BLACK LEADERSHIP IN LOS ANGELES:
JOHN T. STEVENS

Interviewed by Clyde Woods

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

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CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: February 2, 1924, Detroit.

Education: Wayne State University, 1938-41; University of Detroit, 1956-57.

Military Service: Second-class machinist mate, United States Navy, 1943-46.

Spouse: J. Rose Nesbitt Stevens, married 1951, two children.

CAREER HISTORY:

Salesman, Miller Brewing Company wholesaler, Detroit, 1952-54.

Branch salesman, special representative, regional representative, Anheuser-Busch, Detroit, 1954-71; district sales manager, Los Angeles, 1971-80; manager of special field markets, western region, 1980-93.

AFFILIATIONS:

Alpha Phi Alpha.

Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, board member, 1982-88.

Christ the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Los Angeles, vestry board, 1990-94.

Culver City, California, commissioner of environmental standards, 1973-77.

Golden State Minority Foundation, board member, 1983-present.

The Good Shepherd Manor, Los Angeles, board member, 1980-95.

Los Angeles County Fire Commission, 1983-87.

Los Angeles County Fire Department advisory board, 1989-92.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, life member.

Pacific Rim Apartments (housing for the handicapped), Inglewood, California, board member, 1992-present.

Saint Augustine's College, trustee, 1991-present.

Thirty-third degree Prince Hall Mason.

United Negro College Fund, Los Angeles.

Urban League of Los Angeles.

Young Men's Christian Association, Culver City, California, board member.

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS:

Distinguished Leadership Award, United Negro College Fund, 1982; Frederick Patterson Volunteer Service Award, 1988; Valued Volunteer Award, 1994.

Pioneer of the Beverage Industry Award, Shield Foundation of the National Affiliated Beverage Association, eastern district, 1984.

Resolution, Willie L. Brown Jr., 1987.

Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, Shorter College, 1987.

Omega Citizen Award, 1988.

Community Service Award, Black Business Association of Los Angeles, 1990.

Appreciation Award, United States Bureau of the Census, 1990.

Recognition, California State Senate, 1990.

Los Angeles Mayor's Certificate of Appreciation, 1990.

Humanitarian Award, Mid-City Chamber of Commerce, 1990.

Corporate Award, People Who Care Youth Center, 1990.

Founders Award, Sickle Cell Research Foundation, 1990.

Certificate of Merit, Supreme Council, Prince Hall Masons, 1990.

Ben L. Hooks Service Award, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, San Bernardino, California branch, 1992.

Appreciation Award, Black American Political Association of California, 1993.

Retailers retirement salute, California State Package and Tavern Association, Northern California division, 1993.

Frank Award for Humanitarian Achiever, 1993.

Recognition Award, Los Angeles County Fire Department, 1994.

Award for vision and outreach to church and community, First African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1994.

Black Firefighters Salute, Stentorians of Los Angeles County, 1994.

Inducted, Promenade of Prominence "Walk of Fame," Los Angeles, 1994.

Appreciation Award, Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs Today, 1994.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Clyde Woods, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program; B.A., Government, Oberlin College; Master of City and Regional Planning, Morgan State University; Ph.D., Urban Planning, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA; Assistant Professor, African American Studies, Pennsylvania State University.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Stevens's residence, Culver City, California.

Dates, length of sessions: December 13, 1994 (61 minutes); January 18, 1995 (61); February 21, 1995 (31); March 1, 1995 (42); April 13, 1995 (46); February 26, 1996 (36); March 3, 1996 (30).

Total number of recorded hours: 5.1

Persons present during interview: Stevens and Woods.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Stevens's early childhood, education, and employment in Detroit and continuing through his career with Anheuser-Busch and his move to Los Angeles. Major topics discussed include Stevens's work as one of Anheuser-Busch's district managers in Los Angeles; his involvement with community and civil rights organiza-tions and with various civic boards and commissions for the city of Los Angeles, Culver City, and Los Angeles County; important African Americans in Southern California; and the status of African Americans in America's business community.

EDITING:

Kathleen McAlister, editorial assistant, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Stevens reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names

and made minor corrections and additions. At that time Stevens also requested that a transcript of a video tribute to him given at the time of his retire-ment from Anheuser-Busch be added as an appendix.

Alex Cline, editor, prepared the table of contents. Peter Limbrick, editorial assistant, assembled the biographical summary and interview history. McAlister compiled the 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

DECEMBER 13, 1994

WOODS: Mr. Stevens, I just wanted to talk a little bit about your early life prior to your starting to work with Anheuser-Busch, Inc. To begin with, could you tell us a little bit about your parents?

STEVENS: Yes. I was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1924. My father's name was John Arthur Stevens, and he was from Natchez, Mississippi. My mother was Helen Valeria White, and she was born in Bay City, Michigan. I have one brother, Kenneth [Stevens], who was born in Bay City, Michigan. I was born, as I stated before, in Detroit, Michigan. My brother is approximately two and a half years younger than I am.

WOODS: So you were born on February 2.

STEVENS: Groundhog Day.

WOODS: Okay. So your father migrated to Michigan?

STEVENS: Well, I wasn't there when my mother and father formally met each other, but that's where they met. And the occasion I can't recall. But my father worked for New York Central Railroad, and he was a sign painter at the railroad station, Michigan Central Station in Detroit.

WOODS: And Bay City was just outside of Detroit?

STEVENS: Well, Bay City is about 120 miles from Detroit, and that was where my grandparents lived. My grandfather

was Charles T. White. That's how I got the Theodore in my name.

When I was five and my brother was three, my parents separated and divorced. So my mother and my brother and I went to Bay City for a couple of years and went to school, as I said, in Bay City--Farragut School--a couple of years. Then we moved back to Detroit, and we had an apartment. My mother did domestic work to try to support and keep a home for my brother and I.

I went to school in Detroit, to Fannie Wingert School, and that was elementary. McMichael was the junior high. And I graduated from Northwestern High School. I went to the Ford [Motor Company] Apprentice School.

Then I went into the service. I was in the U.S. Navy as a second-class machinist mate.

Then I came out of school and went to work for the Detroit water board as a meter reader. I was one of the first ones. Then I, along with Melvin Jefferson, Louis Morgan, and John Roxborough--who was Joe Louis's manager--started Superior Beauty and Barber Supply Company. I stayed there until 1952. [tape recorder off]

WOODS: Okay. Mr. Stevens, could you tell me a little bit about what Detroit was like when you were growing up? That was the Depression?

STEVENS: No. Actually, during the Depression years I was in Bay City with my grandparents, and we were able to live and eat pretty well. My grandfather worked for the post office. That was before civil service, and it was contingent upon your political party. And then, I guess around 1932 or so, I had a paper route.

Then I went into business. You might laugh at this. There were three black families in Bay City, so I got one of the ladies to cook me 250 pork chops every day. I used to put them in my wagon, and I'd sell them to the Jewish kids when they came out of the synagogue--that is, until my grandmother [Anna White] talked with the rabbi. As a result of their conversation I was so sore I couldn't even file a Chapter 11. I was out of business. But truthfully, I grew up in a good environment, and I guess the Lord has always blessed us, for which we have a lot to be thankful.

WOODS: Okay. So you had to work a lot when you were young?

STEVENS: Yes I did, to maintain and to help our family, the three of us, get along. And of course, I was always a prankster and everything. My brother is much more serious than I am. He's the quiet type. And although I profess and tell folks that I'm bashful, shy, and timid, most folks say it's just the opposite. But we grew and, as I said, I was always into some devilment.

I have a very close friend in Detroit now, Edward Burke. When we were youngsters he hit me, so I enticed him to look down the manhole in the middle of the street, and I pushed him in, and then I went home and went to bed. My mother and his parents were very concerned about friend Edward. I wouldn't say anything until the next morning, but you can bet friend Edward never hit me anymore. [laughter]

And another humorous thing, I know when my mother and father were together he bought a new Chevrolet. Of course, he could only afford insurance on the other person's car, and he didn't have insurance on his car. He'd just meet the note. So one day we were there on Vancourt [Street]. Jimmy [James] Harold's father drove a big milk truck. So he got in there and pretended he was driving, and I pretended I was driving, and the car rolled down the street and was demolished. And every time my father would get the note, I'd get another whipping.

WOODS: [laughter] Okay. So you were saying about your grandfather the fact that government positions were dependent upon--

STEVENS: Your political affiliation.

WOODS: So that was during the period when blacks were still primarily Republicans?

STEVENS: That's right, back in those days. And my father's

parents-- I knew his mother, Maggie [Johnson]. She was married about half a dozen times. It seems like we were always going to one of her weddings. And we always used to kid--my brother and I--that she had the kiss of death. She'd marry them and then, boom, they'd drop off. And then she had a daughter along with my father. He had a sister [Marie Thompson], rather. The sister died maybe about four or five years ago, and her husband, Holland Thompson, he died I guess about three years ago. He was about ninety-six or ninety-seven.

WOODS: So were you aware of politics at a young age?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, not per se. I can remember when my children [John T. Stevens Jr. and Sandra Jeanne Stevens] were young and I had a friend, Emmett Long Sr., and he was running for a Wayne County recorders court judgeship in the city of Detroit. I campaigned with him a little because I was his campaign manager, and that was quite an experience. I can remember one Sunday we went over to Reverend C. L. Franklin's church. That was Aretha Franklin's father. We went back into his study, and I inquired as to whether or not he would give a supportive statement for Emmett. He said that there were some politicians out in the audience, in the congregation, and that he couldn't do that. I had what you call a Kentucky bankroll, so I told him I was giving that to him for his discretionary fund. He said, "Well, that kind

of changes the story. You can sit up here with the deacons and the trustees." [laughter] Needless to say, he gave Emmett about a half-hour endorsement.

WOODS: And I guess that was during the time when blacks were becoming Democrats.

STEVENS: Yes. Well, I'll tell you, Democrats really-- As far back as I can remember was with Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt, and that was in 1933. And pretty much thereafter there was a Democratic administration, with the exception of, you know, Eisenhower and Bush and Nixon and that--

WOODS: So you spent a lot of time going back and forth between Bay City and Detroit?

STEVENS: Well, in my younger years. Like I said, we lived there a couple of years, but then my mother would go back. And I had an uncle [Theodore M. White] who was a doctor--my mother's brother--and my aunt Edith [B. Watson], who was the older sister. And we'd go back to visit the grandparents for the holidays or special occasions, because it was, like I said, only about 120 miles or so.

WOODS: So what was it like growing up in Detroit? What were some of your memories of the city?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, in Detroit, even back in those days, there were gangs. I can remember at the church that

we had a dance when we were youngsters--you know, probably in our teens--and one of the fellows was so badly beaten that he still requires care and treatment. And that was at the church, you know, so-- I grew up on the west side, and if you were from the west side and you went to the north side-- That's where all the pretty girls lived. So when you were ready to leave, you had to fight your way back to the streetcar if you weren't old enough to get in the car and leave. But it was always some kind of confrontation.

WOODS: So I guess there were a lot of blacks moving into Detroit at the time?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. You know, even now Detroit is quite heavily skewed with Afro-Americans, and it was then, too. I think primarily that a lot of people migrated into Detroit in the earlier years because of employment at Ford [Motor Company] or Chrysler [Corporation], you know, the factories. I can remember at Ford, when I was going to the apprentice school, that a lot of folks-- You know, $5 or $6 a day was a lot of money. And I can remember I was making $22.50 a week at the apprentice school. You were obligated to buy a Ford automobile, so I bought the automobile, and I guess it was about $700. But my mother couldn't drive, and my brother was too young, so mostly I tried to wipe the finish off of the car-- [tape recorder off]

WOODS: You were talking about wiping the finish off of the car.

STEVENS: So as a result, when I got ready to go somewhere I had to get somebody to drive me. I guess that worked pretty well, you know, being on the payroll there for $22.50. And then I became-- When I went to college I met Herb Kallenbach, whose father was the superintendent of all the Ford foundries. Herb was the superintendent of the new steel foundry at that time. So he said, "I'll make you a foreman, and you come and work for me." And at that time Jesse Owens was in labor relations, and Willis Ward, who was a noted football player from Michigan, he was in personnel. And as a result, I stayed there.

WOODS: What plant was this?

STEVENS: The new steel foundry. That's at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan. [tape recorder off]

WOODS: Okay. Well, what was the auto industry like back then?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, they had--

WOODS: What year is this?

STEVENS: The union went into Ford in 1941. And in the local, which was the [International Union,] United Auto[mobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement] Workers [of America, Local] 600, a lot of the leadership was Afro-American because of the workers in the factory. It, as I said before, offered

an opportunity, because back in those days you found a lot of lawyers and professional people were working at Ford because they couldn't find placement either in education or in a law firm. So what I'm pointing to is the fact that there were a lot of professionals there because it offered a sense of security.

WOODS: So there was an era of a lot of great strikes and, I guess, strife on the line. Or had that already passed?

STEVENS: That had already passed. After the plant became unionized, that was all over. But there was quite a bit of strife prior to the agreement between the company and management. So I was fortunate, really, at a young age to experience both sides of the work equation both by having worked as an hourly person and then as a salary person.

WOODS: What was the experience like as a machinist on the factory floor back then?

STEVENS: Well, actually, as I said, I left when I finished as an apprentice machinist. I never got into that. I went into the new steel foundry because it offered me opportunity and more money than I probably would have made. At that time I was making a hundred and some dollars a week take-home pay, and that meant the difference between buying a young lady a single-dip ice cream or a banana split. [laughter]

WOODS: Well, since you got into labor relations--

STEVENS: No. I said at that time Willis Ward, who played football

at Michigan, was in personnel, and Jesse Owens, who was a great Olympian, was in labor relations. As a result of disciplinary action on some of the workers that were assigned to my department, I had to interface with them, and that's how I became friends with them.

WOODS: What was your department again?

STEVENS: I was in the foundry, and I was making cores. That's where they pour the metal into a sand-made object for molding purposes. That's what we did.

WOODS: And you were the foreman?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: So what are your recollections of Jesse Owens?

STEVENS: Oh, he was a tremendous guy. He always used to call me junior and give me a hard time. He'd say, "Here you are again. What have you done this time?" You know, he'd call me into his office. But we developed a friendship and a rapport that lasted. He was quite a person.

WOODS: So he stayed in the steel industry for--

STEVENS: Well, he stayed in labor relations, and then, I guess eventually he moved. I don't know whether it was to Ohio or somewhere, but he left Ford I guess for some other opportunities.

WOODS: So it was a Ford-owned steel plant?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: You had mentioned another person, Willis--

STEVENS: Willis Ward. Well, Willis Ward was an athlete of renown from the University of Michigan. He received his higher education at University of Michigan, and then, I guess, when he finished law school, etc., got into Ford.

WOODS: So this was a pathbreaking period, you're saying, when blacks started coming into the management field?

STEVENS: Well, yeah. It wasn't all at one time, Dr. Woods. Like anything else, it was a progression, but it wasn't the fastest progression in the world. And back in those days it was who you knew. To get into the apprentice school, I had to pay Bernie Smith fifty dollars to give to Father [Everett] Daniels, an Episcopal priest at Saint Matthew's Church, so that he would write a letter of reference. And the letter he wrote-- That was it; you were hired. But the fifty dollars had to move, you know. WOODS: Grease the wheels.

STEVENS: Yes. It is pretty much the same today. If you're in the right spot at the right time and in the right place and know the right people, it makes a world of difference.

WOODS: So would you say that Ford was the center of the sort of black community in Detroit?

STEVENS: I would say that since they were the largest, their employment roles considerably influenced life in the

Afro-American community.

WOODS: So I guess the black church and politicians were all connected?

STEVENS: Yes, in most churches. And it's no surprise that in those days the minister or the priest influenced life not only in their community but in the total community and caused people through persuasion, etc., to vote the way they wanted them to. They had the candidates that they endorsed, and I think people for a number of years in most areas of the country followed the words of encouragement--for lack of another word to call it--of their religious leaders. Because they in turn were able to invoke favors for members of their congregation, whether it would be employment with the city or things that they wanted to have done in their community maybe even as simple as a stop sign or a streetlight or whatever.

The church I went to was Saint Cyprian's Episcopal Church in Detroit. That's where I was confirmed, I guess, when I was about ten years old. But the Reverend Canon Malcolm [G.] Dade was quite a force in not only local politics but state politics. And I can remember as a young man that he brought folks that were even controversial to the church, like the Reverend Malcolm Boyd, who's now out here, a gay Episcopalian priest. I was a youngster when he brought him to our church. And I can remember when he brought Paul Robeson. Paul Robeson

was quite a man, but still it took a lot of courage to bring him in confrontation with the audience. So that's the kind of church that I grew up in.

WOODS: So it was sort of like an intellectual center?

STEVENS: Well, it was a regular Episcopal church where they had the regular service, but then they had these forums. And at these forums the Reverend Canon Dade would bring in folks like Adam Clayton Powell and the [Charles] Diggs family. They were from Detroit. They owned the House of Diggs Funeral Home, and they were quite involved in politics. The father, he was a state senator, and Charles Diggs Jr. went on to become a member of Congress. I can remember back in those days that he and John Conyers [Jr.] and all of us would meet at the Toddle House. I guess we thought we were developing some little strategy, but now I kind of wonder whether we were or not. But they always used to call me "Mr. Secretary."

WOODS: Yeah. I met Conyers in Washington, I think, one of the weekends when he was putting together his political action committee. I also read a book. It's hard to get, but it was about Paul Robeson and his work with unions. It was written by a union organizer, I guess, in Detroit, and he was talking about Ford and that a lot of the black preachers also worked at Ford.

STEVENS: They did. Well, that's like the old country store,

you know; it's taking care of you, so you've got to take care of it. And then there's an old saying that you can't have the dog watching the pork chops. [laughter] So it was quite a thing where folk were influenced, and thus they voted that way and everything.

WOODS: Also, I guess you mentioned a lot of people, sort of national leaders or very influential people, who came out of Detroit. There seem to have been a lot of influential black leaders who did come out of Detroit. Why do you think that was?

STEVENS: Well, I think that both religiously and in other professions that there were a lot of leaders who came out of Detroit, and I think that was because of the determination and the desire to try to experience some of the other things in life. My wife [J. Rose Nesbitt Stevens] is from the South. You go South now and you see folks are enjoying everything. But I would imagine that back in those days it was just a life. When they got to the city and found out and experienced through vision and conversation what some of the other folks had and what they were doing, I think that that sort of influenced us. And the same is true today, that our standard of living, I would venture to say, is probably much greater or higher than our counterparts.

You know, as I ride around, and especially during my

experiences with Anheuser-Busch, you'd go into a Korean or Asian store, and the whole family worked there. And then pretty soon you'd say, "Well, where is so-and-so?" "Oh, he got his own store." But they would sit in the back room and eat that rice, etc., and one thing about us is that we've never eaten that way. But economically we're just getting to the position where we realize the need, that we've got to do something if we're going to survive. You know, as far as hotels are concerned and employment in general, we've got to forge a way to encompass the desires that we have. It's such now that as you ride around you very seldom see a black working in a hotel, even as a waiter. You don't see them at the gas stations pumping gas or any of the old jobs. Most blacks that were making money back in those days were waiters, at the country clubs, etc., and you don't even find that much anymore.

WOODS: You said that you were in a group with Representative John Conyers Jr. What kind of issues were you looking at? And who was in the organization?

STEVENS: Oh, well, we'd meet just, you know-- Most of the time it would be perchance. And there would be Freddy [Fred] Cuthrell. He was a dentist. There was Jimmy [James B.] Fritz, whose family owned a funeral home. There was "Sonny" [James] Stinson, whose family also owned a funeral home. And it wasn't

that the waffles were that good, but we'd just go there because we could get a table and sit and talk and converse as young men would do. Back in those days, when John Conyers was a young man-- We were all young, and now we're in the September of our years.

WOODS: Still looking good. This was in the early forties?

STEVENS: Yes, I would say in the early forties and even into the fifties. When I got ready to come out here in 1971, for example, Charlie Diggs wanted me to be employed at his funeral home, but I decided I'd come out here with Anheuser-Busch, because Anheuser-Busch afforded me an opportunity to be sort of self-developing. You know, I really never had anybody peeking over my shoulders or anything. I knew what I had to do, and as long as I did it there were no problems.

