Taylor

Unquestionable. No question about it. I think that fact that things went so well at Poly reduced their apprehension and concern about sending minority administrators into all-white schools. There's no doubt of that in my mind.

Stevenson

Also, could you tell me about other community organizations or other groups you were involved with that we've not covered in the interview that you'd like to add?

Taylor

I don't think of any offhand. There were a lot of community organizations. I don't even think some of them still exist. Southwest Central Community Organizations or something like that, that was primarily at Locke High School. When I was out at Poly, there were just the kind of run-of-the-mill things, Optimist Club. I served on an advisory committee for what was then called the Metropolitan Hospital, doesn't exist anymore. It was in Panorama City. I can't think of anything that comes to mind right immediately.

Stevenson

Okay. Anything else you'd like to add to the interview that was not covered, before we close?

Taylor

Only that I guess I would think out of the Poly High experience I think I grew a lot, a lot in terms of understanding what high schools--I mean, I have to focus. When I say schools, I'm talking about high schools, because I didn't have that experience at the elementary level. Just a renewed confidence in the ability of public education to meet the demands of society. I know there are tremendous problems being faced now, and people sometimes say to me, "Aren't you glad you're not in it now?" And my reaction is, "At eighty-two years of age, you're right, I'm glad I'm not in it. But if I were forty, I'd like to be back in it, because I just think there are things that can be done." The end. That's it.

Stevenson

Okay. And lastly, looking back on your thirty-some years' experience in the district, related to what you were saying about what's happening today, the challenges facing public education, what lessons could be taken from your experience or from what happened during those years that could be applied today so that school districts are not reinventing the wheel?

Taylor

I think I'd mentioned this earlier. The ingredient that I think is most absent in the approach of school districts, primarily urban school districts, is the failure to have parents and community and educators recognize the significance of

the responsibility of the learner to learn. By the time youngsters have reached middle-school age, we ought to be emphasizing to them, "School is your job." I used to say to some students when I was at Poly, on rare occasions when I maybe had a severe discipline problem, "George, I really hope you enjoy school here at Poly. But I want you to know, that's not my primary concern. I don't care whether you really enjoy it or not. You have a job, and you're to do your job, and we'll try to do ours."

Taylor

And I feel that in all the discussions that transpire, and they're important discussions, improving the quality of teachers, improving facilities, generating standards, and all of that is extraneous in a sense to the student, that nobody says, "Now, let's sit down with the students, and you sign a contract. You sign a contract you're going to do four things. Number one, you're going to come to school regularly. Number two, you're going to try. I didn't say grade-point average, I said you're going to try. Number three, you're going to at all times respect the authority of the teacher." It's okay, I've had teachers like this at every school I've been in, where the guys want to wear nice open shirts, and they want the kids to call them by their first name, not Mr. Smith but George or Sam or whatever. I don't believe in that, but as long as they respect the authority of teachers. "And the last item is, you'll do nothing on a school campus that will jeopardize the health or safety of anyone on that campus." They sign that contract, and the parent signs a contract. "If you live up to the contract, we're going to help you in every way we can. If you don't live up to the contract, you will not attend," what I call, "a contract school. We're going to find another kind of educational experience for you."

Taylor

And I don't mean throwing them out on the street, because the other educational experience is one where you concentrate a lot of support factors. But I like that approach because I used to say to teachers, "If I remove from your classroom every kid that's given you any backtalk, that's just coming and sitting in class and says, 'I'm not going to write that essay,' if I get all those kids out of there, don't you tell me you can't make those kids achieve any kind of reasonable goal." I used to do that so--you know, teachers would say, "I can't teach these kids, because I've got all these kinds of problems." And sometimes

there's a lot of truth to that. Now, how did I get off on this? You told me, what would I like to see?

Taylor

I'd like to see two kinds of schools established. I call them a contract school--this is secondary level, not elementary. Secondary means middle school and high school. Contract schools and non-contract schools. I've illustrated what the contract school is. Kid signs, parent signs, and if they live up to it, boy, you're going to give them all the support you can. The non-contract kid, sometimes non-contract not of his own fault. The kid whose parents say, "I can't have my kid going to school every day, because he has to stay home and babysit some of the kids." The kid whose parents aren't even there. The kid whose home is a drug location, a crack location. There are all kinds of reasons why--and then there's always that there's just a kid who's just totally belligerent. There are all kinds of reasons why they can't live up to the contract, and all I'm saying is, "If you don't live up to the contract, then you go to a non-contract school, because your presence in the contract school is deteriorating, is distracting from the learning experience of all the other kids."

Taylor

Now, what happens in the non-contract school? First of all, they're small, maybe a hundred kids per location. Now, that doesn't mean that at any one location you only have a hundred kids, because you've got massive buildings, but you can separate into essentially individual little schools. A hundred kids, probably no more than a hundred, and four teachers. And what's the curriculum? At the high school level it's simple, math, history, probably not much science because you don't have labs, but those two. Oh, math, history, English, that's the curriculum. They are classes maybe of one and a half hours duration, in the morning primarily.

Taylor

Now, what else is, though, at that school? That's where you've got a full-time nurse or health-service person, serving not just that one hundred kids, but this one hundred kids and this one hundred kids and this one hundred. You have a full-time what we used to call child-welfare and attendance supervisor. If that kid's not in school, go out there and see what the situation is in the home. You

probably have a liaison with juvenile police, because some of these kids are going to have problems that you need some kind of law-enforcement support. You have concentrated there as much support service as you can, to try and get those one hundred kids back in shape.

Taylor

Now, are they there forever? No. The moment, the time they demonstrate a better pattern of attendance, an understanding of their responsibility to try, they can work their way back into the regular high school. Well, why would they ever want to get back into the regular high school? Because that's the only place where there's coeducational activities, sports, choir, music, other kinds of things, and that's the only road they're going to have if they're trying to do some post-high-school educational experience. They don't graduate from a non-contract high school. The non-contract high school is focused on one thing, trying to get the kids' heads screwed on right. There you are. Now, take that and bury it. [laughs]

Stevenson

Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for this interview.

Taylor

Alva, as we conclude this series of discussions, interviews, I want the record to show you've been very kind. You've been very patient. You've been very understanding, and an old man appreciates it. Thank you very much.

Stevenson

Thank you. [End of interview]

Date: