

BLACK LEADERSHIP IN LOS ANGELES:
RUTH WASHINGTON

Interviewed by Ranford B. Hopkins

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: August 12, 1914, Salina, Kansas.

Education: Public schools, Denver, Colorado, and Kansas City, Kansas; Emily Griffith Opportunity School, Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles Unified School District Metropolitan Skills Center.

Spouse: Leon H. Washington, Jr., 1940.

CAREER HISTORY:

Legal secretary, Kansas City, Kansas, 1934-40.

Photographic retoucher and co-owner, Avalon Photographers, Los Angeles, 1940-48.

Business Manager, Los Angeles Sentinel, 1948-74.

Publisher, Los Angeles Sentinel, 1974-90.

AFFILIATIONS:

Black Women's Forum.

Iota Phi Lambda.

National Negro Newspaper Publishers Association.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Ranford B. Hopkins, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., M.A., Ph.D. candidate, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Vernon Branch-Leon H. Washington, Jr., Memorial Library for Tape I; and her office at the Los Angeles Sentinel for Tapes II-V.

Dates, length of sessions: July 5, 1984 (64 minutes); July 11, 1984 (45) ; August 29, 1984 (46); September 5, 1984 (20); April 2, 1985 (53).

Total number of recorded hours: 3.80

Persons present during interview: Washington and Hopkins.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

In preparing for this interview, Hopkins reviewed photographs and files at the Los Angeles Sentinel, the Sentinel's anniversary issue, Sentinel 50, and his own research on his doctoral dissertation, "Growth of the Black Community in Los Angeles from 1890-1930."

The interview followed a chronological outline, beginning with Washington's childhood and education, continuing through her marriage and photography career, ending with her management of the Los Angeles Sentinel.

Major topics covered include the urbanization of blacks, Leon H. Washington, Jr.'s political activism, the evolution of the Los Angeles Sentinel, and Ruth Washington's religious interests.

EDITING:

Program staff edited the interview. They checked the verbatim manuscript against the original recording, edited for punctuation, paragraphing and spelling, and

verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

The edited manuscript was sent to Washington in September of 1985. She died before reviewing the transcript, and thus some of the proper names were never verified.

Steven J. Novak, editor, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, interview history, and index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 5, 1984

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, when and where were you born?

WASHINGTON: I was born in Salina, Kansas.

HOPKINS: Salina.

WASHINGTON: August 12, 1914. At that time we had forty-eight states, and Salina was the middle of the United States. I was born near the Tenth Cavalry--not far. You see, there was Salina and Junction City; no, Salina, Abilene--that's where the Eisenhower [Presidential Library] is--then Junction City and Fort Riley. The Tenth Cavalry was at Fort Riley--all within twenty miles.

HOPKINS: Can you tell me something about your parents? Let's start with your mother, what was your mother's maiden name?

WASHINGTON: Boswell.

HOPKINS: Boswell, and her first name?

WASHINGTON: Oma, Oma Boswell [Bromel]. My family came from Tennessee.

HOPKINS: Both father and mother?

WASHINGTON: No, my mother's family. They left Tennessee over a hundred years ago, I imagine. They settled into Kansas, which was a free state. See, Missouri was a slave state; Kansas was your free state.

HOPKINS: Did they leave Tennessee looking for freedom?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: So they were slaves at one point?

WASHINGTON: Yes, that's right.

HOPKINS: I see.

WASHINGTON: They all came from Memphis, Tennessee, but it wasn't named Memphis then, it was called Waldersville; then later they named it Memphis, Tennessee.

HOPKINS: Do you remember, or did your parents talk about, when they came to Kansas?

WASHINGTON: I don't remember just when, but I would imagine it would be close to two hundred years [ago]; some of them [my relatives] were "up there" in age then.

HOPKINS: When your parents arrived in Kansas, do you know what your mother did for a living?

WASHINGTON: Yes. I come from a family of fine cooks. My mother was a fine cook and also all my relatives. I had some that worked for the Pillsbury [Company] flour people. Maggie and my mother worked for all the well-to-do people in Kansas.

HOPKINS: So when she arrived, she worked for wealthy people as a cook.

WASHINGTON: That's right.

HOPKINS: Did she have sisters and brothers?

WASHINGTON: Yes, she had sisters and brothers, and they did the same thing. But you see, my mother was a little

girl when she left Tennessee. See, my mother passed in 1977, and she was close to ninety.

HOPKINS: Could she read and write?

WASHINGTON: Oh yes, very, very well read, and [she] could write better than all three of us girls. She was very alert, even in her passing.

HOPKINS: Did she have a formal education?

WASHINGTON: No, in those days they went to school and that's it--then they worked.

HOPKINS: So she went to elementary school?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: And all this in Kansas, I suppose?

WASHINGTON: Kansas, yeah.

HOPKINS: Did they move around in Kansas, or did they--?

WASHINGTON: Oh no, they moved around; that's why I got to travel a lot.

HOPKINS: Well, tell me, from as early as you can remember, where did your mother first live, and follow her life, if you can. I know it's a long time ago--

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes. And I'm a person that's sad, but I can't live in the past. My mind is always working forward. If you were talking to my mother, she could tell you the most wonderful history in the world. She had a mind of the past. She kept up with old relatives and everything. But my mind, from a child up, has always been

ahead of myself.

HOPKINS: Okay. Well, tell me about your father.

WASHINGTON: Now, my father came from Missouri. I was born in 1914, and then there was a war on. My father had to go to the First World War, and that was the end of him.

HOPKINS: Oh, he was killed there?

WASHINGTON: I don't even like to talk about it.

HOPKINS: Oh, okay. What was his name?

WASHINGTON: His name was Erasmus.

HOPKINS: And his last name?

WASHINGTON: Bromel.

HOPKINS: So your maiden name is Bromel?

WASHINGTON: Bromel. Ruth Maidrew Bromel.

HOPKINS: If this isn't too hard, can you tell me something about the kind of person your father was that you can remember perhaps?

WASHINGTON: I was very, very young, see, because I guess I was just almost born. See, the war was on. When was the First World War? It was in 19--

HOPKINS: No, you had it exactly right, 1914.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, that's right. And he had to go off. See, I was the youngest, I had two other sisters.

HOPKINS: All right, well, let's start with that. No brothers?

WASHINGTON: No brothers.

HOPKINS: What were your sisters' names?

WASHINGTON: My oldest sister is Bernadette [Bromel] Plummer (her name is Plummer now); she lives in Portland, Oregon. And my other sister's name is Naoma [Bromel] Cunningham; she lives in Kansas City.

HOPKINS: Do you remember what schools you attended in Kansas?

WASHINGTON: Well, I went to grade school; let's see, it was Dunbar [Elementary] grade school. Then I went to junior high in Denver, Colorado--Cole Junior High School. And you know what? I was very young in junior high school, but in the evenings I would go to this Emily Griffith Opportunity School. It's like our [Los Angeles Unified School District] Metropolitan [Skills Center] here. Can you imagine [me] going to school all day and then [to] want to go to school at night, [when I was] very young? I guess I was searching for something then and didn't realize it.

I always liked business, because my mother, she worked for people, and I had a cousin that raised me, helped me. You know, in those days, families were close together, close-knitted. If one had to work, someone was going to take care of you. And my cousin that helped raise me was more like a businesswoman. See, farm life-- She had her own business; I guess that's what I was so close to. So when she passed and I went to Colorado to school, I wanted

to take up business, even [while] going to junior high school, and that's what I did. I learned bookkeeping, early; I learned everything that you would do in an old business.

HOPKINS: Early on?

WASHINGTON: A very early age.

HOPKINS: So when you were, say, ten years old and you were at Dunbar Elementary School?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, I was going to just the elementary school.

HOPKINS: As you think back to that period, were you living in Salina?

WASHINGTON: Salina.

HOPKINS: Do you remember when you moved to Denver?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I moved to Denver in the thirties, early thirties. Because my cousin had passed, and I went to live with my auntie in Denver.

HOPKINS: I see. Now, when you were in elementary school, who was in your household?

WASHINGTON: Oh, Mrs. Taylor, my cousin, and my mother, you know; and then my mother later went to Kansas City to work.

HOPKINS: To work, I see.

WASHINGTON: I stayed in Salina (the young kid). Then as I got older and she [Mrs. Taylor] passed, I went to be with my auntie in Denver to go to school.

HOPKINS: And when did your mother pass?

WASHINGTON: Oh, my mother passed here in Los Angeles, in-- Well, she passed in Portland, Oregon, in '77.

HOPKINS: But then the person that was keeping you, is this Mrs. Taylor who passed?

WASHINGTON: When I was very young.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see. What was Salina--?

WASHINGTON: What was Salina like? Well, it was, I would say, a farming land. You see, Kansas is your wheat and meat country. See, every state in the United States God has blessed with food of some sort, and Kansas was your wheat and meat. We used to drive, and oh, I'd enjoy-- Well, in those days people just-- They weren't in airplanes, they were in cars, and they were going to the country all the time. It's beautiful. I can even envision the wheat, the fields of wheat. We used to watch them when we were kids at the elevators, you know, storing the wheat.

So it was what you call a nice, big, country town of well-to-do farmers. See, in those days, farmers were well-off. They had the land; they had the cattle; you're [in] cattle country-- See, Kansas City, Kansas, used to be your stockyards, then later on they moved it to Chicago. So all day long on the roads were cattle going to the stockyards or the men harvesting the wheat. It's like Russia wants our wheat. Where does wheat come from? Kansas.

HOPKINS: Were there many black farmers, that is, black farm owners?

WASHINGTON: Not too many, not too many; there were some.

HOPKINS: Did your mother mainly cook for wealthy whites?

WASHINGTON: Wealthy whites. If you lived in those days, that's what you did, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: Exactly, no choice.

WASHINGTON: And she traveled with them. She was very fine and cultured. That started from young in life, [being] around the right people. You see, the people there [Kansas], the people that she was around, were not like the people in the South with their help. They all loved my mother; she was a fine woman. She had these three girls, and my father had passed [during] the First World War. They kind of felt, I think, that they owed her something. In fact, I have some pictures I meant to bring you of my family. I'll show them to you when I get the albums. I'll bring them next time.

HOPKINS: Oh, I'd love to see them. Now, back to the elementary school years.

WASHINGTON: Oh, we got a good education.

HOPKINS: Good education.

WASHINGTON: Teachers were the boss. I always say that they were my second mother, because in the first place, you listened, and it was either "yes" or "no." Children were--

We were altogether different than the children today. I think that's why America is like it is.

Think of the older people, how they got their education and how they built America; they worked and their families worked. The education system was tops. Everyone wanted an education; they knew what school meant, whether it was high school, elementary school. That's why we have a great America, that's why we have history. Today we'll be making history in a new, different way--high technology--but see, in those days, everything was with the hands, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's true, from what I learned. The kids you played with, did you play with all black kids?

WASHINGTON: Oh, no. We played with all races; we went to our homes; we played with all races.

HOPKINS: And did you go to their homes?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes, yes, especially in Kansas.

HOPKINS: Now, when you were in high school--

WASHINGTON: I went to junior high in Colorado. Then I came back to Kansas City where my mother was and finished Sumner High School in Kansas City, Kansas.

HOPKINS: I see, so when you were in Colorado, you were in junior high school.

WASHINGTON: Junior high.

HOPKINS: Where in Colorado, in Denver?

WASHINGTON: Denver.

HOPKINS: All right. Do you recall what Denver was like in those days?

WASHINGTON: Beautiful. I think some of my happiest days were in Denver.

HOPKINS: Who did you live with in Denver?

WASHINGTON: My auntie.

HOPKINS: Is this Mrs. Taylor?

WASHINGTON: No, Mrs. Taylor passed, you remember, she passed in Kansas. I went to live with my mother's sister, in Denver, because I wanted to go to school.

HOPKINS: What was her name, do you recall?

WASHINGTON: Aza [Boswell].

HOPKINS: Okay. How was Denver different from Salina?

WASHINGTON: Well, I didn't find it too much different, because when I was living in Denver there weren't too many blacks there either, you know, so everything was mixed. We just got along fine. Denver-- That was in the early thirties, that was in the thirties. I went to a junior high. Then I finished high school in Kansas City; I went to Kansas City, where my mother was [and] finished Sumner High. I got to move around early in life and I kind of liked it. I enjoyed it because I was learning all the time.

HOPKINS: Did you find Kansas City different from Salina

and Denver?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes, because Kansas City was separate schools. Sumner High School was all black, but Denver was mixed. Kansas [state] was mixed.

HOPKINS: What about the teachers at Sumner?

WASHINGTON: [At] Sumner High, they were all black.

HOPKINS: Okay, so all the students and all the teachers were black.

WASHINGTON: Yes, all black.

HOPKINS: The principal was black as well?

WASHINGTON: [Yes,] but in my early years, they were not [black], they were white.

HOPKINS: Did you like Kansas City?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I liked Kansas City. My husband was from Kansas City, Kansas: Mr. [Leon H.] Washington [Jr.].

HOPKINS: Oh, did you meet him at this point?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I knew him there.

HOPKINS: Well, tell me about that--tell me about when you met him.

WASHINGTON: Lord, let's see, well, it's been so long.

See, I met Mr. Washington--[I'm] trying to think--he came by to see me in Denver, but I knew him before then. I'd been to Kansas City, I met Mr. Washington. Kansas, let's see-- Isn't it awful, I can't even remember. I know he came by Colorado and Denver when I was in [junior] high

school. Then I went back to Kansas City, going to school, and Mr. Washington was there. I knew him then; my mother knew Leon [Washington], oh golly, years before then. Then I came to California; I met him again in "C," in Colorado.

HOPKINS: You met him in Denver?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, he came by to see me in Denver. Then I went to Kansas City to live, and went to school; so I knew him there.

HOPKINS: Why did he come to see you in Denver?

WASHINGTON: Well, he knew my family, my mother. Oh, we were just talking, you know--young kids--weren't thinking about getting married. I didn't have it on my mind.

[laughter]

HOPKINS: Well, what about in Kansas? Were you sweethearts in Kansas?

WASHINGTON: Yes, we were sweethearts there. He wanted to get married, and I didn't want to get married.

[laughter] I wasn't ready, I guess, but it all worked out. I guess that's the way you meet, in high schools and schools, don't you?

HOPKINS: That's true, or in churches.

WASHINGTON: We got married out here. I mean, I came out to California in the forties to get married. We married in Yuma, Arizona. This is my wedding ring. He put it on my finger in 1940. It's never been off my finger. He paid

five dollars for it! [laughter]

HOPKINS: Boy, that's something.

WASHINGTON: Isn't that something? It's never been off my finger. So it was "gold," wasn't it?

HOPKINS: Yes, definitely. No signs of--

WASHINGTON: Isn't that nice?

HOPKINS: What was he doing while you were in high school in Kansas City?

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington was going to school. He was in school, going to school, just like I was. He went to Ashburn College in Topeka [Kansas].

HOPKINS: Oh, so he was in college?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, a freshman in college.

HOPKINS: What was he studying at that time?

WASHINGTON: Journalism.

HOPKINS: What did you do in high school, Mrs.

Washington? Did you participate in any sports or extra-curricular activity?

WASHINGTON: I didn't do too much in sports there. I did a lot in Denver. Very young I started out on sports in Denver: ice-skating, [I] did a little skiing, horses (loved them). In Kansas I did that, mostly ponies and horses.

HOPKINS: But in Kansas City you didn't participate?

WASHINGTON: No, I wasn't--

HOPKINS: What about any other activities or clubs?

WASHINGTON: Oh, well, let's see; I belonged to a little club in Colorado, I can't even think of the name of it now.

HOPKINS: That's fine. Well, can you think back? I hate to keep making you think back so far, but we're moving forward, as you can see--

WASHINGTON: Yeah, because see, I'm always-- My mind is ahead of me. You know, some people can think-- Oh, my mother had a beautiful memory.

HOPKINS: When you were in high school, did you have aspirations of doing something at that time?

WASHINGTON: Yes, all of my mind was on business. I don't know why.

HOPKINS: What did you want to do with business at that point? Can you remember?

WASHINGTON: Well, I always said I'd like to be in business for myself, because my cousin was in business in those days when I was very young in Salina. She had a little bakery, like. They had a barbecue stand where they sold barbecue. That was my cousin, Mrs. Taylor, before she passed.

Years ago there was no place for the black Pullman porters to stop. See, they ran on the Santa Fe [railroad] through Salina. If they had to stay over, they had no place, because they couldn't stay in a white hotel. So my cousin built-- Her home had eight, I think it was eight,

bedrooms. Then she built on next door to her, with seven. Like, the Monarchs, the Kansas City Monarchs, would come there. I was just a young girl. Well, they stayed at her place. Then if wealthy people were traveling with their chauffeurs, they paid her for them to stay there. Then the Pullman porters on the Santa Fe, they paid her for them to stop over. See, she was a businesswoman. That was years ago. You see, our people didn't have it easy in those days, but they were smart and sharp--they believed in work. Now, see how she created that business for herself? Then they all came from fine cooks in my family, and there you had a restaurant. All the farmers would come, buy all their pies. They couldn't even cook fast enough for them!

HOPKINS: White and black?

WASHINGTON: No, whites would come in, well, blacks would come there and eat too. I mean, you know, the farmers would come in and shop. Why, they would go down to her bakery there. It was beautiful homemade cakes and everything. I think that grew into me, you know. I must [have] wanted to do something. I was searching, didn't realize what I was searching for, because I always was trying to improve myself.

HOPKINS: What did you do after high school?

WASHINGTON: Well, now let's see--we're back at high

school--what did I do? I worked, and then I worked for a lawyer [named] Shackleford, in his office, typing.

HOPKINS: In Los Angeles?

WASHINGTON: No, that was in Kansas City yet.

HOPKINS: Oh, because there was a Shackleford here--oh, but that was a furniture dealer.

WASHINGTON: No, this is when, after high school, I worked for a lawyer Shackleford in his office, typing, you know.

HOPKINS: I see.

WASHINGTON: He was a black lawyer. Then I worked for, I don't remember. I know we always found jobs, extra jobs. But I worked for him, then I came out here. When I married Mr. Washington I went to Metropolitan school, even, because I still was taking up business--bookkeeping. Then finally, when I got out, I took up photography--I took up retouching and lighting.

HOPKINS: Okay. I want to get to that in a second. So you worked for a Mr. Shackleford?

WASHINGTON: He was an attorney, a black attorney.

HOPKINS: I see. So did you learn clerical skills in school?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes.

HOPKINS: Because you were business-oriented at the time?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes.

HOPKINS: What was Mr. Washington doing when you were

working for Mr. Shackelford?

WASHINGTON: Let's see, where was Mr. Washington? He came to California in '32. I guess Leon had come back to California, probably came back to California. He came to California in--he started his paper in '33--must have been in '32. He must have come out here in '32.

HOPKINS: Do you remember what year you graduated from high school, approximately?

WASHINGTON: 'Thirty-four, I think it was the class of '34.

HOPKINS: Class of '34. And how long did you work for Mr. Shackelford?

WASHINGTON: I worked for him till I came to California.

HOPKINS: And you came to California in--

WASHINGTON: 'Forty.

HOPKINS: Nineteen forty. All right, well, let's talk about that a bit. Why did you come to California?

WASHINGTON: To get married. [laughter]

HOPKINS: To get married. So the only place you'd lived after high school, then, was in Kansas City, where you worked for Mr. Shackelford.

WASHINGTON: That's it. See, I lived in Salina, then I went to Denver, then to Kansas City.

HOPKINS: Did you see Mr. Washington very much between the time you graduated from high school in 1934 and the time you came to Los Angeles in 1940?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I saw him.

HOPKINS: How did you see him?

WASHINGTON: Well, he would come to Kansas City.

HOPKINS: Did he have business matters--?

WASHINGTON: No, his family lived in Kansas City, Kansas.

See, Mr. Washington was from Kansas City, Kansas.

HOPKINS: You decided to come to Los Angeles because--

WASHINGTON: I was going to get married.

HOPKINS: When you arrived in Los Angeles, what did you do?

WASHINGTON: The first thing I did was-- I married in 1940. When was the war? The war was in '41, or what, '42?

HOPKINS: 'Forty-two for us, for the most part.

WASHINGTON: It was '42.

HOPKINS: Yeah, late '41, early '42.

WASHINGTON: I married and we lived in-- And I got a job working at a drugstore.

HOPKINS: Which drugstore?

WASHINGTON: At that time 103d Street was Watts, called Watts. I lived at Ninety-fifth [Street] and Baird [Avenue]. So I said, "Well, I'm going to get a job," because I just married. It was close to home, at a drugstore, and I worked at this drugstore.

Then I decided I wanted to get into photography, and I went into that, took it up--retouching. I wasn't so much bothered by the pictures, I wanted to do something

different--that's always been my life--so I wanted to take up retouching and lighting. I knew if you retouch a picture with good lighting, take good pictures, anyone can print your negative. Isn't that right?

HOPKINS: Yeah. Did Mr. Washington influence you to become interested in photography?

WASHINGTON: I became interested in photography through Mr. Washington, because he had a Jewish boy--man--that took pictures for him, Norman Seminar. So that's how we [Ruth Washington and Norman Seminar] got together. And I said to Norman, "I want to--" And Norman knew retouching, but he had kind of poor eyesight (and for retouching, you know, you've got to have real good eyesight). So I said, "Well, I'm going to work on that part of it and the lighting." Then I specialized in babies.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see; in portraits of babies, I see.

WASHINGTON: So we just worked together.

HOPKINS: You and--

WASHINGTON: Norman.

HOPKINS: Who taught you photography then?

WASHINGTON: Norman, and I took it up a little at the school.

HOPKINS: At Trade-Tech [Los Angeles Trade-Technical College]. Was it Trade-Tech then, when you--?

WASHINGTON: No, Metropolitan--I think that's what they

called it--with Norman and with other fine photographers. But, you know, it's just like I tell many of the children today: "When you really want to do something, it's not hard. You'll learn quick and you'll be perfect at it. Now, if you get into something, say, that your family wants you to be--a doctor--and you don't want to be a doctor, you won't be a successful doctor. Because it's not what you really desire." You'll go and do it. Like I know a family, and they had a son. The father was a doctor, and they wanted him to be a doctor, and he said he didn't want to be a doctor. He's a fine musician (I'm not going to call their names). His father insisted, and there was friction between the father and the mother about him being a doctor, walking in his [the father's] shoes. But, you know, the boy turned out to be one fine musician, and the family was just torn apart, I think. So I always say, "Do what you would like to do--"

HOPKINS: I'm certainly--

WASHINGTON: "--and you'll do well in it."

HOPKINS: Well, for the historical record it would be important for us to know what family that was, could you tell?

WASHINGTON: No, I'd rather just let that go.

HOPKINS: Okay. Mrs. Washington, when you arrived in Los Angeles, you and your husband lived, you said, at Ninety-

fifth Street and--

WASHINGTON: At 9514 Baird Avenue; that's not very far from 103d Street, which was Watts. It was beautiful, beautiful out there.

HOPKINS: I was going to ask you to tell me about the community.

WASHINGTON: Oh, the community was beautiful, 103d Street was beautiful; nothing but business, mostly white. It was a white drugstore that I worked in, the largest. I don't know, I just said, "I don't want to work for a lawyer, I think I'll go and get a job."

Then the war came on. I was scared. I wanted to go back to Kansas, because I told my husband, "They're going to bomb us off into the ocean." I was nervous, but I went on and changed my mind and started working for photography. I went into that and was in it five years, let's see: '48, '47, '46, '45, '44--'44, because I'd been going to school [previously].

HOPKINS: Did you know any Japanese people at the time of the war?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes. I had a man that worked for me, Charles Williams, and he was married to a Japanese girl.

HOPKINS: He worked for you.

WASHINGTON: He worked at the photography studio. He married a Japanese girl--he lives here, now--and they had

to go in the concentration camp.

HOPKINS: Both of them?

WASHINGTON: The mother and father--her mother and father. Then he went back to Kansas City (his father was a photographer there), and that's where he took his wife. Because see, what they did, they-- All Japanese went into-- what do you call them?--concentration camps, that they had out here.

HOPKINS: Resettlement camps.

WASHINGTON: Resettlement camps--whatever you call them now. Charles went back to Kansas City, and he had two children by her.

HOPKINS: And he took his wife with him to Kansas City?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: So she escaped having to go to--

WASHINGTON: Yes, to the camps, see.

HOPKINS: Did he ever come back to Los Angeles?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, they live-- Oh no, they're separated now. They have children, and he's married again. He has two fine children. They're Japanese mixed, you know, because he's colored. His father was a fine photographer in Kansas City--Mr. Williams. In fact, he took pictures of us three girls together.

HOPKINS: Did you think it was the right thing to do for the U.S. government to put the Japanese in the resettlement

camps at the time? You may think differently today, but at the time what did you think about it?

WASHINGTON: At the time I didn't think-- They didn't seem to be a threat so far as I could see it, because [of] me being close to Charles and his wife and his children--a little girl and little boy. They were small, and they used to come in my studio. I just loved them and played with them; they were so nice. Of course, I was really young, too, and thinking-- I didn't have "one way, other way" to say about it, because that really was the government's business, not mine.

When I read the Bible, and when you read the Bible, there's always been wars, nothing but wars. That's what it says, "There will be wars and rumors of wars." In biblical days, there was nothing but wars, isn't it right?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: It's gone on from the beginning of creation to today, it hasn't stopped: the First World War, your Second World War--but this "Third World War" no one will survive. We won't survive, because God has fixed it so that all nations have to depend on each other: see, oil is in the Mideast; diamonds and gold are in black Africa; the United States has fifty states of food--fifty states, I've been in them.

We could feed the world if we weren't so lazy. Just

like Russia doesn't grow wheat. They need our wheat, don't they, to survive? Other countries need certain things to survive. We need oil, even to fight a war, to survive. This gold, these diamonds, gold people wear, didn't come from the United States, it came from black Africa, isn't that right? Everything is gold today, and look at the people starving over there. Every state produces everything--we have wood here--we have everything.

So this "Third World War" will not be with pistols and guns, like the First World War. It won't be like the Second World War; this high technology can wipe man off. We're getting close to two thousand years, and the Bible tells us about two thousand years. We're in a hungry world today; we don't produce in this country like we used to. See, I came up in a working country, and my family ahead of that came up in a working country.

HOPKINS: What do you think changed it?

WASHINGTON: My family died in their nineties. I have two here now, in their nineties, almost a hundred, and their families were a hundred. I remember some of the family almost a hundred when I was a little girl. So you know my background!

We won't survive. Once they make a mistake and push that button, that's it.

Have you traveled much in the United States?

HOPKINS: Not that much in the United States. I've been to a couple of southern states; I've been to London, that's been the biggest thing for me.

WASHINGTON: I've traveled the United States, too, and I'm telling you, it is beautiful to see Iowa, corn; Idaho, potatoes; Wisconsin, cheese country; Tillamook, Oregon, cheese country; the Northwest (where my sister lives), fruit; Seattle, the best salmon in the world; on the East Coast, Boston, crab; all the good--

HOPKINS: Have you literally been to all fifty states?

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes. New York. Yes. The Carolinas is where your tobacco comes from.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

JULY 5, 1984

WASHINGTON: Well, come to think about it, the United States' education-- Why do the foreign students want to come over to the United States? Education. Isn't that right? Look at USC [University of Southern California], look at UCLA today, look at our trade techs, even our opportunity schools--look at all of them today. Why are they coming to the United States? Education has always been here. The United States was your education system for all of them to look forward to. Foreign students they'd let in-- I remember years ago, when they wouldn't let too many in, but you can see who's in school today--Iranians. This is your education. The United States has so much. And then we have that freedom of speech--we have freedom here--that so many countries don't have.

Really, when I was a young girl in Kansas, New York was first in education, California was second, and Denver, Colorado, was third; then your other states. New York used to be top, many, many years ago.

HOPKINS: How do you see it now?

WASHINGTON: Well, it looks like everybody wants to come to California to go to school, isn't it? Have you noticed that?

HOPKINS: Sure.

WASHINGTON: Our colleges, USC, UCLA-- Well, one thing they like is the climate, too, they like the climate. USC, look how it is grown. Our print shop used to be right across the street from the Shrine Auditorium. They sold out, right across the street, they sold out to USC, Dickson Bell Press. In fact, they used to print their daily paper.

HOPKINS: Used to print USC's daily paper?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see. Who owned Dickson Bell Press?

WASHINGTON: Mr. [Dickson Bell]. He's passed on.

HOPKINS: Was he black?

WASHINGTON: He was white. He's the one who helped Mr. Washington get started. He was right across from the Shrine [Auditorium], and he printed the Trojan--that was the daily paper.

HOPKINS: Right, it's still called that.

WASHINGTON: There used to be all the students right in there with us.

HOPKINS: Of course, in our next session, we want to go into length about the origins of the Los Angeles Sentinel, but let me ask you about your own business, the origins of your photography studio. Tell me about it.

WASHINGTON: Yes. Well, my photography studio-- We were busy. Norman and I worked one whole year without taking a penny; we put all the money back into the business.

WASHINGTON: Oh yes, yes--my business.

HOPKINS: But Norman worked for the Sentinel as well?

WASHINGTON: Yes, we did work for Mr. Washington, yeah, oh yeah. We were just like a family, Norman and I, and we worked and we didn't take any money out. We put most of the money back, right into the business, because photography equipment was so expensive, and after all, who had money, in the forties even? After that, everything was profit, almost. We did different school books.

HOPKINS: You're just talking of the [high school] annuals?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, yeah. He [Norman Seminar] was one of the photographers for Jefferson, Jordan, and Los Angeles High [Schools]. Then we did lots of copy work, we did business for other businesses around. At that time we had lots of business in Los Angeles. We were busy. We did portraits (I specialized mostly in that). We did lots of work for many of the little movie stars in different lines, you know, working in pictures. We were just busy, we did lots of work!

HOPKINS: Where was your studio located?

WASHINGTON: On 4733 Avalon [Boulevard, Los Angeles]. See, I even know their address! [laughter]

HOPKINS: How did you get the capital, may I ask, to start the business?

WASHINGTON: Well, we just had a little change. As I said,

when we opened that Sunday for business, it was on Easter Sunday, and we were packed. There was a park down the street, and everybody wanted their pictures made. I tell you, we worked from early, from the time we opened up at twelve, until about six or seven, and business just came to us. And Norman, he would buy and sell, we were just-- When you open your doors, God supplies it--all your needs-- doesn't he?

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: Huh?

HOPKINS: Yes, I think so.

WASHINGTON: That's the way I look at it. We were just busy.

HOPKINS: How was the labor divided? What were the assignments that each of you had?

WASHINGTON: Well, you see, people would call in. We had students come in with their gowns and caps. We took all of that in the studio--schools and things--if it was graduation. Norman would do some of the work, I would do some, and Charles [Williams]. We had other [people] working around there. We all just worked like a family. It's like I did with the Sentinel. I started with six employees. You see how many are over there today.

HOPKINS: Charles [Williams] was a photographer. Did you hire other photographers as well?

WASHINGTON: Yes, there was a Mr. Smith (he's passed on), and there were many of them, in and out, you know.

HOPKINS: What did you think of Los Angeles when you came, Mrs. Washington?

WASHINGTON: Well, I liked Los Angeles. It was pretty, it was different from the Midwest [and] the East, and to me it looked like a big country town. Most Californians had not even been out of the city. I was here, and before you know it I was over in Santa Catalina--I was there. Then I was up in San Francisco, whereas many people had not been to San Francisco. I couldn't get over that. I was everywhere. My husband and I would get in the car and go to see California--all the cities around. San Francisco, Sacramento. We were on the go. It was beautiful, beautiful! The streets were clean, you could almost eat off of them--take a look at them today. Families were lovely, people were fine. No crime or anything; you left your doors open. I lived right out there at Ninety-fifth [Street] and Baird [Avenue], close to Watts.

HOPKINS: Where did you move after that?

WASHINGTON: I lived there from 1940 to 1958. Then we moved to Pasadena, and I live in Pasadena.

HOPKINS: Have you been in the same house ever since?

WASHINGTON: Ever since. I've only been in two houses since I've been to California. I married-- My husband had

the home when we married.

HOPKINS: How did you come to move to Pasadena?

WASHINGTON: My husband wanted to move, not me, but I'm so grateful he did. He had lots of friends in Pasadena. He wanted to move to Pasadena. I think he was looking out after me then, because where I live I'm protected. I live near the Rose Bowl.

HOPKINS: It's a nice area.

WASHINGTON: Oh, it's beautiful. I have all the wildlife and everything there. It kind of reminds me a little bit of Colorado, looking at the foothills.

HOPKINS: When you moved there in 1958, what kind of neighborhood was it then?

WASHINGTON: Beautiful, just like it is today.

HOPKINS: It was interracial?

WASHINGTON: Interracial. I have Japanese across the street from me, I have whites to the east of me, I have blacks to the west of me; and they keep their properties nice.

HOPKINS: Did Mr. Washington have any problem buying a house in Pasadena, in 1958, in that area?

WASHINGTON: No, because we bought from a colored.

HOPKINS: I'm sorry?

WASHINGTON: No, because we bought from a colored family.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see.

WASHINGTON: I found my house in about an hour and fifteen minutes.

HOPKINS: You selected that house?

WASHINGTON: Well, I called the real estate man--a friend of mine--in Pasadena and I told him my husband told me I wasn't going to please him before he passed on, so I said, "I've got to come over and find some kind of a house, and I don't have all day to find a house, Mr. Boulon." He said, "Mrs. Washington, I don't have time to fool with you today, because you're not coming to Pasadena--" I said, "Yes, I am, I'm on my way; I'm not going to the office." Then he said, "I've got an appointment here." I said, "That's all right, I'll sit in your office till you come back." So I waited for him, and he put me in the car, and he showed me two houses--I didn't like them. The third house-- Oh no, he showed me this house, the second one; the lady wasn't there, so he goes to show me another one, because he's showing me two. I didn't like those two, so we were on our way back and he said, "Maybe we'll stop at the house again, maybe the woman's there." Sure enough, she was there. The first thing she said to me, "I want you to have my home."

There was an upstairs up to it, and I said, "Oh, my, I wish it was all on one floor, my husband's had a stroke." I went through it, and it was so beautiful--the scenery. It reminded me of Colorado, the surroundings, the

foothills. I liked everything that I saw. I said, "I'll bring him over on Saturday. If he likes it and can get up those stairs, maybe we can make a deal." I brought Mr. Washington over, and he just loved it, and he beat us all upstairs. There was one little railing as you go up at the side, but I had a railing put on the downside. She came down to what I wanted, so I bought the house. I didn't move right away; they lived in it almost a year (it was '57 or '58, for one year). Then he [Washington] said, "Whoever heard of buying a house and not moving in it?" Just like that I got on the phone and told her I had to move. And they paid me rent.

HOPKINS: For that year or so?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, it wasn't quite a year.

HOPKINS: Why didn't you move in right away?

WASHINGTON: Well, I had to make up my mind [if I] wanted to drive so far every day from Pasadena to Los Angeles, and I was comfortable where I was. Then I found her a place to move.

HOPKINS: Where was that?

WASHINGTON: She moved over on Santa Barbara [Avenue]-- Then later-- She's in a beautiful home now, but she moved over there, and we all helped each other. I moved in '59, I must have moved about May--April to May--of '59, because I began fixing it up for our convention. We had our

National Newspaper Publishers convention here in '59, and I was in my house by then.

HOPKINS: I want to come back to this on our next session, but for now can you tell me was this National Newspaper Association black?

WASHINGTON: Black.

HOPKINS: What's the formal name?

WASHINGTON: National Negro Newspaper Publishers Association: NNNPA.

HOPKINS: Had the association held the conference here in Los Angeles before?

WASHINGTON: No, I think that was their first one in 1959.

HOPKINS: Where was the conference held?

WASHINGTON: At the Biltmore [Hotel].

HOPKINS: At the Biltmore. No problems?

WASHINGTON: Oh, no. No, no.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, I want to end your business, because I know you worked there for five years and then terminated it. Tell me about the growth of the business.

WASHINGTON: What, the Sentinel?

HOPKINS: Excuse me, the photography business.

WASHINGTON: Oh, the photography business.

HOPKINS: First of all, I should get the name of the business; did it have a name?

WASHINGTON: Avalon Photographers.

HOPKINS: Avalon Photographers. Okay, and you started off in what year?

WASHINGTON: What did I say? Now, it was either '44, because I was there '48, '47, '46, '45, '44, we might have gotten it in the latter part of '43. I know I was there five full years.

HOPKINS: Okay. So somewhere around '43, '44.

WASHINGTON: Uh-huh, because I was going to school.

HOPKINS: Oh, you were going to school while you were--

WASHINGTON: Yeah, I would go, you know-- [I was] taking up that retouching, working with that, different ones, everything.

HOPKINS: And you started off by taking photos of people on an Easter Sunday?

WASHINGTON: Oh, that's it, we opened up on Easter Sunday. I'll never forget, we were so busy! And our work was so beautiful that it was always reorders, anything that we'd done. Norman was a fine photographer; we took pride in our work.

HOPKINS: Then you expanded your service for school and contracts for other things?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, everything. Oh yes, we did all kinds of photography, copy work--

HOPKINS: Now, what made you decide to close your business?

WASHINGTON: My husband had a stroke in '48.

HOPKINS: What about the employees who worked--?

WASHINGTON: Well, this is what I said to Norman: I prayed over it; I read the Bible. I've come up always, from a child up, in a Christian life. I prayed, and I asked God, "What should I do?" Mr. Washington was in the hospital, he had this stroke, he couldn't tell me anything. He was at the Queen of Angels-[Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center]. What should I do? Should I stay in the studio or go to the Sentinel?

And I was praying hard. My heart was heavy, and God talked to me that night. He said, "You remember Solomon? King Solomon? He had a decision, his first decision--you know, King Solomon was appointed over all of them, his brothers, he was young--he had a decision to make with the two women claiming the babies." I don't know if you recall?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: Do you remember that?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: That was his first decision when he took over the kingdom. These two women were claiming the same baby. Well, the decision was, he said, "Bring the sword, cut the baby in two." Well, in those days that was a command, isn't it? But that was a decision, a hard decision, isn't it? To cut the baby in two, and you take half, and that half. But he knew he'd find out the real

mother, didn't he?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: She says, "No, give it to her." It was a decision, and God told me I had to make a decision that night. I went the next day, and I told Norman-- I did my hands like this, [gestures] this is it, no more photography, you do what you want to do with it, because I have to go and learn something I know nothing about.

HOPKINS: What did Norman do?

WASHINGTON: He said, "You're crazy!" [laughter]

Exactly! I said, "Well, I'll take my money and go to the Sentinel." I said, "You take your money and love it and go to--" He went into a school at Jefferson [Boulevard] and Avalon [Boulevard], and that's where Harry Adams learned, from Norman. He opened up a nice school. We were going to [start a] school, but I did this. That meant I've never touched a camera since, because you know why? When you going into something like what I was facing, you can't have a divided mind; and care is something you love in your heart, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: Being young, I had to think, because I was going into something just like going into that wall, you see. So I've never touched a camera since.

Now, what I did-- Norman said, "Why don't you take

what you might need over to the business and fix yourself a photography room and let some of the other photographers that'll be working for you do their work there?" And that's what I did. I brought different equipment that I thought I would like. Well, the computer room now, that was a photography room. Then I had some lovely cameras and things. They lost so much. They went through so much of my papers and lost so much that I got angry, and I just changed it to an eating room. Now we're back into a computer room in it. But I had had a nice photography shop [put] into the Sentinel. Because I moved the Sentinel immediately. We'll get into that later on.

HOPKINS: Did you do any photographic work for the Sentinel?

WASHINGTON: No, no.

HOPKINS: Who is Harry Adams?

WASHINGTON: He's a photographer, and he learned from the school.

HOPKINS: So Norman established a school?

WASHINGTON: Uh-huh. I went to the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: Was the school successful?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Is it still in business?

WASHINGTON: Oh no, he's passed, and the school is gone.

HOPKINS: I see. Mrs. Washington, how do you feel about

your decision to leave the--?

WASHINGTON: Wonderful, because I was able to help our people more. See, at that time, journalism in the forties, blacks weren't on other newspapers working. The Sentinel was a good springboard for them, I would say, because many of them came and they got good jobs and things working with the paper.

HOPKINS: For the--

WASHINGTON: We've had some fine people in journalism at the Sentinel, and they are out in good jobs today.

HOPKINS: Financially, which one was the most profitable, the photography business or the Sentinel? [laughter]

WASHINGTON: Well, I made money in the photography business--I didn't suffer. And the newspaper business is all right, it's just rough with anybody now, in the economy we were in. See, this economy has affected not just-- It's affected newspapers, it's affected many big businesses-- huge businesses! You see, pick up the Wall Street Journal and the business section of the [Los Angeles] Times, all day long companies and things are closing, shutting down, merging, or laying off. That's all you read, if they're not stealing! [laughter] Now, you can cut that out, [laughter] but that's what you read, if you read the business section of the [Los Angeles] Times, and the Wall Street Journal; they're ripping off--

HOPKINS: Well, in 1948, which one did you see would probably have made the most money?

WASHINGTON: I really wasn't looking at money.

HOPKINS: In 1948 you weren't looking at money, you were looking at what?

WASHINGTON: Carrying on my husband's business.

HOPKINS: Because that was close to him, wasn't it?

WASHINGTON: That was close to his heart, that was his baby. We didn't have any children, so that Sentinel was his baby.

HOPKINS: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but did you carry on the paper then out of your love for your husband or--?

WASHINGTON: Love of my husband, to carry on the paper, and I had money to do what I wanted to do with it. I had bought the building that we're in now--a half a block--when I was in my studio. I had bought it for him, but he didn't move in it. Mr. Washington wasn't a businessman, he was a journalist all the way. So what I did was to-- Mr. Washington had this stroke in '48, and I couldn't work in the place he was in--it was so small. My studio was four or five times larger than this place because we had shooting rooms. So what I did immediately-- Now, he had the stroke in '48. In '49 I had done gotten everybody out of my building that I wanted to go, and remodeled it, and

moved in. Well, you know what a woman can do--she's good at moving furniture, isn't she, and moving things around! Immediately what I did, I gave everybody that was in the building notice that I was going to take certain parts of it over. Now, I didn't take all of it, I grew little by little, but we took all the front on Forty-third Street. I had a--I can't even think of all of the people I had in there--I had a beauty shop; a cleaning, pressing shop. I don't remember it all, but anyway I moved everybody out. Then I had it remodeled. Now, he had the stroke in '48, November; in '49, in April, we were in there. Now, that's moving some, isn't it?

HOPKINS: That is.

WASHINGTON: Remodeling.

HOPKINS: Right.

WASHINGTON: Then-- Well, you don't want to talk about the paper [Sentinel] right now--

HOPKINS: Right. In fact, this is probably a good place to stop, and I think we can pick it up next time.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JULY 11, 1984

HOPKINS: After listening to our first session, I had a couple of questions that I'd like to rehash with you. You mentioned that your mother [Oma Boswell Bromel] was an avid reader. I'm wondering, she probably read a lot of things, but was there anything in particular that she read, any group of literature, or any kinds of things that she particularly paid attention to?

WASHINGTON: No, mostly the daily papers.

HOPKINS: And then you had two sisters, right?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: And what did they do for a living?

WASHINGTON: Well, my sister in Oregon--

HOPKINS: Her name again, please?

WASHINGTON: Bernadette.

HOPKINS: Bernadette, yes.

WASHINGTON: Bernadette finished college, and she was a social worker.

HOPKINS: What college did she attend, do you recall?

WASHINGTON: Kansas university [University of Kansas].

Where is that? Lawrence [Kansas]?

HOPKINS: Yeah, and this is Bernadette [Bromel] Plummer?

WASHINGTON: Yeah. My other sister [Naoma Bromel Cunningham] was just a housewife.

HOPKINS: Very good. When you were growing up, did you live with your sisters very much?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I lived with my sisters and my mother.

HOPKINS: And so, when your mother had gone to Kansas, when you were living in Salina--

WASHINGTON: My mother went to Kansas City; then I lived with my cousin.

HOPKINS: Did your sisters live with you as well?

WASHINGTON: No, my sisters lived with my mother's sisters.

HOPKINS: How much older were your sisters than you?

WASHINGTON: Well, I'm seventy years old this year, and my oldest sister will be seventy-four in September, and my other sister must be about seventy-five-- No, I'm seventy. That's one thing that I don't keep up with much, is age.

HOPKINS: Oh, that's fine.

WASHINGTON: She'd be about seventy-three.

HOPKINS: And this is Naoma?

WASHINGTON: Naoma.

HOPKINS: Naoma, okay. You also mentioned that as a girl you were interested in horseback riding and that sort of thing.

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes. We'd come up in rural life, and so we were around horses and ponies and everything that you would have in a rural life.

HOPKINS: What about since you've been in Los Angeles, did

you continue that?

WASHINGTON: I did for a while, but I had to give it up very quick, because Mr. [Leon H.] Washington [Jr.] had his stroke eight years after we were married (and we married in 1940).

HOPKINS: So when you came though--

WASHINGTON: And then I was busy into my business: photography, growing up, still growing up! [laughter]

HOPKINS: You worked for a drugstore in Watts there, and we didn't get the name of the drugstore. Do you recall at all?

WASHINGTON: You know, I don't even remember the name; it was the largest drugstore there.

HOPKINS: Was it Rexall?

WASHINGTON: No, it wasn't a Rexall. I really don't remember exactly the name.

HOPKINS: Okay, no problem there, just thought I'd check with you.

WASHINGTON: It was the largest-- It was a huge, large drugstore on 103d [Street].

HOPKINS: So do you think it was privately owned, or was it part of a chain?

WASHINGTON: No, it was privately owned.

HOPKINS: You and Mr. Washington bought your house in Pasadena. Do you recall the name of the family who sold you the home?

WASHINGTON: I'll have to think--

HOPKINS: Yeah, take your time and relax.

WASHINGTON: The Elliots.

HOPKINS: The Elliots.

WASHINGTON: The Elliots. Mr. Elliot worked for the Golden State [Mutual Life Insurance Company]. He was retired.

HOPKINS: Do you remember his first name? Here, I'm pressing you, I'm sorry.

WASHINGTON: Not right now.

HOPKINS: Okay, if you think of it, fine.

WASHINGTON: It's been so many years, and I'm not good on the past. My mind is always thinking ahead of time.

HOPKINS: When you were growing up in Kansas, would you consider that you were from a well-to-do family, from a middle-class family, or perhaps a not-so-well-off family? Financially?

WASHINGTON: Most Kansas people, I would say, are middle class, because most Kansas people were workers where I came from. They all worked; everybody worked. They were busy, some farming. I didn't see poverty.

HOPKINS: So you didn't notice any real poverty among the blacks or--

WASHINGTON: No, no, no, because Salina's a small town, and all families work, you know. They had their gardens, their children were going to school-- It wasn't what you call

poverty. I didn't see poverty like I see today, nothing like that.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, what were your parents' [Oma and Erasmus Bromel] religious affiliation?

WASHINGTON: They were all Baptists.

HOPKINS: And you, today?

WASHINGTON: I am AME [African Methodist Episcopal].

HOPKINS: AME.

WASHINGTON: First AME.

HOPKINS: When did you change from--? I assume you grew up as a Baptist--?

WASHINGTON: I changed. I was baptized in a river, Smokey Hill River, I remember that.

HOPKINS: Smokey Hill River in what state?

WASHINGTON: In Salina, Kansas.

HOPKINS: I see.

WASHINGTON: As I grew older-- We all change, you know, in our thinking. I went into the Methodist church when I moved to Kansas City, and I'm still in the Methodist church. At the same time, I read Christian Science.

HOPKINS: So what church were you attending in Kansas City? You joined--

WASHINGTON: First AME church.

HOPKINS: First AME church. Then when you came to Los Angeles, you joined--

WASHINGTON: First AME church.

HOPKINS: Have you been active in that church?

WASHINGTON: Well, I go every Sunday. I'm not active, because I don't have time, you know, to be active, I'm in so many other things.

HOPKINS: Tell me about Christian Scientists.

WASHINGTON: Well, I went into Christian Science when Mr. Washington had the stroke. The doctors had given him up; [they said] that he would never walk or talk anymore. He'd had two cerebral hemorrhages. Is it all right to say that?

HOPKINS: Oh yes, please do.

WASHINGTON: He had two cerebral hemorrhages, and he went into about seventy convulsions. I was very frustrated--depressed--and a friend told me about Christian Science. Well, the first thing, they say they don't use medicine, but I didn't look at that, I just started reading the book.

One morning early, Mr. Washington called me, and he said two or three words. And I knew that I have found the answer there. Then he began to unfold. One day he even wouldn't take his medicine, but we kept him on medicine. I prayed, listened to God, did my reading, and he unfolded into beautiful health and lived twenty-six years and was very active in the community. You can see by his life story. Now, he was handicapped, having the stroke on his right side, but that didn't bother him at all. He

traveled, went everyplace, and communicated with people.

So I still read Christian Science, and I go to the First AME church.

HOPKINS: When you met Mr. Washington in Kansas-- Well, you met him in Denver.

WASHINGTON: I met him in Denver.

HOPKINS: Well, in Denver and in Kansas City. Did you know him to be a religious person at that time?

WASHINGTON: No, no.

HOPKINS: Did he attend church?

WASHINGTON: I think I started him on the right track.

HOPKINS: So after this first bout with the stroke in '48, he came home?

WASHINGTON: He went to church now, he went to church, but I think that by us communicating and me reading a lot to him, he was real on the religious side. He believed in Christ Jesus, listened to good programs on the television, and then he went to church.

HOPKINS: Did he read--?

WASHINGTON: No, he didn't read Christian Science; I didn't force him to. I didn't have to; I did my work.

HOPKINS: Why did you change from Baptist to AME?

WASHINGTON: I was young, I don't know. I had some friends that were going there--to the AME church--and I enjoyed it. I liked it.

HOPKINS: How did your parents feel about that change?

WASHINGTON: It was all right.

HOPKINS: Was it?

WASHINGTON: Don't we work out our own problems, sooner or later?

HOPKINS: Right, we have to, I think.

That concludes the questions I had from my last session. I'd like to move into some new material today. We want to focus on Mr. Washington in this first session. I know that's a pleasant subject for you. I'd like to begin by asking if you remember when and where Mr. Washington was born.

WASHINGTON: He was born in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1907.

HOPKINS: What was his full name?

WASHINGTON: Leon Harold Washington, Jr.

HOPKINS: Did you know his parents?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I did.

HOPKINS: Can you tell me about them--his father first?

WASHINGTON: His father was nice and his mother was nice. They lived in Kansas, but they came to California. When I took over the paper, I had them come out here.

HOPKINS: Why did they come to California?

WASHINGTON: Well, they wanted to come, so I helped them to come out.

HOPKINS: This would have been '48 then.

WASHINGTON: No, they came in the fifties. I think it was in the fifties, after Mr. Washington had the stroke.

HOPKINS: The second stroke?

WASHINGTON: Well, he had really two strokes all at one time. He had a stroke; then he went into another one about a week or two later. So it was about the same time, the strokes.

HOPKINS: Do you know what his father did for a living?

WASHINGTON: He ran on the road, he was a Pullman porter, that's what he retired from.

HOPKINS: And what was his run, do you recall? From where to where?

WASHINGTON: I don't recall, you know, I really don't.

HOPKINS: Do you know if he came out to California?

WASHINGTON: I think he came out to California, and he went to other parts of Kansas, but I don't remember the full run.

HOPKINS: As you recall, was that a good job to have at the time?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I should say. Most all black men at that time were Pullman porters. I have another friend here of the Washingtons, Reverend Miller, and he was a Pullman porter. This is his watch. The Miller family and the Washingtons were good friends. Mr. Washington was born on Mrs. Miller's birthday, April 15. This is her wedding

ring. That would have to be about a hundred and some years old. Yeah, she was ninety, about ninety-seven, when she passed. This is Reverend Miller's watch, when he ran on the road. I had a new band put on it.

HOPKINS: He was a minister and a Pullman porter?

WASHINGTON: No, he had retired from [being a] Pullman porter. They moved to Los Angeles--from Kansas City to Los Angeles--all good friends of the Washington family.

HOPKINS: What church was Reverend Miller? What was his church, do you recall?

WASHINGTON: They were AME's.

HOPKINS: Did you attend his church?

WASHINGTON: At that time he wasn't preaching, he had retired.

HOPKINS: What about Mrs. Washington?

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington's mother?

HOPKINS: Yes.

WASHINGTON: Well, she was just a housewife.

HOPKINS: Do you know Mr. Washington's parents' religious affiliation at all?

WASHINGTON: What did you say?

HOPKINS: Their religious affiliation; I assume they were AME then.

WASHINGTON: Yes, they were AME's.

HOPKINS: Does Mr. Washington have any brothers or sisters?

WASHINGTON: He has a sister, Juanita Washington.

HOPKINS: Is she still living?

WASHINGTON: She's still living.

HOPKINS: Did she marry?

WASHINGTON: Yes, she's married and she had two children, George and Barbara.

HOPKINS: What does Juanita Washington do for a living?

WASHINGTON: Well, she's retired.

HOPKINS: But early on, what did she do for a living, do you recall?

WASHINGTON: I don't remember. I think she was in social work, too.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, Mr. Washington's educational background, can you discuss that at all?

WASHINGTON: He went to school in Ashburn College, in Topeka.

HOPKINS: And he majored in journalism?

WASHINGTON: Journalism.

HOPKINS: I think we discussed that just a bit, a little bit before. To your knowledge, was Mr. Washington ever interested in any other kind of career other than journalism?

WASHINGTON: I wouldn't know. All I know is that he was interested in journalism.

HOPKINS: Did he serve in the military?

WASHINGTON: He didn't go off. He did community work during the war because he couldn't go and leave his business, so he worked in community work.

HOPKINS: I was looking at his age, and I said if he was born in 1907, he was too young to go to World War I and he was getting too old to go to World War II. So that was a good time to be born, actually. Oh, this is a picture of Mr. Washington in uniform.

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: It looks like army to me.

WASHINGTON: Yes, but the work was here in Los Angeles, you know. He worked within-- Here's some pictures of him, little snapshots of Mr. Washington.

HOPKINS: Oh, these are excellent. Pipe smoker, huh?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Now, here I see him in what today would be a very popular dress; I know in Santa Barbara a lot of people dress this way.

WASHINGTON: That's the way he dressed when he went to Santa Barbara! He loved the Wild West outfits, and I did too.

HOPKINS: Did many blacks dress this way?

WASHINGTON: No.

HOPKINS: When was this photo taken, would you guess? Just roughly.

WASHINGTON: Let's see, in the fifties.

HOPKINS: In the fifties.

WASHINGTON: Sometime in the fifties. He always wore his cowboy hats.

HOPKINS: Was this a Kansas--?

WASHINGTON: He'd go to rodeos.

HOPKINS: Would this be an impression from Kansas or from California?

WASHINGTON: California, but Kansas people dressed that way. Colorado. Of course, he wasn't from Colorado, but Colorado people dressed that way years ago.

HOPKINS: What do you remember about his military service? You say he worked in the community. Do you remember specifically what he did?

WASHINGTON: No, I don't, I really don't. I was busy.

HOPKINS: Those are excellent pictures. Why was he called "the Colonel"?

WASHINGTON: He was made a Kentucky colonel from Kentucky. That was bestowed upon him from the state of Kentucky. You had to be outstanding to get that name, you know. I know you've heard of the "Kentucky Colonels," haven't you? Years ago?

HOPKINS: Well, I've heard of "Kentucky Colonel," but, to be honest with you, I don't know what it means.

WASHINGTON: Well, it's an organization from the state of

Kentucky. So that was bestowed on Mr. Washington many, many years ago, I would say in the fifties.

HOPKINS: What kind of organization is it?

WASHINGTON: Some kind of outstanding organization throughout the United States, and everybody recognizes it. That's why you see "Colonel" on the post office [Colonel Leon H. Washington, Jr., Postal Station]; I think it's "Colonel" here on the [Vernon Branch-Leon H. Washington, Jr., Memorial] library.

HOPKINS: It is, that's right. Can you tell me about the founding of the Los Angeles Sentinel at all? I know you were in Kansas City at the time, and he was in Los Angeles.

WASHINGTON: Well, I don't know too much about it, other than he started the Eastside Shopper in '33. Then the next year he dropped the Shopper and named it the Los Angeles Sentinel. It was just a community newspaper, where he was involved and interested in the people of the community. It was during the Depression. Black people were not working, and Mr. Washington-- I guess God inspired him, because with the paper he helped people--he opened doors for people to work. Businesses would not hire in the community where the Sentinel was located, where people shopped, most black people lived. So his slogan was, "Don't spend it where you can't work! If you can't work there, don't go in and spend your money," which made good sense. And the people stayed

out of the stores. This is a front page of the Sentinel, 1934, January. See there, that's Mr. Washington in jail.

HOPKINS: Tell me about that.

WASHINGTON: Well, I wasn't here then.

HOPKINS: Yes.

WASHINGTON: He started picketing stores that would not hire blacks, so the people that owned the stores had him arrested. He paid his fine. The second time he went back again, and Dr. [H. Claude] Hudson with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] paid his bail out. Then he goes back again.

HOPKINS: A third time.

WASHINGTON: And the people formed a--what is that?--citizen committee to help him. When he went that third time, the doors began to open. They began to call Mr. Washington--"send so many here at Crescent, send so many here at this market"--they would call him and people lined up at the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: Who would call him? You mean the owners of these stores?

WASHINGTON: The owners, yes, the owners would call him, "Mr. Washington, would you send so many at the Crescent, will you send so--" And all the doors began to open in California.

HOPKINS: What do you think caused that change?

WASHINGTON: Well, what causes anything? When you don't get the business. Pressure.

HOPKINS: So in fact his boycott was working.

WASHINGTON: Oh, it worked beautifully. He put them in the post office, the federal government, state government, everywhere, all over, driving trucks, street cars.

Everything opened here in California in the thirties for black citizens. It was harmonious; it was beautiful. I guess you'd say what blesses one, blesses all.

HOPKINS: True enough.

WASHINGTON: And they respect him.

HOPKINS: I know from this article that, as it says here as well, that the Zurich furniture store were one of the biggest culprits.

WASHINGTON: They moved.

HOPKINS: Oh, they moved out of the community rather than hire?

WASHINGTON: Uh-huh. See the sign here, "You can't work here." [shows photograph]

HOPKINS: Do you know what happened to that store after that?

WASHINGTON: No, I don't, but the east side became a very prosperous community.

Dr. Hudson was forty-seven years old when he got Mr. Washington out of jail. He's head of NAACP here, you

know. Now he's ninety-eight.

HOPKINS: Did Mr. Washington talk to you about founding the paper? I mean, did he come to you and say, "Ruth, I'm thinking of starting this paper, what do you think?"

WASHINGTON: Do you mean the Sentinel?

HOPKINS: Yes.

WASHINGTON: No, I wasn't around.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see. I know you were in Kansas City, but you were sweethearts--

WASHINGTON: No, not at that time, in the thirties, the early thirties.

HOPKINS: So by the time you had started seeing each other, he had already founded the paper?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, he was living in California. I was in Denver in the thirties.

HOPKINS: Do you know what made him decide to go to California, as opposed to Chicago, or New York, or San Francisco?

WASHINGTON: He had a cousin out here, attorney Loren Miller, and had come to California and he was-- Attorney Miller worked for Mrs. [Charlotta Spears] Bass, of the California Eagle, and he encouraged Leon to come out.

HOPKINS: Did Mr. Washington work for the California Eagle at one time?

WASHINGTON: Yes, he did.

HOPKINS: When was that, do you know?

WASHINGTON: In the early days, before he had started his paper.

HOPKINS: Do you remember much of what he thought of the California Eagle?

WASHINGTON: Oh, he liked the Eagle; he enjoyed his work there. Mr. Washington and Mr. Joseph Blackburn Bass, Mrs. Bass's husband, were good friends.

HOPKINS: So he decided, though, to found this other paper--

WASHINGTON: His own paper.

HOPKINS: His own paper. What was the reception from the other newspapers, because wasn't there the Tribune that was in business then?

WASHINGTON: The Tribune came on later. Then there was the Neighborhood News; there were several papers. There have been several papers started, you know, even since I took over the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: Well, we know for sure that the California Eagle, I guess, prior to the--

WASHINGTON: Well, California Eagle was one of the oldest black newspapers in the country. I don't remember exactly, now, what year it started.

HOPKINS: I've seen a date as early as 1878, but I've seen copies since 1919; so there you go, it's an old paper.

WASHINGTON: It's an old paper.

HOPKINS: So we have Mr. Washington founding the Sentinel here in 1934.

WASHINGTON: 'Thirty-four, the [Eastside] Shopper.

HOPKINS: Right, and then in 1934 the Sentinel was founded.

WASHINGTON: He renamed the Shopper.

HOPKINS: There obviously was competition between the two papers, between the Sentinel and the California Eagle, or was there? Well, say, by the time you came out in 1940.

WASHINGTON: Well, I never look at competition. I always try to do a good job, put out a good paper, and that's where you progress. We have many papers across the nation, black papers, and some cities have two and three. See, at one time California had quite a few papers. I don't envy anybody in the newspaper business; it's hard work and sacrifice. Nowadays the paper industry across the nation has suffered; many dailies have folded and many of them have cut down editions--

HOPKINS: Do you know what made the Sentinel-- Sorry, go ahead.

WASHINGTON: I always say each newspaper serves its own purpose.

HOPKINS: Was the purpose of the Sentinel different from the purpose of the California Eagle?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Can you tell me about that?

WASHINGTON: Well, I don't want to say-- I know why, but I don't think I should say it.

HOPKINS: You know, this part can be sealed for as long as you like.

WASHINGTON: No, I would not like to say.

HOPKINS: Okay. Well, from what I've read with the California Eagle and from what I know of Mrs. Bass and Mr. Bass-- At least Mrs. Bass, she seemed to have-- [tape recorder off] From what I've read, and what I've understood, Mrs. Bass had very left-leaning, or communist, associations and so on. Was that attitude reflected in her paper at all?

WASHINGTON: I don't know. I didn't read the Eagle too much.

HOPKINS: Well, what was the purpose of the Sentinel then, as you saw it, in '48 and after?

WASHINGTON: The Sentinel was a people's paper. It belonged to the community, helping people.

HOPKINS: As I recall--

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington was always busy helping people-- young people, everybody, placing them into jobs. If they had problems, they could come and talk to him. He took time with everybody, no matter who you were, what class you were. The politicians loved him. For one thing, if you

were wrong, he'll tell you that! [laughter]

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, the paper was founded in 1934, and it continued to grow. Of course, today it's the largest and I think most successful black newspaper west of the Mississippi and maybe to some the most successful paper in the country. At what point do you feel it became a success, or was it a success from day one?

WASHINGTON: I think it started out as a success, and naturally you grow.

After I took over the paper, I made a lot of changes in different sections. I'm very creative, and I studied other papers across the nation, whites' [newspapers], blacks' [newspapers]. Sometimes I would go and buy five dollars' worth of papers from all over the nation--that was me going to school. Then I realized how I wanted the *Sentinel* to be. So I created a classified section, real estate section, entertainment section, food section, sports section. I didn't have time to go to school, so I went to school with papers. Really, the *Sentinel* is more like a metropolitan paper, if you pick it up and read it, isn't it?

HOPKINS: It is. So it wasn't that way before you took over. How was it before?

WASHINGTON: Well, all news was together, whereas I made sections and headings.

HOPKINS: What about the kinds of news that were reported? Let me just say this. I've heard that they used to call them the "negroid tabloids," or whatever, and they would say that these papers--

WASHINGTON: We have had a tabloid. When there was a paper shortage, the Sentinel had to go tabloid in the forties for a while. It was beautiful. It was all in the order of the Daily News (see, we used to have a tabloid white paper called the Daily News). The Sentinel had to go tabloid for a while, but it was very nice.

HOPKINS: You studied other papers. When were you doing this?

WASHINGTON: After I came to the paper and gave up my photography.

HOPKINS: When you took over the Sentinel, did you make any changes in the staff?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I did.

HOPKINS: Can you talk about that?

WASHINGTON: Well, I knew that I wasn't in journalism, but I knew business. I'd studied papers, and I decided to surround myself with the best journalists I could find. I let some go, and I would replace them with top black journalists. But I had to grow, you know, because we only had six employees.

HOPKINS: When you took over there were six employees, and

so you had to let some go and you hired some others?

WASHINGTON: Yes, that were more qualified to do the work that I wanted.

HOPKINS: Those that worked on the paper before 1948, what were they like?

WASHINGTON: They were all right, but I opened up more to our people. He had two white girls working there in the editorial that I replaced with black.

HOPKINS: Well, what was wrong with them? [tape recorder off] What were these two women's backgrounds?

WASHINGTON: They were more on the socialist side, and I wanted to change the thought of the paper.

HOPKINS: Were there other socialists working on the paper, other than these two women?

WASHINGTON: No.

HOPKINS: No. [tape recorder off] What about other newspapers in the country? If the Eagle had a socialist bent and--

WASHINGTON: I don't know too much about the others.

HOPKINS: Say the Chicago Daily Defender.

WASHINGTON: No, it wasn't on that side.

HOPKINS: Or the New Pittsburgh Courier, some of those.

WASHINGTON: No, no. No, I don't know of any of them.

HOPKINS: Okay. So you replaced your staff with others. Tell me something about the qualifications of these new

employees, new staff people, who came to work for you in '48.

WASHINGTON: Oh, they were top journalists in journalism.

HOPKINS: Were they local people, or did you go make a search around the country?

WASHINGTON: Some were here, local. I can't even remember all their names now, I'm not good on history.

HOPKINS: Well, that's all right. Do you remember maybe the most outstanding one perhaps? Or one that comes to mind at least?

WASHINGTON: Well, I had Leon Hardwicke, I think; Wendell Greene; A. S. "Doc" Young was our editor; Stanley Robertson; I replaced with good journalists.

HOPKINS: Is Wendell Greene still alive?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I talked to him the other day.

HOPKINS: He'd be an interesting person to interview, as well.

WASHINGTON: Oh, he's very, very-- Yeah.

HOPKINS: Where did he go to school, do you recall just offhand?

WASHINGTON: No, I don't remember.

HOPKINS: He's a local person.

WASHINGTON: Yes, he's local.

HOPKINS: Wasn't his family from Los Angeles?

WASHINGTON: Yes. [tape recorder off]

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, now, I understand that the California Eagle, at least according to the record, folded in 1954. Do you have any idea what caused the paper to--?

WASHINGTON: No, I don't. I was so busy at the Sentinel, planning, that I never got into other-- See, at the same time, I'm in the stage of learning every day.

HOPKINS: Okay. So you made these significant changes with the paper in terms of the format and having classified under different topic headings and so on. What other changes did you make in that early period? Not too much now, or maybe in the last ten years, but in '48, was that--

WASHINGTON: Well, I didn't start that right away, I had to grow into that. I just changed the whole layout of the paper--I mean the news [section], you know.

HOPKINS: Do you know if it took a lot of money for Mr. Washington to start the paper in 1934?

WASHINGTON: He didn't have any money.

HOPKINS: What did it take to start a paper during the Depression?

WASHINGTON: Well, he left the California Eagle, he said, and he went over to Dickson Bell Press. Now, Dickson Bell Press was located right across from the Shrine Auditorium. Today USC [University of Southern California] sits on that part of the land, where Mr. Bell had his press. He didn't have any money. He told Mr. Bell that he

wanted to start a paper, but he had no money. He said he put Mr. Bell in his car, and he brought him over to the east side and drove all around where he wanted to put the paper and his office. So he said, "Old man Bell says, 'Well, you don't have any money and I don't have much, doggone it!'" (Exactly what he said.) "'Get to work and I'll print it for you.'"

HOPKINS: For free?

WASHINGTON: Till he began to make some money.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 29, 1984

HOPKINS: Today, Mrs. Washington, for session three, we'd like to begin where we left off last time, but first I have a couple of questions. Last time in session two, one of the things we talked about was your membership with the Christian Scientists. I was just wondering, were there other black Christian Scientists in Los Angeles?

WASHINGTON: Oh yes, there was a black Christian Science church, Twenty-ninth Church--we still have the Twenty-ninth Church--it used to be right here in this community, on Hooper [Avenue].

HOPKINS: Hooper and--

WASHINGTON: Hooper and, let's see, Forty-fifth [Street]--same street that the library--only it's [Twenty-ninth Church] on Hooper and the library is on Central [Avenue]. That's where I went into Christian Science; that was the first church, Twenty-ninth Church, it was the black church. Since then, they have moved and they're on Fifty-fourth Street, off of Crenshaw [Boulevard] and West Fifty-fourth Street.

Now, I am a Christian Scientist, but I also am a Methodist; I started out being First AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Methodist first, when I was very young.

HOPKINS: Are you still a Methodist?

WASHINGTON: Yes. My husband [Leon H. Washington, Jr.] was a Methodist and my mother [Oma Boswell Bromel] was a First AME. So I still go to the Methodist church, and I go to the Christian Science church. I like Christian Science because it develops your thinking in a good, positive way, and Miss [Mary Baker] Eddy was a beautiful woman.

HOPKINS: I'm sorry, Miss--?

WASHINGTON: Miss Eddy, that founded the Christian Science organization. I liked its principles, so I read it. Although I look at religion like this: there's only one God and Jesus Christ his son; the more we get an understanding of God and of his son, Jesus Christ, the closer we are to God.

HOPKINS: What's the most attractive thing about Christian Scientists to you? Or are there one or two things you could single out as what draws you to it?

WASHINGTON: No, I just like the principles of Christian Science. The other churches are fine too. I go to other churches because, after all, I'm in the business world and I go to the Baptists to cover things. So I enjoy church, church is spiritual, it's in consciousness; that's the way I look at it.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, there was a slogan your husband coined, called "Don't spend your money where you can't work!" It was certainly made popular by Mr. Washington,

but I've seen that that's a slogan that's also been attributed to Mr. [Joseph Blackburn] Bass. Have you ever heard anything like that?

WASHINGTON: No, I never heard anything like that until Mr. Washington. I didn't know too much about Mr. Bass. Mr. Washington carried it through, with everything. He said that, he was telling me that, in the thirties there were no jobs for blacks other than domestic--women were working in domestic [service]. For men to work a good job, there was none. And he was telling me about how the Olympics had been in '32 and how rough it was for black people. He started his first paper in '33, the very next year, it was the [Eastside] Shopper, a throwaway. The next year he named it the [Los Angeles] Sentinel, '34. And his slogan was-- He was trying to get jobs for our people. When he put on the boycott, "Don't spend your money where you can't work!" people followed him. They were together. They stayed out of the stores, he said, a month and eighteen days, not buying anything. Then many of the companies called and said, "Mr. Washington, send so many at Crescent and so many at this department store." He said the doors just opened--that they were so busy that the community would come in to help answer the phones and take the applications. He said the doors just opened beautifully for people to work everyplace--waiters, everything. He

said California was just beautiful: "What a beautiful change!" He was telling me that the people-- Hearts changed, because everybody was working, happy.

HOPKINS: What about during the Depression?

WASHINGTON: Well, the Depression came on, you see, right after the Olympics. He said California began to grow. I don't think it was felt as bad in California as it was in the Midwest or the East. Then as he was more involved in the community-- You see, California didn't have a lot of commercial business. Many eastern companies moved to California and that opened jobs. Then the shipyards and the war came on even, and that opened jobs. Now, I married in the forties, and with the war everybody went to work, even women in the shipyards. There was no discrimination or anything. California begin to grow.

Mr. Washington was involved in politics. He worked with all the politicians, and they loved him and they respected him.

HOPKINS: I want to come to that in just a second. Let me ask you here, you mentioned he named the paper the Sentinel. What was it called at first?

WASHINGTON: It was the Shopper.

HOPKINS: It was called the Shopper?

WASHINGTON: The Shopper. And the Sentinel's a good name-- What does Sentinel mean? You give me the definition.

[laughter]

HOPKINS: I'm going to leave that to you. Well, let me ask you, how'd he come to pick that name?

WASHINGTON: I don't know, I wasn't here. God directed, God protected. See, we live and move and have our being in God. God was with him. He was twenty-five years old. Solomon was a young man when he built the temple. He used Mr. Washington to help his people in California.

HOPKINS: Do you know, was the [Los Angeles] Sentinel founded in Mr. Washington's home or in the home of Mary Tinsley?

WASHINGTON: Oh, I wouldn't know, but I think they have it there, and that would be correct, Mary Tinsley.

HOPKINS: Did you know Mary Tinsley?

WASHINGTON: No, see, I didn't come to California until 1940.

HOPKINS: Did you know of her or who she was?

WASHINGTON: No, I've heard Mr. Washington speak of her.

HOPKINS: What did she do?

WASHINGTON: I really don't know. People were so together then, you know, very closely knitted. Where, today, you don't find that.

HOPKINS: Do you think it was possible she was involved in the newspaper business?

WASHINGTON: No, I don't think so, probably just a friend

of Mr. Washington.

HOPKINS: Well, Mrs. Washington, some new questions: we were talking about Mr. Dickson Bell and how he agreed that he would not charge Mr. Washington for printing the paper initially.

WASHINGTON: Well, I can tell you how that came about. Mr. Washington said he was selling ads for the [California] Eagle, and Mrs. [Charlotta Spears] Bass didn't want to pay him some of his commission--because he worked on commission--and so he said he walked out of the office. He was so disturbed that he walked from Central Avenue over to Jefferson [Boulevard], that's right at the Shrine [Auditorium] (in fact, USC [University of Southern California] is on that property today). He met Mr. Bell, Dickson Bell, and he told him he wanted to start a paper. Mr. Bell had a very small print shop, because he was just doing little, small printing. Now, I don't know if that was the first time he met Mr. Bell or not, but anyway, Mr. Bell put him in his car, and they drove back to the east side. Mr. Washington had him drive all around, where he wanted to start the paper. He [Dickson Bell] told him to go on, that he'd help him till he got started.

I guess God was with him; he started his paper. We printed there for many years. Now the Bell family has all passed on. The Dickson Bell shop was right there where

USC is located today, right across from the Shrine Auditorium, on Jefferson [Boulevard].

HOPKINS: Can you tell me something about Mr. Bell; what race was he?

WASHINGTON: Oh, he was white, southern.

HOPKINS: Jewish?

WASHINGTON: No, he was a southern white, he was a southern white man, but he loved--liked--Mr. Washington. I remember when Mr. Washington took sick, Mr. Bell said, "Doggone it, I told them they better take care of Leon and take care of this Sentinel." I never will forget-- Mr. Bell and I, we got along fine. I liked the whole family. But I got angry with him at something that he pulled, and I moved the paper to the Huntington Park Signal.

HOPKINS: To the Huntington Park Signal? What's that? Is that a publisher?

WASHINGTON: It was a daily paper in Huntington Park. Mr. Vanderhoff was the owner. When I did that, Mr. Bell was very upset because he had lost the Sentinel, but I came back.

HOPKINS: Well, when you say you moved it there, what do you mean?

WASHINGTON: They printed the paper. A misunderstanding. But you know what women do, and I was quite young.

[laughter]

HOPKINS: Were you Mr. Bell's largest customer?

WASHINGTON: Yes, and Mr. Washington had gotten Mr. Bell a lot of good accounts.

HOPKINS: Why did you move?

WASHINGTON: Oh, I don't know. You know how women are.

HOPKINS: He didn't do anything to you, or--

WASHINGTON: No, no, he didn't do anything; he was trying to take the paper from me.

HOPKINS: To own the paper?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Now, when was this, about?

WASHINGTON: You know, it's too bad I--

HOPKINS: Oh, no, don't worry about the dates, but was it after the stroke?

WASHINGTON: Let's see--oh, yes, after the stroke--it was in the early fifties.

HOPKINS: Was he interested in owning a newspaper, or--?

WASHINGTON: Well, I don't think he thought I knew what I was doing.

HOPKINS: You proved him wrong.

WASHINGTON: Well, thirty-six years; thirty-six years with no newspaper experience.

HOPKINS: Well, who actually owned the paper around this time that Mr. Bell was interested in the Sentinel?

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington owned the paper.

HOPKINS: He still owned it.

WASHINGTON: Oh, yeah.

HOPKINS: So he was a friend of Mr. Washington.

WASHINGTON: Oh, yeah, they were good friends.

HOPKINS: Did Mr. Washington know about the attempted takeover by Mr. Bell?

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington had this stroke-- I don't recall, I really don't recall. Coming into the newspaper business and no experience, and very young myself, you know, I just guess I was moving fast.

HOPKINS: Did Mr. Washington know that you had moved the paper to Huntington Park?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, yes, he knew Mr. Vanderhoff.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, Mr. Washington knew Mr. Vanderhoff.

HOPKINS: Did he agree with the move, at the time?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, he never said anything--he wasn't too well--he didn't say anything. We didn't stay too long.

HOPKINS: How long did you stay?

WASHINGTON: Maybe three months, something like that.

HOPKINS: When Mr. Washington had his stroke and you took over the paper, you were the business manager?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Who was the publisher and editor of the paper?

WASHINGTON: I did so much changing. [pause] I did so

much changing immediately, and I'm not good on back history because my mind is always thinking ahead of time. I happen to be a Leo, and I'm thinking ahead all the time. What's done today, fine; it's gone, it's over with. I don't know if that's a good way to be. I should have taken after my mother, who could remember everything; she was a history person. I don't even keep up with birthdays and things like that.

HOPKINS: No problem.

WASHINGTON: See, my mind, at that time, was to move. I had given up my business, and I'd made a decision to come to the Sentinel. I brought my money with me, and I never looked back--even at my studio that I loved so much--because I knew if I looked back I couldn't go forward. I had a sick husband that didn't talk and walk for nine months. I didn't have the wisdom that I have today. So my life is different.

HOPKINS: When you took over as business manager, who had the "say-so"? Who decided policy for the paper?

WASHINGTON: Oh, I did and Mrs. [Dora] Moore; I had a friend, Mrs. Moore. In fact, she's on that-- What did I do with it?

HOPKINS: Well, we'll stop the tape for a minute. [tape recorder off]

WASHINGTON: I had a plan to see this.

HOPKINS: Okay, Mrs. Washington, we have an excellent photo here of the first employees of the Los Angeles Sentinel, when your husband Mr. Leon Washington opened the office. Can you name some of the individuals, or all the staff?

WASHINGTON: Yes. From left to right: we have Louis Cole.

HOPKINS: Now, what was his job, do you recall?

WASHINGTON: I think Louis sold advertising. Now, we have Dora Moore, she was the office manager--she was working for Mr. Washington when he had the stroke, when I took over-- There's Mr. Benson; Leon Washington, my husband; Carl Gross, Mr. Gross laid out ads, he was a good layout man. Charlotte Perry, who lives in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, is living; attorney Loren Miller, his cousin, who did editorials; and Lawrence Lamar.

HOPKINS: I keep reading and hearing the term "when you took over." Do you consider you took over the paper in 1948 or in 1974?

WASHINGTON: Well, Mr. Washington passed in '74. He had the stroke in '48, so I just left my business then and took over the paper.

HOPKINS: In '48?

WASHINGTON: 'Forty-eight.

HOPKINS: So your duties in '74 were not much different than in '48?

WASHINGTON: Well, see, Mr. Washington passed in '74, June

'74. I took over the paper in '48, and I worked with Mrs. Moore. Then she left in-- We had-- I had some problems with her and-- I don't remember what year that she left, she left in the fifties.