WOODS: Okay. Maybe we can just go back a little bit in terms of what some of your significant experiences were during high school, Northwestern High School.

STEVENS: Well, really at Northwestern High School I was working. I was out at Ford, and I'd go to work at seven o'clock in the evenings and get off at three thirty in the morning. And by the time I'd get home it would be well into morning, because usually I'd fall asleep every night on a streetcar and go to the other end of the line. [laughter] And then I was going to school, and I joined the Alphas [Alpha Phi

Alpha fraternity] and--

WOODS: While you were in high school?

STEVENS: No, in college. Then in college I was working, so I didn't have time for any sports or anything like that.

WOODS: So I guess you started the apprenticeship program at Ford during your senior year in high school?

STEVENS: Around in there, yes.

WOODS: So then you were at Ford for six months.

STEVENS: In the school, yeah. Then I went on into the factory, and I worked in the factory. I believe I stayed at Ford until I went into the service, which was in 1943. And I was discharged honorably in 1946.

WOODS: Was Northwestern an integrated high school?

STEVENS: Yes, it was. The greater preponderance was Anglo. Some of those who preceded me were like Damon [J.] Keith, the federal judge. There were quite a few persons who attended the school who went on to obtain responsible positions in their chosen fields.

WOODS: So the school was becoming increasingly more black over time?

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: Did that lead to any problems in the school with the teachers and students?

STEVENS: No. There were never any serious problems related

to friction between the groups. I can't recall anything that happened that relates to that until I guess around 1965 or so when they had the riots in Detroit, which was devastating, because a lot of the city was never able to rebuild.

WOODS: What was the cultural scene like in Detroit in the early forties?

STEVENS: As far as the arts?

WOODS: Right, music and--

STEVENS: Well, they had the Greystone Ballroom on Woodward Avenue and Paradise Valley, which was an area located downtown. And Freda Rente--I don't know if you know her--or Marla Gibbs, their father [Chester Rente] was the honorary mayor of Paradise Valley. That's where they had the bowling alley and the nightclubs. This was an area where all of us got together to congregate.

WOODS: On the weekends? Or at--?

STEVENS: Even during the week.

WOODS: So it was like a cultural center?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: So there was a black neighborhood adjacent to that?

STEVENS: Well, yes, there was, pretty much. It was quite a few homes in that section. In fact, that was the section not too far from where I was born, on Joseph Campau [Street] and Maple [Street]. And there was only one other house on

that block, and that was the funeral home. But now all of that property-- There are blacks included in it, but the demographics are skewed with Anglo Americans. That is, they moved downtown because Henry Ford [II] built the Regency Hotel down on the waterfront, and there's Cobo Hall down there and other buildings. It induced or enticed a lot of whites to come back in. So now you find where some of the older homes have been torn down there have been condo[minium]s, etc., built along Jefferson Avenue. That's now where a lot of those who are affluent live. But when I was born it was an area like any other area in any other town in any other city or place.

WOODS: I've been to that neighborhood.

STEVENS: That's where Joe Louis lived, down on McDougall [Street] with his mother.

WOODS: So did you meet him as a young man?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. I had the opportunity when I was young and by exposure during my years, because after I worked for a Miller [Brewing Company] wholesaler for two and a half years-- I was making, I guess, about eighty dollars a week at that time. So I went to the Urban League. Dr. Francis A. Kornegay was the head of the Urban League in Detroit, and he interviewed me for a possible position with the J. L. Hudson department stores. I would have been in charge of the elevator girls

and the maids, etc.

So when I got back, I met this young man. His name was Ron Rohn, and he had been out to get a job with Miller, and it paid more money--five dollars [more] a week. So I went to the Miller-- We just swapped jobs, so to speak. And then after about two and a half years the manager from Budweiser for Detroit stopped me and said that he'd like to have me come with them, and I started with them, and then I guess it was about-- I'd been there about a couple of years, and they had to cut back. So naturally, being one of the last ones hired, I was one of the first ones to go. So they brought me home. There was a friend, Wendell Johnson. He worked for Old Grand Dad. It was a whiskey company. He said, "What you doing?" And I said, "Well, they laid me off."

So I called Stroh's [Brewery], and they said, "If possible, could you start next Monday? Just get a letter." So meanwhile, the salesmen-- We were kind of organized. We called ourselves the "hucksters." They went around, and they said, "You know, Budweiser laid John off." So like the Flame Show Bar--that's where Dinah Washington and all of the stars used to come--they called and said, "Could you come and pick up your full and your empties? Randolph Wallace and Sonny Wilson, everybody, come pick up your empties. We don't want to handle your beer anymore."

So they called me. And they had given me I guess a three-month severance. So they said could they meet me. Then they said, "Well, we've got to hire you back." Because I guess it was economic pressure. And they said, "Could you give us the severance that we gave you?" [laughter]

I said, "Well, I spent that."

So we haggled before we could come to some terms or condition. They said, "Well, how soon could you pay it back?"

I said, "Well, you know, it is going to hurt me, but I could probably pay ten dollars a month."

So they said, "That doesn't sound too satisfactory." But finally they agreed to it, because there was no other way out.

So I went back with them, and over the years it proved that it was a good choice for both of us.

WOODS: So what year was it you started working with Miller?

STEVENS: I believe I started with the Miller wholesaler around 1952, and then I stayed there until 1954, April 26. WOODS: And you had mentioned Joe Louis.

STEVENS: Well, Joe Louis, as I told you-- We have some good friends, Norman and Shirley McRae. They're both Ph.D.'s. Shirley's aunt went with Joe Louis. And then I knew Joe Louis because of his association with John Roxborough.

WOODS: And that's where you--?

STEVENS: Yes. Well, John Roxborough is the one I mentioned to you. Dr. Robert Bennett was his physician.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 13, 1994

WOODS: You were going to tell me about your experience in the service, which started in--

STEVENS: Yes. I remember one day I went to the barber shop to get a haircut, and when the barber let me out of the chair he said, "Well, I won't be seeing you for a long time."

So I said, "Smitty, why?"

"Because, you know, I'm the chairman of the draft board, and everybody on the west side of town is going to be gone."

As it turned out, I went down, and I was inducted into the navy, where most of the young fellows whom I knew, grew up with, or had some association with-- I went from Detroit to Great Lakes [Naval Training Center], Illinois. That was at the time that they had just commissioned the first thirteen black ensigns who later became admirals, etc. In fact, I have a picture in my book with Admiral William Toney that I was going to show you.

From Great Lakes I was sent to Lambert Field in St. Louis. On one side of the road they kept all the airplanes, and that's where all of the Anglo sailors lived. On the other side of the road was where all of the ethnic personnel was.

You could go out of the back door of our barracks and you were right there with all the Anglo WAVES [Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service], etc. So, needless to say, some of the fellows had an enjoyable time, because the brig would only hold three people.

At the movies they had-- The booths were painted red, and that was where we were supposed to sit. So finally one morning they stated that in our barracks, when the bugle blew, if anybody got out of bed--because most of the brothers were either cooks or stewards or truck drivers, and I was a machinist's mate--that bodily harm would befall them. As a consequence, the admiral from the ninth naval district came up, and we were all shipped out.

So I left there, and I went to Hawaii, and in Hawaii I was assigned to a company. But in the navy, if you're not assigned to your classification you can demand a transfer. So rather than change big truck tires, I asked for a transfer. That evening I was on my way to Guam, and I got to Guam, and from Guam I went into Japan, and I was there for the surrender.

It was quite an experience being in Japan, because there was a certain color consciousness between the Japanese and the blacks. They would come down from the hills, and their snipers would shoot the whites but they wouldn't shoot the

blacks. And it wouldn't have done much good if they would have tried to shoot me, because I had a .45[-caliber pistol], and when I was the junior officer of the deck I only had one shell. I guess they gave me that one shell so I could kill myself.

But anyhow, it was an interesting experience, because on the ship I met a fellow named Willie [William] Knight, who lives in Indiana. He has some nightclubs there. But Willie was a professional gambler. In the navy you got paid twice a month. I'd give Willie my money, but I would watch the bets and everything. And, oh, he'd sell everything on board the ship. He was paying off the executive officer. And then finally we had a change of command, and they wanted to know how was I able to send $100 or $200 home every day. So I told the captain
that I ran into folks who were indebted to me. And he said, "Well, you'd better get unindebted and cut that out."

But anyhow, because of the way things were racially, I couldn't go down to the machine shop. I could go ashore when the boat went over to pick up the mail. But they would assign me to duties. For example, if they had too many flight jackets or too much inventory of food or whatever, or if they wanted to lighten the weight of the ship, they'd push brand-new automobiles over the side. And you could see the Japanese

diving in the water trying to retrieve some meat or some butter or something.

And finally in 1946--I guess it was about October-- they said, "If we put some more stripes on your jumper and you can get some more fellows to reenlist, we can see you being home for Christmas." I said, "Now, that sounds excellent." That's how I got out of the service in 1946. WOODS: So you were in there from 1943 to 1946?

STEVENS: That's correct. In fact, the day I went in was the day my father got discharged from the army, but we didn't pass each other.

WOODS: Well, what was the experience like on Guam? Did you spend much time there?

STEVENS: No, not too much. We just went into Guam and refueled and everything and went on into Japan. And as you know, they were headed in for the surrender. And I was ready for the surrender, because I had an armful of candy and an armful of cigarettes, because I was the

Henry [A.] Kissinger of my day--making friends. [laughter]

WOODS: Just one last question: What was Japan like during that period?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, Japan reminded me so much of the United States because of the fact that you could look on the corner and you could see the Shell gas stations back

in those days. They had so many conveniences, you know. They had the transit system that was developed. There wasn't much westernization, but there was still a lot.

I think that one of the things that intrigued me so much was the fact that there was no modesty. If you were walking down the street and a young lady was with you and she had to go to the bathroom, she'd just stop right there and go, or a fellow would go, and that kind of amazed me. And back then, you know, the government ran the geisha houses, and you paid according to rate or rank. But it was always amazing to me to see and hear that the first person in line at one of the houses was the chaplain. I guess he was blessing everything. [laughter]

WOODS: So there was a lot of poverty there after the war?

STEVENS: Oh, yeah. Yes, there was.

WOODS: Okay. Maybe we can move on to your time at Wayne State University.

STEVENS: Yes. Well, I went to Wayne State University, and it was there that I met my wife. I was still working and going to school and was active in the fraternity. Actually, I met my wife, I believe it was, in 1950. It so happened that it was down at the fraternity house, and I wanted to know who she was. The person whom she was with didn't want to divulge that information or her phone number. But I did

know a couple of the young ladies who were sitting there at the table, so the next day I was able to garner that information from them. So in June of 1995, June 16, we'll be married forty-four years.

WOODS: Congratulations. So you were working at Ford when you were at Wayne State?

STEVENS: Part of the time. And then, as I related earlier, I read water meters, and then I was associated in the beauty and barber supply business.

WOODS: So was Wayne State sort of like a center of this new generation of blacks going back to school?

STEVENS: Yes. There were quite a few blacks at that time. And there were some blacks who were on the faculty, like Arthur Johnson, who is now vice president. Eugene Hall Sr., who lived out here, he was a counselor. And there were others. But primarily it was a school that attracted perhaps a more diversified ethnic body than the University of Michigan because of the cost differential.

WOODS: I've always heard that Wayne State sort of had a progressive student body that was very much connected with the labor movement and civil rights.

STEVENS: Well, I would say it was very progressive.

WOODS: What did you study while you were there?

STEVENS: Well, I started out with liberal arts with the

intention of perhaps going into law. But then, as I stated, I wound up with Anheuser-Busch, and then I went over to the University of Detroit. I had an assistant branch manager who was a devout Catholic, and he was determined that we were going to give the Jesuits some money, so he enrolled the whole sales force in some marketing courses, and I went over there. And as a result, I can say, I was married, and it wasn't long--five years--before my son [John T. Stevens Jr.] came. And then we bought our first house.

Blacks didn't have the mobility to quit a job like our Anglo counterparts, you know. They could go and tell the man what he could do with the job and go out and find a better job. But then I think with us there's the realization that the rent is due. You need groceries, you need this, you need that. I got married, and, like I said, it was a necessity to try to provide for my family. So really I never finished college.

WOODS: What was Detroit like after the war? Was it booming? Or was it--?

STEVENS: Well, Detroit was always a town where there was a lot of activity, where there was a lot of expendable money in the black community. Because you had a black hospital, and you had-- Your doctors were pretty wealthy. Teachers were making good money, and as a result there was more of

a tendency to patronize those in the community than there was to go outside of the community. I think there was probably what you would call more of a recycling of the dollar then than perhaps there is now. Because the little guy had the grocery store before the big supers, and he would extend credit if you needed it or if you didn't need it. And I guess that's where most folks-- You know, they had their restaurants in abundance serving different types of cuisine. There was always a lot of things to do in Detroit. You know, you had the [Detroit] Red Wings, hockey, you had the Detroit Lions, football, you had, as I mentioned before, the Flame Show Bar, where Johnny Ray got his start. I can remember the Chesterfield [Bar] on John R. [Street], where they had all the big-name entertainment. There was just a mecca of things to do.

WOODS: So it was still expanding after the war?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: So Budweiser's business was also--?