HOPKINS: What was the problem with her?

WASHINGTON: Oh, some things that I didn't like.

HOPKINS: What about attorney Miller? Was he an attorney at that--

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes, he was an attorney; Mr. Washington's cousin.

HOPKINS: Didn't he work for the [California] Eagle?

WASHINGTON: Yes. He left and started a paper of his own; he took over the Eagle.

HOPKINS: Mr. Miller did?

WASHINGTON: Yeah. I guess they didn't like "the Lioness," Mrs. Washington! [laughter]

HOPKINS: Oh, the lions.

WASHINGTON: I'm a lioness, a Leo. Yes, they all left and I changed staff. I brought in my own staff, I began to bring in my own staff.

HOPKINS: I want to talk about that. I'm trying to get a chronology here--

WASHINGTON: Mr. Lamar, he had a little news service, so he went to news service. Attorney Miller finally went and took over the Eagle--didn't last.

HOPKINS: When would you say that was?

WASHINGTON: I don't know. Mr. Gross, he went to the playground, he was working at the playground over on Forty-second Street; Charlotte Perry had gone back to Canada before Mr. Washington had the stroke.

HOPKINS: Do you know what made her come to Los Angeles?

WASHINGTON: She and her husband lived here. He was a Canadian but--I think it was in the early forties--he had to go back to Canada; he was a doctor.

HOPKINS: For some reason?

WASHINGTON: Yes, you know, during the war they had lots of Japanese in camps in different places. I don't remember what happened, but they had to go back to Canada. Now, she passed. Mrs. Moore passed, later on. I had a whole new staff.

HOPKINS: What did Mr. Miller write?

WASHINGTON: Editorials. Yes, he used to write our editorials.

HOPKINS: And he carried on a law firm at the same time?

WASHINGTON: Yes, he was always a lawyer.

HOPKINS: How long did he stay with you?

WASHINGTON: I don't remember the years, to be correct.

HOPKINS: No problem. Was he there a long time? A short time?

WASHINGTON: No, a short time.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, of these people-- When you took over, I know you said you gradually got rid of them.

WASHINGTON: Well, many of them left, you know, because-- Mr. Lamar was mostly in a business, he just would bring in news; attorney Miller was an attorney; Mr. Gross worked at the playground and he just helped Mr. Washington, you know, with layouts; Mr. Benson had his own business, but I don't remember--don't recall--what his business was.

HOPKINS: Thank you for that, it's an excellent picture.

WASHINGTON: It's an excellent picture. I don't even remember the first people in editorial--I've done quite a bit of changing--but we've had some wonderful, outstanding people working for the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: How long would you say after Mr. Washington began the paper, when it was the Sentinel, did it become successful--start making a profit?

WASHINGTON: Well, right after I moved; I moved the Sentinel from Forty-third Place into Forty-third Street, where we are now. When I moved the Sentinel, I had brought in, too, a new staff.

I'm an idea-woman, I had ideas. I studied other papers. Sometimes I'd spend five to six, seven dollars, buying papers from all over the country, reading and studying, because I wasn't a newspaperwoman. When you read and study other papers, you are serving the community. You

get ideas of what you want, which would help the community. So I studied newspapers, and I just put in the different ideas that I wanted the Sentinel to be. Then I sold advertising myself; I learned that. I'm thinking about getting out, selling some advertising now, because I'm going to try and take it a little easy now. I'm seventy years old, and I just want to do some of the little things that I want to do.

HOPKINS: Well, you're entitled to that.

WASHINGTON: Yes, yes.

HOPKINS: For the service you've given to the community, there's no question about that.

WASHINGTON: I got a lot of knowledge studying newspapers-- they were white papers. Like I put in my classified section. Years ago we used to run from twenty-four to twenty-six pages of classified in real estate alone. In fact, the Sentinel moved [advertised] most of the property. When California started growing and people were moving to the West Coast--the blacks--we sold most of the property through our paper. We had white brokers, black brokers-- I've seen different communities shift.

The Sentinel was a beautiful paper. I had a beautiful staff, and they all loved Mr. Washington. Mr. Washington began to get well. He came back in the office--he had the stroke in '48-- On April 15, 1949, I moved in this place

where we are now. We had a party, and I brought Mr. Washington down to the office. I think that move helped him. He saw what I had done, how I'd fixed up things so beautiful. He had all new furniture, new everything. When I took over the Sentinel, he didn't even own a typewriter, he was renting. I didn't even know you could rent typewriters!

HOPKINS: When he was running it, was the paper financially successful?

WASHINGTON: Not too good, not too good.

HOPKINS: When you married him in 1940, Mrs. Washington, did he have a car or did he own a house?

WASHINGTON: Oh, no, he had a house, and he had a car. Yeah, he had a car, and he had a house, and he had the paper.

Mr. Washington was more of a newspaperman than a businessman, see. I think I was more of the business type. I said, "I'll watch the pennies, the dollars will take care of themselves." I was always that way until now, with the economy like it is! [laughter] When I read the business section of the [Los Angeles] Times and the Wall Street Journal, I see that nobody is able to watch the pennies anymore because our country, to me, looks like it is going backwards. See, America has always been a working country, a building country. When you look at it today,

and you read the Wall Street Journal, and the business section of the Times--you look around--none of us are too good as business people, because, what do you see today? Big business, we're losing; savings and loans are leaving us, banks leaving us; that shows that we're not so good [in] business as we were in the beginning.

HOPKINS: Why do you think the change--? You're talking about the black community, right?

WASHINGTON: Black community and the white community, because lots of big business is in the white community.

HOPKINS: But among black--

WASHINGTON: We don't have the business.

HOPKINS: But among black business--

WASHINGTON: Just like we used to produce ourselves, we're sending everything out of the country now.

HOPKINS: That's true.

WASHINGTON: When we send things out of the country, that lets off all people. We don't have business ourselves. When you see big companies leaving us, that affects you, me and everybody. Yet today we're taking in the whole world, and we have less business in the United States.

See, we were producers. I was born in Kansas, the wheat and your meat. When I was young, we could travel throughout the United States and people were working. The farmers were busy, the loggers were busy--Oregon and

Washington where your logging is--people were busy. You go and visit somebody, well: "My father's not home, he hasn't gotten home from work yet." We were working, we were "Working America." The politicians should take a good look; talking is not building. All my parents were working people, just like Mr. Washington started our people here in California working, and they began to work. We were producing. Not anymore. You can travel throughout the United States, all you see are empty buildings and more people. That's enough, back to the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: In 1948, when you took over the paper, how were you received by the newspaper world?

WASHINGTON: Well, they couldn't understand me, being so young. I would go and call on people. I'd go to New York and call on agencies. They'd look up and see a young woman in there with her briefcase, talking about advertising and running a paper (and especially a woman). I would tell them how I came into the newspaper business, but they respected me and I got ads. Just like they have to swallow a frog--it's a shock. Well, I was a shock, but I'd come back happy, because I had sold my ads, that simple. Mr. Washington belonged to Amalgamated Publishers, New York, and they sold more ads for the paper. He joined the California Newspaper Publishers Association--he was the first black. [We've] been with this for years, since he

started.

HOPKINS: Did he know Mr.--?

WASHINGTON: It was growing pains for me and the Sentinel because each day I was growing up. Well, can you imagine women thirty-six years ago? Huh?

HOPKINS: It's hard to imagine.

WASHINGTON: It's hard to imagine. Can you imagine a young woman--let's see, thirty-six years, let's see, I'm seventy--

HOPKINS: You'd be thirty-four.

WASHINGTON: That's quite young, isn't it?

HOPKINS: Yes, it is--running a paper and being a woman. Do you remember any examples, or instances, of prejudice against you as a woman?

WASHINGTON: No, people were real nice to me. I guess there was no other women out there! [laughter] I like people, and they seem to like me. They would just shake their head, "Right on!" Of course, I told them how I came in the paper, and most men thought that was beautiful. Some of them said, "I hope my wife would take care of me like that." I took good care of Mr. Washington.

HOPKINS: Were you friends with the other female newspaper publisher, Charlotta Bass?

WASHINGTON: I didn't know Mrs. Bass too well. I knew her. My mind, mostly, was doing the thing that I had

decided to do; to make the Sentinel a beautiful paper. I had nobody I could turn to, you know, so, as I said, I studied other papers. As you know, the Sentinel is a metropolitan-type paper, isn't it?

HOPKINS: Yes, it is.

WASHINGTON: It has your classified and your real-estate-- I'm very creative, I'm the one that started the food section--through a friend of mine, she'd retired--and then I set up the fashion section, the entertainment section--

HOPKINS: What about your employees, how did they accept you?

WASHINGTON: Well, my employees all liked me because it was a new beginning for them. At that time blacks couldn't work on white papers. [If] they were studying journalism, where were they going? This was a good springboard for many of them, you know. I surrounded myself with the top journalists that I knew, because I knew that I was going to be busy in the business world. I find, if you get the top people working for you, that know journalism-- Then they'd listen to me, because they knew I had ideas of what I wanted the paper to be.

HOPKINS: How did you go about finding the top journalists?

WASHINGTON: Searching.

HOPKINS: Searching? Were there specific black journalism schools--?

WASHINGTON: It was like how you found Mrs. Washington.

[laughter] What are you smiling about? That's right! So I searched out good people.

HOPKINS: It seems to have worked.

WASHINGTON: It worked. I wished I could go back and tell you some of all the fine people that worked for the Sentinel, but as I said, I am not good on history and that, because my every day was looking forward. I'm a person like this: if we have a problem--if I had a problem with the Sentinel, with any employees or anything--I always said, "Let's straighten it out now, let's fit it together and straighten it out now, tomorrow's a new day." My mind will be in another direction, and I don't really like that about me. I never like to go back over a thing.

HOPKINS: Well, it seems like pictures help. Maybe if you brought some of the pictures you have again.

WASHINGTON: I will, I'm going to get some of the old pictures and things of Mr. Washington--Mr. Washington with the politicians-- After Mr. Washington began to get well, I took him on a trip and stayed away from the paper two months. But you see, I had it so [well] set up and I had [such] good employees, [that] when I came back, I always told them the paper was in better shape than I was. I left it--can you imagine staying away from the paper for two months?

HOPKINS: It's hard to believe. Where did you go?

WASHINGTON: We went to New York, we went to Philadelphia, we went to Washington, D.C.-- I'm going to look for some of those pictures, too.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

AUGUST 29, 1984

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, there were a number of black newspapers in the country during the thirties and the forties. Did you have any relationships with those papers--with the editors or publishers of those papers?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, yes. Mr. Washington joined the Newspaper Negro Publishers Association--that's a black organization--and has been a member of that for many, many years. [Now National Newspaper Publishers Association] It is combined with all black, mostly black, newspapers across the nation. In fact, I have some of them here that belong: here's a Kansas City Caller I'm pulling out, this is Kansas City, Kansas. Mr. Washington was from Kansas City, Kansas; he used to be a Kansas City Caller [paper]boy when he was a kid, a young boy. He used to sell papers for the Kansas City Caller. Now, this paper is volume sixty-five.

HOPKINS: So we're assuming that's sixty-five years old.

WASHINGTON: Yes. Here are other papers: the Louisville Defender, that was his good friend--they belonged to the same organization. Stanley, Mr. Frank Stanley, he's passed on. Mr. Franklin of the Kansas City Caller has passed on. The Chronicle, that's out of Michigan.

HOPKINS: Is this Detroit?

WASHINGTON: That's Detroit. Here's a Louisville Defender. We'd get exchange from all black papers across the nation that belong mostly to our organization.

HOPKINS: Right. When you took over the paper--

WASHINGTON: We belonged to that [National Negro Newspaper Publishers Association].

HOPKINS: Did you attend meetings and so on?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes. Conventions.

HOPKINS: How were you received by the people?

WASHINGTON: Oh, fine.

HOPKINS: No problem?

WASHINGTON: Oh no, no problem. I've never had any problem.

HOPKINS: I mean, being a woman and all?

WASHINGTON: Being a woman-- They just shook their heads, and that was it.

HOPKINS: What kinds of things did that association do?

WASHINGTON: Oh, they do lots of lovely things for the paper; we exchanged ideas.

HOPKINS: Did they establish standards for the paper?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes.

HOPKINS: Well, I know we won't finish today, but I'd like to at least start talking about Mr. Washington.

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington IS the Sentinel.

HOPKINS: Is the Sentinel, right. Now, I don't know; he

had a little help too, I think. [laughter]

WASHINGTON: You know, I always called him Mr. Washington when he was here around the office.

HOPKINS: At home though-- What did you call him at home?

WASHINGTON: Oh, I called him "honey," different things like that. But I always addressed Mr. Washington as "Mr. Washington." So many couldn't understand that, but they admired me because that's what he was in the business life-- "Mr. Washington." I never called him any other name but "Mr. Washington" around the office. Now, he had a nickname that people called him, "Wash." He used to write a column, "Wash's Wash." I'll have to bring you some of his columns.

HOPKINS: I'd love to see them.

WASHINGTON: Yes. "Wash's Wash," that was his column. After he passed on, I took the same space and called it "Common Sense"--on the editorial page, you know, where his "Wash's Wash" was.

HOPKINS: Was Mr. Washington active in local and state politics?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, yes, very much so, very active. That's how he was able to help his people. He wasn't a businessman: he was an editor, he was a journalist--a newspaperman.

HOPKINS: Did he know Kenneth Hahn?

WASHINGTON: Oh, he helped Kenneth Hahn.

HOPKINS: Oh. Can you tell me about that?

WASHINGTON: Kenneth Hahn started right here in this community where we are today as councilman. He was the one who directed Kenneth Hahn what to do in the community, and Kenneth Hahn followed him. You really should interview Mr. Hahn, he's a wonderful man. He made his move as Mr. Washington directed. He was a councilman here a long time; then his brother walked in his shoes when he went to be a supervisor [Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors]. Kenneth would be beautiful to interview; he loved Mr. Washington.

HOPKINS: I'll have to talk to him. Can you think of any specific examples of where Mr. Washington influenced Mr. Hahn?

WASHINGTON: Yes, and I'm going to bring you the pictures.

HOPKINS: Okay.

WASHINGTON: We're going to get into that a little bit.

HOPKINS: Then we can talk about it at that point.

WASHINGTON: Also with Governor [Edmund G. "Pat"] Brown [Sr.].

HOPKINS: All right, that sounds excellent. Maybe, Mrs. Washington, this is a good place to stop.

WASHINGTON: Yes, see I'll have the weekend to get all the pictures together--with Kenneth Hahn, with politicians--that you can see.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 5, 1984

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, today we'd like to discuss, in depth, the life of Mr. Washington--as you say, better known as "Colonel" Leon [H.] Washington [Jr.]. Now, we've already talked to some extent of when you met Mr. Washington, but can you now give a chronology of your relationship with Mr. Washington?

WASHINGTON: I met Mr. Washington in Kansas City, Kansas. It must have been about 1939, because he was visiting near; although my mother [Oma Boswell Bromel] knew Mr. Washington when he was quite young. And I was coming out-- I was telling him I was coming out to California for a visit, and I guess we did a little courting there. Then in 1940 I came out to California, and he insisted that we get married. It was my first marriage. I was twenty-six. I really wasn't ready to get married, but he won and we married in September, 1940. Although I knew Mr. Washington before this late, before '39, I knew the family.

HOPKINS: Had Mr. Washington been married before?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I was his third wife.

HOPKINS: Do you remember the names of the other wives?

WASHINGTON: They both lived here in California, too. The first wife's name--they lived together, he said, six months--was Laverne Handy.

HOPKINS: Oh, Laverne Handy?

WASHINGTON: She lives right down, about two blocks from the office. The second wife was from Texas, her name was Jay--I don't remember her last name--everyone called her Jay. I know them both; we were all good friends.

HOPKINS: What kind of wedding did you have, Mrs. Washington? Was it a large ceremony?

WASHINGTON: No, I didn't want a large wedding. We went to Yuma, Arizona, and married. And I went back home to get my things, and then my mother had a little reception for me. We're in September, 19-- On September 26, I'd be married forty-three years, if he were living, because we married in 1940, September 26, 1940.