STEVENS: Well, when I started with Budweiser--that's why they wanted me to come--their distribution wasn't what it was supposed to be. I used to work what you would call a retail sales route, not driving a truck or anything. I was responsible at that time for all of the black accounts in Wayne County, Michigan. It afforded me an opportunity and gave me a very valuable lesson, Dr. Woods, in that

you sell your product, but you also learn to sell yourself. I think that as I grew in age and in service with the company, I always maintained their philosophy, and their motto was "Making friends is our business." But I think I had adopted it even before I went with Anheuser-Busch.

WOODS: Can you tell me a little bit about your wife and her background?

STEVENS: Well, my wife is from Montgomery, Alabama, and she was born in Montgomery. Her family, the Nesbitts, lived across the street from Alabama State University. My wife came to Detroit, I believe, after high school years and lived with her cousins Ramon and Marie Scruggs. Then she went to Wayne University, and my wife finished college the year after we got married. And needless to say, we had two children, Johnny and Sandra [Jeanne Stevens].

WOODS: So you were married in what year?

STEVENS: Nineteen fifty-one. June 16.

WOODS: And you first child was--?

STEVENS: Johnny. Johnny was born on October 8, 1956, and our daughter was born August 3, 1958.

WOODS: I guess we've touched a little bit on your work for Budweiser, but--

STEVENS: I think one of the most rewarding parts of my experience with Budweiser was that all of those who worked

for me progressed. Like Bill [William] Jones, he was just promoted to sales director for the state of Michigan, but prior to that he was assistant to the vice president of sales. Bill [William] Brooks, who worked for me, is in charge of sports programming in St. Louis. Diana Gregory worked for me; she's with our national accounts department in Chicago. Derek Fredrickson worked for me; he's got a responsible position in Seattle, Washington. But all of the youngsters have progressed, and I think that that's the greatest satisfaction that I have. And this is what young people have to know, that you have to establish credibility with what you're doing so that others have the faith to rely upon your judgment.

WOODS: Okay. Is there anything else you want to say about your early period before you started working at Budweiser? Anything that you feel like you missed or any points you want to clear up before we move into that period?

STEVENS: Well, the period prior to coming to Budweiser, I would say that I was perhaps a person who had a serious side but also had a jovial side. And I think I worked hard to accomplish what I did accomplish considering the times. Because I can remember traveling for Budweiser and that the hotels, for example, would tell you that they were filled, "But we could recommend Aunt Sara's Tourist Home down the

street." And I can remember leaving home in the early years of my marriage with a washcloth and a towel, because I'd have to sleep in my car and find a friendly face at the gas station to allow me to use the washroom to wash up so that I could go to work. And, you know, I had just about become accustomed to it.

To go back to the days in the navy when I was in St. Louis and I was in charge of the incinerator, the trash trucks-- That's how I used to get my beverages. Because the mess attendants would put an "X" on the barrel, which meant, "Look, don't dump that too hard because you'll break something." As a result, most of my experiences-- I had an opportunity to either live with the mess attendants and stewards or I could live with the fellows, but I just couldn't work with them. As a result, I chose to eat down at the officers mess. I'd go in the back door. Because they had a variety of menus, you know. So when I went into the service I weighed 130 [pounds]. When I got out I weighed 195 [pounds].

WOODS: So I guess during this period prior to '54 there were a lot of changes going on throughout--

STEVENS: Yes. Well, I'll tell you. You know, around that time was Martin Luther King [Jr.] and Rosa Parks. And my wife's uncle was a part of that movement in Alabama, Dr. Robert [D.] Nesbitt Sr., because he was the chairman of the trustee

board at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. That's where my wife used to attend church, and her family still does. It's Dexter Avenue Memorial Church now.

WOODS: Yeah. I went there a couple of years ago. So there was a lot of optimism coming out of the black community in the fifties?

STEVENS: Yes, because there was a determination that things had to get better. And I guess there was the feeling that we could no longer be taken for granted, that we had thoughts, we had dreams, we had aspirations just like any other folk. And as a result of Rosa Parks refusing to sit on the bus, I think that awakened the eyes and the consciousness of our folk--and the rest of America, as far as that's concerned--that we just weren't going to sit still. And as they say, history repeats itself. Now you find the Hispanics are in the same dilemma. When we were marching, they were on the sidelines. Now that they have a struggle, they want us to join them. But I don't know. I think at my age I'm going to sit on the sidelines.

WOODS: Do you think that your generation was signifi-cantly different from your parents' in terms of your outlook about change?

STEVENS: Well, I think so, because I think basically back then there were limits that folk felt allowed them to go but

so far. And I think that, as you remember the rebellion, the college rebellions, etc., it changed the whole thought of the younger generation towards-- But they were nonviolent, and there were protest marches. I think out of it evolved a better way of life that perhaps our parents didn't experience.

Because I can remember back in an earlier experience-- I was leaving St. Louis, and I got a phone call from the vice president of sales. He requested that I go into Columbus, Mississippi. And that was a first experience for me. That was at the time of Emmett Till and his drowning. So I was on this Martin 414--that's a type of airplane where you descend from the back stairs--and that thing flew so low.

I had gotten my orders to wear no company insignia and no jewelry that had the Budweiser insignia, because the wholesaler there was having a problem, and they wanted us-- Well, I was supposed to help solve his problem. So I went across from the Holiday Inn, and I was going to get me a cold Budweiser, and the guy said, "You're a stranger here."

And I said, "How can you tell?"

And he said, "Because you don't have on bib overalls. You look like one of them city slickers."

And I said, "Well, if I'm going to stay here, I have to get me some bib overalls." But that didn't quite do the trick.

Anyhow, it was an experience, because I went out on the street. Hertz brought me a car. It was a white one, and I was skeptical about driving a white car. I said, "Don't you have a darker color?" I was going to another little city, and the sheriff pulled me over. I just had all kinds of thoughts as he was walking from his car to my car. But he said, "Undoubtedly you're a stranger. Are you lost?" And I was just taken by surprise.

But I was trying to think of this little college. It was in-- We contributed to the sporting activities and anything that would help to better our communities.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 18, 1995

WOODS: We sort of left off-- I lost part of the story about when you were a Budweiser distributor in--

STEVENS: When I was what?

WOODS: Not a distributor, a sales rep.

STEVENS: Oh, for Anheuser-Busch?

WOODS: Right, Anheuser-Busch. You went to Mississippi, and I only got part of that story. There was a problem?

STEVENS: Well, the wholesaler in Columbus, Mississippi, was having a problem in the black area, and he couldn't put his finger on it, so they sent me.

WOODS: Do you remember what year this was?

STEVENS: Well, it was-- Let's see. What year was Emmett Till?

WOODS: About '53.

STEVENS: No, well-- Because I didn't start with Anheuser-Busch until '54, but I don't know how I had associated that in my mind with Emmett Till when I went to Missis-sippi.

WOODS: It was around that time.

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay. So you went to Columbus, Mississippi, from Detroit?

STEVENS: No. My home was in Detroit, because I lived in Detroit

from birth except for the couple of years that I went to Bay City, Michigan, to live with my grandparents. I stayed in Detroit and married in Detroit, and my children were born in Detroit. I came to California in '71. But it was during the time that they sent me to Mississippi on a special assignment to try to find out and to help to try to solve the wholesaler's problems.

As I related to you last time, that was an experience, because there the Afro-American, he drove the truck and wheeled in all the beer, and all the Anglo did was to collect the money. But with large drops he was engaged in other activities in the back room while the brother was out breaking his back getting the beer off the truck. And as the barmaids or the owners fell out with this particular driver, they stopped selling the beer. That was the crux of the wholesaler's problem.

But I went down there, and I visited several cities. I went to Jackson, Mississippi, which is the capital, and I went to Tupelo, Mississippi. What is that? The Mary Holmes--?

WOODS: Mary Holmes [Junior] College.

STEVENS: Yeah. I went over there. And I found much to my dismay that Mississippi wasn't really as bad as I had it pictured in my mind. I can remember the first time that I was driving from Tupelo to Columbus, and the sheriff pulled me over, and

I said, "Oh, my God! Here I go. In the windup something bad is going to happen." But he said, "Could I help you? Are you lost?" He was so nice that he caught me by surprise.

WOODS: So you went into the bar, and you told the barmaid that--

STEVENS: Oh, no. I pulled up to the bar in Tupelo, Mississippi, and a lady came over, and she introduced herself as the bar owner. She wanted to know if I was a government agent, and I told her no, that I was the advance man from NBC [National Broadcasting Company], and I was there as part of an advance group because we were seeking to do documentaries on individuals of note in the black community. So she was very friendly. Then she invited me over to her house next door to this wooden tavern, and she said, "Would you care for something to eat? Some chicken and biscuits?"

I said, "No, thank you."

She said, "Well, could you do me a favor and write on your report that I'd like to be sitting on my new sofa that I got from Sears and Roebuck when they do this documentary?"

Well, I assured her that I would and went back over to the tavern.

We engaged in conversation as to how the climate in their community was relative to black and white interfacing, and she said it was no problem. So I asked her some questions

about Coca-Cola [Bottling Company] and how their corporate attitude was and how Miller [Brewing Company]'s attitude was, how Budweiser's attitude was, and one thing or another. And while I was sitting at the table, I felt this pecking on my leg, and I looked under there, and it was a chicken, and he was going to town. [laughter] But when I left I had gotten the information.

But my orders were, when I left Atlanta--which was our regional office at that time--not to wear any corporate insignia and not to divulge that I worked for Anheuser-Busch. Several times during my career with Anheuser-Busch I was sent out on different assignments. Maybe it was to evaluate a wholesaler that they were trying to get out of the system. Evaluation crews, I was on quite a few of those during the time that I was with Anheuser-Busch. Like one was in Louisiana and somewhere in Michigan. I went to the East Coast and all around the country when I was a part of that team.

WOODS: So what was Detroit like in the early sixties?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. Of course, they had the riot in the sixties. My wife [J. Rose Nesbitt Stevens] and my family, we always felt very highly about Detroit, because in Detroit it was possible to make a fairly decent living, and migration was starting to come to the northern cities from the South. There was the feeling that if you were in

a position, you could buy a fairly decent home. And the schools were fairly decent. As I said, employment was good, primarily with all of the factories like Chrysler [Corporation] and General Motors [Corporation] and Ford [Motor Company]. And there were opportunities at Wayne State University for those involved in academia. It was just a good city.

WOODS: Where did you live in Detroit after you started working for Anheuser-Busch?

STEVENS: We bought our first home on Parkside Avenue between Linwood [Street] and Grove [Street] over near the University of Detroit. And then we bought another home on Linwood and Grove, which was where we stayed until I came to California.

WOODS: Okay. What year was the riots? It was around '65?

STEVENS: I believe it was in '65. That really was something, that devastation and loss of lives and the burning of buildings, etc. Some areas to this day haven't fully recovered.

WOODS: What was Anheuser-Busch's response after the riots in Detroit?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. Anheuser-Busch--and I must truthfully give them credit for this--they were trying to do whatever they could do to help to restore some of the damage that was done. For example, when they had the earthquake in Oakland--I don't know if you're familiar with

that--Anheuser-Busch donated food, they donated clothes, they gave money to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, they donated twelve-ounce cans of water. And that's been their attitude of trying to put something back into the communities. And I think it originated with August Busch Jr.--August Busch III's father, who is now deceased--that you had to be a part of the community in which you do business. Wherever there had been a catastrophe or something, Anheuser-Busch was always in the forefront of trying to be a part of the solution.

WOODS: So did they have any special programs or special events after the Detroit riots?

STEVENS: You mean as far as community involvement programs?

WOODS: Right.

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: Working with organizations?

STEVENS: Yes. Primarily that probably was something that--Some of us sat down with management, like Eugene Saffold in Chicago and Henry [H.] Brown, who subsequently retired the same time as I did as a senior vice president. But Henry was the one who instituted and developed the "Kings and Queens of Africa" paintings, which was quite an academic piece. But then we went in and we tried to give scholarships to students. We tried to bring programs to the community. Like I was the first one to have a Martin Luther King lunch and awards

celebration.

WOODS: In Detroit?

STEVENS: No, out here. Well, this year would have been the eighteenth one. But in Detroit we were involved with different groups, and our marketing wasn't as segmented as it is presently. We were able to do a lot of things, and we could reach a lot of young people.

But then, as times advanced, a lot of the programs that we in beer marketing were responsible for were shifted over to the Anheuser-Busch companies, which is approximately thirteen other companies, like the Eagle snack potato chips and the Campbell Taggart bakery and the yeast and so forth. Because there was a feeling that by beer marketing, and specifically us, doing certain programs, it looked and seemed as if it was an inducement or an enticement to get young people involved in the art of drinking. And that was far from our minds. We weren't really trying to get the youngsters involved. But I felt that by affording young people opportunities, it could only mean advancement as far as their lives were concerned.

I've met youngsters that I have given scholarships to. I met one a couple of years ago over at Fedco, and he told me that he had been a Rhodes scholar. He thanked me profusely for the help that I had given him through the

company--scholarships to help him through maybe undergrad or graduate school or something. And that has been a focus. Like tomorrow I'll be going to Golden State Minority Foundation, of which I'm on the executive committee. We give maybe about thirty graduate student scholarships. And we have the program in Michigan, California, and Texas presently.

WOODS: What impact did Anheuser-Busch's employees have on this community involvement? Were there a significant number of blacks in the workforce? Or was it highly unionized?

STEVENS: No. Well, when I started with Anheuser-Busch in '54 there were very few of us. Perhaps it wasn't even enough to sit down to play tonk, but as the time progressed, the levels of employment increased. And at the time that I retired I think minority figures were somewhere around 28 percent.