HOPKINS: So this will be forty-four years.

WASHINGTON: This is 1984--if he were living.

HOPKINS: Was your mother surprised you had been married?

WASHINGTON: No, my mother was happy, because she loved Mr. Washington. She knew him when he was a young man, a young boy.

HOPKINS: I'd like to switch now to politics.

WASHINGTON: Mr. Washington was a great politician.

HOPKINS: Was he active in local politics?

WASHINGTON: Local, state, national; he was a Democrat. I'm a registered Republican--Kansas is Republican. Mr. Washington, I think, at one time was Republican, but he

changed to Democrat, and I decided I would stay registered Republican. But we worked with both of them--he always went for the man. Under Goody [Goodwin J.] Knight, who was Republican, Mr. Washington worked with him, was for him, and under the Democrats, he worked with them.

Today I look at parties [as] quite confusing, a little disappointing too, because our country is in such a bad way. I read the Wall Street Journal, the business section of the [Los Angeles] Times. It gives you the thought of the thirties during the Depression, where banks are closing, savings and loans are closing, people are being laid off from their jobs. We're losing a lot of top businesses today across the nation. That means more unemployment. That affects you as well as me--the big man and the small man in the street. You look around at our country today and look back when it was growing, many years ago--it's quite depressing. Our young children--we've lost a lot of them. We'll lose more if we don't come up with a better answer for education.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, do you remember what your husband's relationship was with Governor Knight?

WASHINGTON: Yes, he liked Governor Knight very well, and he backed Governor Knight every time he ran.

HOPKINS: What was it about Governor Knight that you think he liked?

WASHINGTON: In the first place, Governor Knight worked with him--with the black people--placed them into good jobs. I don't remember who Governor Knight was running against at that time.

HOPKINS: I should know that, but it's not on the tip of my tongue right now.

WASHINGTON: I'm not too good on history, because my mind is always thinking forward.

HOPKINS: I'll have to remember that; I know I know that, anyway.

WASHINGTON: Governor Knight won, and Mr. Washington was for him. I remember that the team-- There was a Knowland, Nixon, and Knight team. Mr. Washington was very disappointed in [William F.] Knowland and [Richard M.] Nixon--how they did [in] Governor Knight, but that's politics.

HOPKINS: What did they do to him? Can you recall?

WASHINGTON: I don't recall, but I know that he wasn't happy with Nixon and Knowland.

HOPKINS: What was wrong with the Democratic candidate for governor? I can't recall his name, either.

WASHINGTON: I can't recall his name or who was running at that time.

HOPKINS: I'm wondering if you remember, not so much the name but what the problem was with the Democratic

candidate?

WASHINGTON: I don't recall.

HOPKINS: I know you were probably happy to have him on your side for a change!

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes. Mr. Washington went for other Republicans, I just don't recall right now. He always searched out the man. I do that in my thinking. Being a Republican, I've crossed and gone for Democrats.

HOPKINS: What about for Governor [Ronald W.] Reagan? What was his relationship with Governor Reagan, if any?

WASHINGTON: I don't think they had-- I don't recall him and Governor Reagan. Mr. Washington has been passed ten years ago.

HOPKINS: I know he had a relationship then with Governor [Edmund G.] "Pat" Brown, Sr.

WASHINGTON: Very close relationship.

HOPKINS: Before I come back to that, do you recall the first time you met Governor Knight?

WASHINGTON: That would have to have been, I imagine, in the fifties or the sixties.

HOPKINS: What were the circumstances that you met him? Not so much the date or even if it was the first time.

WASHINGTON: I don't recall the year now, it would probably have to be around the fifties and sixties. When I met him--personally, myself--he was running for governor. I

think the battle was between Knowland and Nixon; that must have been around [1954]. I know Mr. Washington got on both of them, Knowland and Nixon. He wasn't much for Nixon at all. No way.

HOPKINS: So by the time Nixon ran for president--

WASHINGTON: It had to be around '52, around in there. Mr. Washington was vehement with all politicians. I wasn't so much, because I stayed mostly running the paper, learning every day.

HOPKINS: Can we look at a couple of the pictures there?

WASHINGTON: This is Mr. Washington made a "Kentucky Colonel" in 1963.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, I want to come back to those, but the ones dealing with the politicians since we're on that.

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HOPKINS: Now, I see you have some photos here that you've been getting together. Can we talk about them a little bit?

WASHINGTON: Yes, I would like to talk about them. First, I would like to tell you that April 15 is Mr. Washington's birthday. He was born in 1907.

HOPKINS: Do you plan any special activities here at the [Los Angeles] Sentinel this time?

WASHINGTON: No, I'm not going to plan. I'm going to run some other memorials here in the community in Mr. Washington's name, like the post office which was dedicated October 12, 1974 [Colonel Leon H. Washington, Jr., Postal Station]. And also Mr. Washington has a park, Colonel Leon H. Washington, Jr., County Park, that was dedicated Thursday, April 15, 1976, on his birthday.

HOPKINS: Where is this located?

WASHINGTON: It's located off of south Los Angeles, off Manchester [Avenue] [8908 So. Maie Avenue, Los Angeles]. Here is a picture of the library [Vernon Branch-Leon H. Washington, Jr., Memorial Library]. I think I did show you the library.

HOPKINS: Oh, that's right. We had a couple of sessions at the library, didn't we?

WASHINGTON: That's right, that's right.

HOPKINS: It's a beautiful place, by the way.

WASHINGTON: Here are some pictures of him and [Hubert H.] Humphrey, his great friend.

HOPKINS: Do you remember how he came to meet Hubert Humphrey?

WASHINGTON: He met Hubert Humphrey, oh, about thirty years ago, way before he was way up in politics. They were good friends.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see.

WASHINGTON: We met him in Minnesota, on a trip to Minnesota, Mr. Washington and I.

HOPKINS: How did he come to go to Minnesota, of all places? [laughter]

WASHINGTON: Well, listen, you'd be surprised. I had been to Minnesota when I was very young. I used to ice-skate in Minnesota. Believe it or not, I had my tonsils removed at Rochester, Minnesota, when I was about twelve. I've traveled a lot throughout the United States, very young.

This [photo] is Mr. Washington and Kenneth Hahn; they were good friends. I would like to say one thing, if I may. We are at Easter time. See, man goes through challenges. I had a challenge when I came to the Sentinel; you have a challenge in education; God put a challenge on all of us. That's why we have to grow in our different

lines that we follow--where there's education, where there's the newspaper, or whatever. Christ Jesus' struggle is a challenge, but He ended up with the crown. Don't we end up with our crown after our challenges? That's part of life, isn't it?

HOPKINS: That's true.

WASHINGTON: And Mr. Washington-- In every generation there's a challenge. His came in the thirties, my challenge really came in the forties, just like this new generation has a challenge in front of them. Challenge is a struggle, just like Christ Jesus--that struggle on that cross. But He ended up with the crown, and in time He gives us a crown after we've gone through our challenge, our struggles. That's the way I look at it.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, how would you explain your challenge for the forties?

WASHINGTON: My challenge in the forties? Coming here at the newspaper--not being a newspaperwoman, not knowing anything about newspapers--was a challenge. I used to wonder, "Well, why? Why was I put in this place?" But God placed me here, He placed me here very young, because I've been here thirty-six years. Now, I had been in business for myself five years in fine photography--that was a challenge. But He wasn't through with me. He took me completely away from photography--my mind and everything--

because He put me here at this newspaper--and that was a challenge.

HOPKINS: Can I interrupt just for a moment? If we close this door, because it's a little--

WASHINGTON: Oh yeah. [tape recorder off]

HOPKINS: We're back on now. Yes, he did.

WASHINGTON: He did, and look what He went through. God gave Christ Jesus a challenge, a struggle. The struggle was on the cross. But look, He ended up with the crown, they put that crown on His head. That's the crown we've all got.

HOPKINS: Are you satisfied--

WASHINGTON: I have three words--three things--that I keep in my mind that we must do, that God put in front of us:

PRAY, we must WORK, and we must WATCH. Those are my three key words. And today, don't we have to watch?

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: Everybody's on a watch. You see it all through the streets from Beverly Hills-- Neighborhood Watch, it wasn't there years ago. He's telling us to WATCH, He's telling us to PRAY, and He wants us to WORK.

When I'm in my car, the first thing I see--"I'm Neighborhood Watch." They weren't there years ago, we didn't need them. Mind is God, and Mind put it there for man to watch.

HOPKINS: Have you been satisfied with how you dealt with your challenge?

WASHINGTON: Yes. I'm very happy, I'm satisfied because of one thing: when I started with the Sentinel-- On November 18, 1948, my husband had the stroke. One week later I was here at the Sentinel, giving up all my work and photography that I loved so well. But you know what? I never looked back. I've never touched a camera since, because when I came to the Sentinel--being young, no experience, not in journalism--I had to put my whole mind to where God had placed me. I started out with six employees. Today we have sixty-four employees, and most of them are the youth. Computers-- We are in a computer world. In 1948, we were not in a computer world. Today we're in high technology, the computer world, and young people, our own community people, put the paper together. I'll show you through it. That's satisfaction.

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: I was quite young-- On my last birthday, I was seventy years old, but God has blessed me. I've never been off sick one day, not one day in my seventy-years of life that He's given me. That's a blessing, isn't it?

HOPKINS: Yeah, it is.

WASHINGTON: If we would look to God where He has blessed all mankind, we wouldn't be in the condition we are

today. I wouldn't have made it. I was brought up in Kansas. I was brought up in the church; I've never left it, never. If I were to close my eyes today, I would be happy to know that I've helped somebody. That's the most important thing in life--is helping each other. Today the Third World is here in America, seventy years ago it wasn't.

The doors were opened because God opened them, He opened them. It's in reason, it's in reason.

I'm proud of this Sentinel. I have many awards--you can just look around--that's gratitude.

HOPKINS: I want to-- In fact, the subject-- [she interrupts] Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

WASHINGTON: Awards from every organization; we service many, many organizations: clubs, sororities, business organizations.

HOPKINS: I want to talk about--

WASHINGTON: Then, also, the Sentinel, today--I'm very proud. I would like to just say a few words for the-- We have subscriptions throughout the United States--all through California, Georgia, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware. All through the United States--Colorado, Wyoming, Alaska, Canada. I'm very proud of this Sentinel.

HOPKINS: And with good cause, too.

WASHINGTON: Yes. Oregon--every state in the United States, the Sentinel goes--South Africa, we have one; Tel Aviv, we have a subscription. I said Alaska--all through Alaska, Anchorage, Fairbanks, this many. Nevada. That makes me proud, that means we put out a good paper.

I'm especially proud of the youth today. They need our attention, and they need it more than ever. I would like to say that education is the most important thing, that's why the United States is where it's at today. [tape recorder off] You can cut that off.

HOPKINS: Yeah, we can cut that off, no problem.

WASHINGTON: She made me lose our thought. Our regular girl's not here.

HOPKINS: Oh, I see.

WASHINGTON: She's sick, our regular.

HOPKINS: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. You were talking about the education in the country and how--

WASHINGTON: The education is very important. We have the Third World here, and they want to come to America for education. That's why UCLA, USC [University of Southern California]--we have all foreign students, all over--that's why our educational system has grown. USC-- My print shop used to be right across the street from the Shrine [Auditorium]. Today, it's education. They still, I doubt, have enough room, because more and more people are coming,

isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: I think that our government is shorting us-- our youth--on education. Every child in America should be educated with the taxes we pay. That's why we've been able to give, give, give millions of dollars. Now, it's very high, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: It's very high. For our country to stay where it is today-- [tape recorder off]

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, we're back on after the phone call. When you think about your career and how you've met your challenge, if you had it to do all over again is there anything you'd do differently? Think about it for a moment.

WASHINGTON: I don't think there'd be too much-- Oh, shut it off. Yes! [tape recorder off]

HOPKINS: Okay, Mrs. Washington, after that brief interruption, I'll just ask you again: if you had to meet your challenge again, all over, what would you do differently this time do you think?

WASHINGTON: I don't think I would do anything any different. I would just go up higher. The path would be open for me, just like it was when I started. As the Bible says, the crooked places will be made straight. I think I

would just go up higher. It would be a good challenge, because I would be working still with God's children--a different generation. Every generation is a challenge, a struggle. If we look back a hundred years, even the slave days, it was a challenge, it was a struggle. But we don't have to look back. Look where that challenge and struggle brought us.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: Now we're into high technology, space. We're proud to know that [Guion S.] Bluford [Jr.] was the first black to go into space.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: That was a challenge; the whole world is proud today; he [Bluford] helped us to be proud of ourselves. Isn't that right?

HOPKINS: Sure.

WASHINGTON: Every generation is different. Of course, we're still under the control of God.

HOPKINS: You know, we left off our session four, last time, with talking about Mr. Washington's involvement in politics and the political leaders he knew. Rather than trying to walk through each acquaintance he had, of which there were many, as we talked about people like Pat [Edmund G.] Brown [Sr.], Goodwin [J.] Knight, Kenneth Hahn, and--

WASHINGTON: Lyndon [B.] Johnson.

HOPKINS: Lyndon Johnson.

WASHINGTON: President [John F.] Kennedy, Kenneth Hahn.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh. So he knew many. Who would you say were the most outstanding and influential leaders from the 1940s, as you remember, that impacted the black community here in Los Angeles? [knocking on door] Okay, we'll stop for this interruption. [tape recorder off] Right, now we know about Tuesdays. Tuesdays are busy days, like you said.

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Anyway, when you think about the 1940s till today, are there any leaders that come to mind who were very influential in making an impression on the black community?

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: Could you name some of them?

WASHINGTON: Dr. [H.] Claude Hudson. He'll be a hundred years old, April 15 [1985]. Dr. Hudson is the man that got Mr. Washington out of jail in 1934. He [Hudson] was forty-seven years old. His birthday-- Now, Dr. Hudson started the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] here in California. They are going to have a big celebration on the nineteenth in this month for him. He'll be a hundred years old. He's a civil rights man all the way, and everyone loved him and respected

him. Can you imagine Dr. Hudson, April 15 birthday, and Mr. Washington April 15? And do you know another great man, April 15? A. Phillip Randolph. I know you've heard of him.

HOPKINS: Sure, did you know him personally?

WASHINGTON: Yes I did.

HOPKINS: How?

WASHINGTON: When I was very young we used to go and listen to him speak--my family and all of it--wherever he was. I think he was with the Pullman [Palace Car Company] board.

HOPKINS: Yes, definitely. Anyone else in Los Angeles other than Dr. Hudson? Black or white.

WASHINGTON: Kenneth Hahn.

HOPKINS: How so? Why Kenneth Hahn?

WASHINGTON: Well, Kenneth Hahn was the first in this community that Mr. Washington worked with and pushed. He had him clean up the community, put lights--signal lights--throughout the community and keep the community good. He's well-respected.

I like Gilbert Lindsay. Gilbert has done a lot for this community and also his wife, who's passed on, about a year, Theresa [Lindsay]. In fact, they'll have the Easter parade Sunday; the Sunday Morning Breakfast Club. It has to be about--oh, about thirty-five years old, I'm sure. In the thirties--thirty some years.

HOPKINS: Is that down Central Avenue?

WASHINGTON: Yes, and Avalon [Boulevard].

HOPKINS: And Avalon.

WASHINGTON: On the east side.

HOPKINS: Do you remember your husband's relationship or your relationship with Gilbert Lindsay at all?

WASHINGTON: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

HOPKINS: Anything outstanding that comes to mind?

WASHINGTON: Well, I mean I go to the breakfast club that they have. They have a breakfast club where they honor different people; the breakfast club is very much involved in the community here.

HOPKINS: What do you usually do at the breakfast club meetings?

WASHINGTON: Well, they have outstanding speakers from the community.

HOPKINS: I see.

WASHINGTON: This is a busy community here on the east side, it's always been. This is the history of Los Angeles. It started right here on the east side, Forty-third [Street] and Central [Avenue]. My husband was so involved. He opened the doors in the thirties. His slogan was "Don't spend where you can't work!" and people stayed out of the stores a month and eighteen days not buying anything. He was put in jail three times, and Dr. Hudson

of the NAACP got him out of jail because he [Washington] was broke.

HOPKINS: Mrs. Washington, I remember well the editorials by your husband, especially the ones, "Don't spend where you can't work!" Since that time, can you remember any editorials or controversies that the newspaper has been involved in that are particularly outstanding to you that you can think of? Since the forties, perhaps? Or anything that the paper has pursued and has tried to clean up or to expose an issue? I know there have been many.

WASHINGTON: There's been so many.

HOPKINS: Exactly.

WASHINGTON: My mind-- I can't pinpoint any first, special one.

HOPKINS: Right.

WASHINGTON: That's our job as a newspaper, you know, to be alert to the problems of the community in which you serve.

HOPKINS: Right.

WASHINGTON: Although we have many problems now, they'll be worked out, just like anything else.

HOPKINS: Has there been any--?

WASHINGTON: There was the problem of the post office. Mr. Washington saw to it that the post office was moved off of Vernon [Avenue] onto Central [Avenue]. There's always been problems. All communities have them, and, of course, in

the black community you have more. Our biggest problem today is employment, and, of course, that's employment not only in our community but in the country. I don't know. Should I talk about what I think about the farmers?

HOPKINS: Yes.

WASHINGTON: I'm from Kansas. I was born when it was the forty-eighth state, in the middle of the United States. I come from Kansas--Salina, Kansas--which is farmland. I know about farmland, about farmers. I feel that we should help our farmers. They put the food on our table. Today we have so many people coming from all over the world into our country. They're going to have to be fed. They need employment, like Americans do. If we lose our farmers, food will be so high--which is high now--the average family won't be able to feed the family right.

See, farming is work. Most people don't realize it, but farmers work hard. They start early in the morning. They have to farm that land, before they even make money. Their money comes differently. Can you imagine Iowa, which is nothing but corn, your best corn in the world; Idaho, your best potatoes in the world; Kansas (where I come from), the best wheat in the world; meat, cattle. We'll be shortchanged one of these days, of all of that, if we lose American farmers. They should be able to have money at a very low interest rate. Their money doesn't come fast.

Today we waste what the hungry world would just--that old saying--"gobble up." The children can push away, they don't want it. "I don't want that." But if we lose our farmers--and just start losing a few, others will fold in--we're in trouble. God blessed America with fifty states of food. There's not another country in the world that produces food like America. In the Mideast-- He didn't put the food over there; He put oil over there, not food. In Africa, they have minerals and things--diamonds and gold--but they don't have the food like we have.

We lose our farmers-- Food is very high now. When you go to the store you hear people with their families: "Oh, that's too much, we can't have that." I watch--that's another WATCH--and listen. Then I think of how blessed I was as a child, coming up in Kansas. I can see the wheat fields, the cattle all day long on the roads going to the market. Plenty, plentiful. Even in our Depression of the thirties, the first thing my cousin would say, "We don't have to worry, we have plenty of food." [There were] "storm cellars," they called them, with food. You could go down the cellar, with everything in the world in it. What will that amount to today, with millions of people coming in here to live and no work? It's heartbreaking, it's really heartbreaking if you come from farmland.

HOPKINS: Do you have any regrets that you left Kansas?

WASHINGTON: No, I never looked back from anything, because everything was progress, it was learning. I went to school in Colorado. I want to tell you this, I don't know if I told you. When I was going to [Cole] Junior High School in the daytime, at nighttime--in the evenings--I was going to a business school, Emily Griffith Opportunity School, taking up business. Now, why did I do that? I took up bookkeeping, can you imagine that? I took up letter writing. My auntie, who passed [away] at ninety-nine, said, "Why do you want to go to school at night?" I said, "Well, I enjoy it." I had other friends that would go, and I'd go.

Then when I married Mr. Washington, I went to [Los Angeles Unified School District] Metropolitan [Skills Center], still taking up business. Then I took up photography, [took] up retouching, at another private school. I enjoyed it. It's a challenge--that's your challenge. Then after I took that up, I was able to go in business by myself.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: You see. All of that was a challenge. And we'll celebrate, April 15, Christ Jesus' challenge [Easter], too, won't we? And every town will be happy.

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: Hmm?

HOPKINS: Yeah, definitely. Mrs. Washington--

WASHINGTON: No, I don't look back.

HOPKINS: No regrets?

WASHINGTON: No. No, no.

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: You don't get too old to learn. I'm seventy years old.

HOPKINS: I wanted to move on now, to a topic where you're center stage. Regarding your involvement in the community--and, of course, your whole life has been involvement in the community--but specifically about some of the organizations and groups that you've belonged to-- I know that presently you sit on some committees. Can you talk about some of those?

WASHINGTON: Yes. First place, have you heard of the Black Women's Forum?

HOPKINS: Yes. Could you tell me a little bit about it for the tape, please?

WASHINGTON: It was a great, great organization started by Assembly[woman] Maxine Waters, Mrs. Ethel Bradley and myself--with a conversation--[for] bringing outstanding people to talk to women across the country. We're known all over the United States--we've had outstanding women and men. We opened up, first, with Andy [Andrew] Young's wife [Jean Childs Young], and every other month, we have someone

outstanding to come and speak to us. There's usually about thirteen to fourteen hundred women, sometimes more.

HOPKINS: How are they invited? Is it the membership that's invited--

WASHINGTON: Yes.

HOPKINS: --or anybody?

WASHINGTON: Oh, anybody. We have a membership of about-- Well, I imagine it's about fourteen, fifteen hundred, I haven't kept up with it, you know. They have all different task forces and things. They've worked it out. It's just an idea that Ethel and I had, and Maxine, and they carried it--

HOPKINS: When was this founded?

WASHINGTON: Now, isn't that awful? I don't have exactly what year.

HOPKINS: But roughly, in the seventies, eighties?

WASHINGTON: In the seventies, I think, the late seventies. Now wait, what's this? We're in '85 now, aren't we? It's been going a bit between three or four years.

Then, of course, I'm a national honorary member of Iota Phi Lambda sorority, which is a business organization. I'm involved with clubs and organizations--anything that's part of the community. I enjoy it, I enjoy people. We have so many wonderful, outstanding

organizations here in Los Angeles, and many of them are busy doing things--giving scholarships--which are needed so in the community. It's good encouragement for our young generation.

I couldn't look back, I can always look forward. I can say I've had a happy life, the way it's been laid out for me. [laughter]

HOPKINS: What are your plans for the future?

WASHINGTON: Well, my plans for the future are to keep involved in the things that I want to do--slow down a little. That's what I'm working at--

HOPKINS: I can't imagine you slowing down.

WASHINGTON: Well, no, because once I get my rest, I'm ready to go. I think I'll keep moving. My family all lived to be around their hundreds or their nineties. I talked to one on the phone the other day in Tennessee. She works in her church involvement--and that's part of life, that's a good life. Shut that off now, I want to-- [tape recorder off]

To Nicodemus. See, Salina, Kansas, was in the middle of the United States when it was the forty-eighth state. Now, on June 16, everybody in Kansas, all blacks, would go; some would go to Topeka; we would always go to Nicodemus. You just can't imagine, everybody came to Nicodemus, brought food, because we celebrate; nobody worked on that

day. They had a great, big, old-time platform, like they made years ago. With the horn [megaphone], you talked out of the horn in those days, you know, the big, old horn that they used.

HOPKINS: Oh, okay. Yeah.

WASHINGTON: They were all farmers. Now, Nicodemus is close to Hill City, Kansas, and that's on the Colorado line, see. I told you I left Kansas and went into Colorado. That's where I went to school. Now, my auntie lived in Colorado; my mother [Oma Boswell Bromel]'s family lived in Salina, Kansas, and we would go to Nicodemus. [shows photograph] That's my mother when she was a little girl.

HOPKINS: Boy, these are incredible pictures.

WASHINGTON: Oooh, you just see the others. I just brought those, not too long ago. When you get them all together-- You know what? Our people looked so beautiful in those days; Kanja looked just like him, only he's-- I've got one [photograph] of him, only he's brown-skinned. I just got those not too long ago to fix a book of all of them. He was about your color--Kanja. He specialized in raising corn, sweet potatoes, and Irish potatoes; farmers, farmland--beautiful! See, Kansas was a beautiful farmland. Our best cattle in the world comes from Kansas; the stockyards were in Kansas City.

HOPKINS: So are you celebrating Juneteenth Day?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, June. Yes.

HOPKINS: Can you tell us what Juneteenth is?

WASHINGTON: That's the celebration of the blacks from out of the South into the free state of Kansas. I don't remember, how many free states did we have? See, Missouri was a slave state. Then if you read that [book], you'll see that not all blacks-- Did you read the history [of] what came out of the South there?

HOPKINS: Yeah, you mean--

WASHINGTON: Russians!

HOPKINS: Yes, Russians, Mennonites. Yeah, all kinds of people came out of that track.

WASHINGTON: Yes. Isn't that something? Yes, see, that's a hundred and six years ago. [shows photograph]

HOPKINS: We appreciate you sharing this with us.

WASHINGTON: Yeah. I wish I had all the others. I've just got that-- I've been trying to get it together. My sister, she's taken lots of pictures. I've got to send some to her.

I don't know, there weren't very many free states, were there?

HOPKINS: No, not west of the Mississippi or in the South.

WASHINGTON: No. I had a cousin who went into Oklahoma in territory days. He married an Indian woman, Porto Gloma.

[They] own most of the land, that family does, today.

Yeah. There was the Ku Klux Klan in those days, too-- I think it's in there. Is it in that part? I mention the Ku Klux Klan, the nightriders?

HOPKINS: The nightriders.

WASHINGTON: And when the-- I have some more history.

HOPKINS: Oh, nightriders? Yeah.

WASHINGTON: My mother said. So you see, it didn't matter what color you were, those Klans were after us.

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: They knew who we were; aren't they busy today?

HOPKINS: They are. Could you have passed for white in your earlier days?

WASHINGTON: No, I never-- You know, even though people were fair, they never thought of anything like that. I, sometime, would be on the ski slope--I was a good skier-- and this is what I would get: "Look at that nigger, look at that nigger! She's gonna win, she's gonna win!" So color has always been that with us. But I always say--my mother said--"We're all God's children; don't pay any attention to that trash." Those were the words of the old people. They'd call us, "old black nigger," and we'd call them, "old, poor white trash." (You don't need to put that in there, but that's what they did.) And yet, we didn't have separate schools. We went to school and got along

fine. Well, we were country people. You know how children are, just like children are today, they're not looking at color.

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: Isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: Africa's looking at color--South Africa.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: Isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's right, yeah.

WASHINGTON: But today, are people looking at color? Here in the United States? South Africa--and it's going to change. Now, I'm going to tell you what happens: see, God teaches us all a lesson, and we listen to Him.

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WASHINGTON: [They] killed nineteen blacks just the other day over there in Africa, didn't they?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: What happened with that school bus? Thirty-eight--double, in a few days, didn't it?--were drowned. This says the power of God is quick and sharper than any two-edged sword. He doesn't like evil. The devil killed thirty-eight, didn't it?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: Nineteen and nineteen is what?

HOPKINS: Thirty-eight.

WASHINGTON: I bet you, [there] haven't [been] many people [who] thought about that. I did, immediately.

HOPKINS: Hmm. I didn't. Yeah, that's amazing.

WASHINGTON: He put it in my mind. I read my Bible every morning, and that opened up to me--many things open up to me. When you read the Bible and study [it], it's amazing how close you get to God.

He said-- I remember I asked Him, I said, "Why Ethiopia?" Ethiopia didn't look to God in the early days when they were rich. It was the richest country in the world, wasn't it?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: The richest country in the world. They didn't look to God, did they? Well, what happened? He's bringing the whole world together to help Ethiopia, isn't that right? Japan, Russia, everybody is giving money--white--every nationality is giving money. He's bringing them all together for Ethiopia, isn't that right? Clubs, organizations, individuals--"We are the children." I'm going to buy a record [Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie, "We Are the World" (1985)]--"Feed the children." I sent them [Live Aid] money. Everybody in the world is coming, has got their buying focus on Ethiopia. Radio, television, satellite--we can see it. Just like God said, when He returns, we will all see Him. Today, we've got satellites, we didn't have satellites fifty years ago.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: It's getting close to two thousand years. Everybody is focused. No matter where you go, it's Ethiopia now. And yet, He's letting the whole world see, and it is hurting us too--to see those children die and the ground parched and the dust. You know how dust is. I know what dust and whirlwinds are, coming from Kansas--that dust! You see it, don't you? No water, no water, and think of the dirty water they have to drink. That's affecting you, me, and everybody, isn't it? All over the world. But what does He say? "Ethiopia will spread forth

her wings." Something good's going to come from it, because it's bringing all nations together, from Europe, all over, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: Now their focus is on South Africa, who's sitting over there on diamonds and gold, isn't that right?

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: Diamonds and gold. He didn't put the diamonds and gold over here [United States]. It's in Africa, isn't it?

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: They [South African government] don't want to give up anything, do they? But the countries are turning against them, isn't that right? Countries are turned, they're fighting. They're [South African government] worried over there, they're worried people. But God has his plan, doesn't He? You know what? They're going to have to open up the doors; they're going to open up, it's going to take time. Just like Hitler killed seven million Jews, weren't they? We lived to see that in the forties. I had just married, was afraid, scared. Seven million Jews. They're still talking about the Holocaust, aren't they? Television. We went all through that. How could Hitler kill seven million Jews and no one stopped him? There was a reason. What was Jerusalem forty-two years ago? Israel,

what was it forty-two years ago? Nothing, not a soul, wasn't that right? What is it today? The whole world goes over there. My photographer's been over there two or three times [and taken] the most beautiful pictures in the world you want to see. I'm going. Even groups, church groups, they have excursion rates and things where they go in droves over to Jerusalem, isn't that right? Israel.

HOPKINS: That's right.

WASHINGTON: That's where He's going to return. He says the Second Jerusalem, doesn't He? It's in the Bible, isn't it? Isn't it beautiful today? Ooooooh! And you see the pictures of it. I've seen the pictures, those educational pictures, that they show at the auditoriums.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: You should see it. You should see when they start out, what it was before then--nothing. Out of the worst comes good, doesn't it? That's that challenge, and that's that struggle, isn't it? And who's doing it all? It's that challenge. You have a challenge in life; it hasn't been easy for you, has it? Just look how you drive that distance every day. That's our challenge, that's our struggle. In the world today, we can see Israel and we can see Africa.

HOPKINS: As a challenge, right?

WASHINGTON: It's a challenge, isn't it? He's putting

every man to the test in this, in this Ethiopia. Isn't that something? Now, look at all the millions of dollars that will go to Africa. Why is this happening? It's a reason, isn't it? That's beautiful, where they've got that record out. I'm going to go buy one, because I want anything to help them, see.

HOPKINS: Yeah.

WASHINGTON: He wants us to help. That's an idea came from mind, see?

HOPKINS: Well, Mrs. Washington, that sounds like an excellent place to end this interview. We talked about the future, and we talked about challenges. I think you've hit it right on the head. Is there anything else that we talked about, over the many months that it has taken to get the interviews done, that you'd like to share?

WASHINGTON: Well, I just hope you'll be able to get something out of the interview. I've enjoyed it.

HOPKINS: Uh-huh.

WASHINGTON: It's just that it's life that we face, and we don't take time enough to unfold where we've come from and where we're going. But I'm proud to be able to do what I have done in my business, because as I look back from the first day I come over here, in an empty building to lay out the [Los Angeles] Sentinel with the contractor--who was black, who's passed on, who was a builder--I couldn't have

done it if it wasn't for God. He put me to the challenge. Now, I've struggled, just like He did, but I feel like I can wear a crown today, because my employees are happy. I feel I've done something to help somebody along the way.

I have always said one thing, "When you've done good and you feel good, you sleep sound at night." I tell them, "When I'm gone, I don't want a big funeral." I just want to run a full page, thanking everybody for being kind and staying with me and helping me at the Sentinel and helping me to help people. "Just take me out to Rose Hill and put me on top of Mr. Washington."

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