WOODS: That was in the front office or in the factory?

STEVENS: No. Well, both. I was at the groundbreaking of the Columbus brewery, and I was at the groundbreaking of the California brewery in Southern California in 1954. And when--I guess it was in the late seventies or early eighties--they decided to do away with the Busch Gardens and expand the size of the plant, I went to the plant manager, Earl Burke, and we sat down. And as a result of the fact that they were going to hire maybe another six or seven hundred people, we were able to get a couple hundred hired a couple of months before

the masses. And as a result, they had seniority. Plus the fact that we instituted a school for them so that a lot of them could be in supervisory jobs.

When I came out to California in '71 there was only one other black out here, and that was David Holt. And he didn't know I was coming. I passed him in the hall going down to the opening of the meeting, and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, they brought me because they figured I had some brains, and they wanted me to speak." But in truth they were announcing the fact that I had been promoted and I was going to be the district sales manager for Anheuser-Busch for Los Angeles. I was the first black there, too. So my job really involved marketing and creating an awareness for our products but also to handle our community involvement programs. And in doing so, while I was a district manager I also made a recommendation to senior management about the necessity of having a black wholesaler here in Los Angeles. And as a result, Edison R. Lara [Sr.] was officially designated as an Anheuser-Busch wholesaler on April 1, 1974, April Fool's Day.

WOODS: What was David Holt doing prior to your coming? STEVENS: Well, David was a regional representative.

He started as a regional representative. I believe Dave retired in 1976, and he was still a regional represen-tative. And

Dave, about eighteen months after he retired, died of cancer. I instituted the Dave Holt Scholarships in his memory, and we gave twenty to twenty-five scholarships every year in his name just in California. But the idea also spread to Arizona and some of the other states.

WOODS: So were you satisfied with your position in Detroit? Or were you trying to move out?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. I grew up, as I said, in Detroit. I knew everybody in Detroit. And there's no place like your home environment or your home field. I knew everybody in Detroit. At least I thought I did. And when they called me--Our regional office was in Chicago, and they didn't want me really to come to California. But Mike [Michael] Lamonica, who was a regional vice president, he was in Chicago for his daughter's wedding. So he called and said, "I would like for you, if you could, to come over to Chicago. I'd like to talk with you."

So I said, "Well, are you still a vice president?"

He said, "Yes, I am."

I said, "Well, when do you want me in Chicago?"

And he said, "Well, could you come over tomorrow?"

So I went over. So Mike didn't come down, but his wife, Sally, came down to the bar in the Marriott [Hotel], and she said, "Mike wants to make you an offer." Anyway, finally

he did come down, and he talked to me and said that he would like for me come out to California and that his original intent was to assign me as a district manager in Oakland. But I told Mike that I would have to think about it.

I went back home, and of course my family, they were so enthused that I thought they were going to hang me at sunrise. [laughter] After a lot of thought and deliberation-- The manager that I worked for in the division office said, "Now, we want you to stay here. We'll make you the same offer."

So then I said, "Well, let me think it over." I said, "Call me."

So every time he would call me he would say, "Have you made up your mind?"

And I'd say, "Well, you know, for a decision like this we have no place else to turn but the Bible. And every time you interrupt me I have to go back to reread, because I can't contain my thoughts." Sometimes he would call and I would be down the street at our friends' house. Finally the executive vice president of marketing called me--his name was Owen Burkhardt--and he said, "John, now, you've been reading your Bible and you've been dillydallying." He said, "I want you in California Sunday morning. In fact, you should arrive Saturday night." So I told my wife, "Well, I have to go to California." Right.

So then I came back, and they put me up at the Century Plaza [Hotel] and everything.

WOODS: He said we wanted you in California Saturday night?

STEVENS: Yeah. No, wait. No, wait, I'm wrong. I was supposed to be in Monterey. That's where they were having the meeting. So I came out to Monterey for the meeting, and then I went back home. And then they sent for me to come, and then that's when they put me in the Century Plaza. And I had an opportunity for a week or ten days to just ride around and look and to assess whether I really wanted to come out here.

So then I went to them, and I told them that my wife should have an opportunity to come out to see what she thought. And she came out and spent a week or something like that. So then finally we just went back, and the company-- Through the real estate division they were going to buy my house, and they made me an offer. They handled the closing and all of the other particulars relative to real estate.

And then the real estate lady that we knew, Marie Jones, said she would like to buy my house, and she offered me a little more money than the company. So then I called St. Louis and told them that the deal was off and that I wasn't coming unless we could sell the house to Marie Jones. I said, "Since she's a real estate agent, you wouldn't have to pay

the broker's fee." And secondly, I said, "The appraiser you gave me was wrong, because the persons who came out weren't cognizant of the real estate values in my neighborhood." I said, "You'd be surprised. A lot of this is HUD [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development] property." So they said, "John, we'll sell it. Just come on to California." And we came to California, Rose and my children.

And we've met a lot of folk. And sometimes I have to stop and remember when I did live back in Detroit, because it seems like we've been out here for an eternity. You know, we've been going to the same church, and I go to the same dentist and everything. And you think nearly twenty-five years have almost passed.

WOODS: Okay. So where did you live when you first came here? And what sort of things did you do during the first year?

STEVENS: Well, I came out in June of '71, and I lived in the hotel. And my wife came out in September, her and the children. At first we lived at the Holiday Inn on Sunset [Boulevard] and the 405 [Freeway]. And then we moved over to the Farmer's Daughter Motel on Fairfax [Avenue] across from Farmer's Market. Meanwhile, Rose was busy looking for a house, and she liked this house. I think it was October 16, '71, we moved in, and we've been here ever since.

WOODS: So what was your official title when you came?

STEVENS: When I came to California I was the district sales manager for Los Angeles.

WOODS: And what were the specific duties that you had?

STEVENS: Well, the duties that I really had were marketing oriented, but I had involvement, though limited, with media support, voice and written media. I also had a responsibility to keep our product name in the forefront of the consumers.

WOODS: So was it just Budweiser? Or were there any other labels?

STEVENS: Just Budweiser. Well, of course Budweiser is the flagship brand, but they also had Michelob, and they had Busch beer. But it was to keep all of our brands in the forefront.

WOODS: What were some of your first impressions of Los Angeles, particularly the African American business community?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. When I first got out here to Los Angeles I think that there was in the community a greater amount of black proprietorships, small groceries and gas stations and cleaners, etc. But as things changed, a lot of the small grocers went out of business because of the influx of supermarkets, etc. And you take liquor stores and so forth, there was a lot of Negro ownership. And now there are very few blacks that are involved in liquor stores, because the Koreans and the Asians have bought them out.

WOODS: Why do you think there was a larger amount of black

proprietorships, black ownerships?

STEVENS: Well, I think it was probably due to the fact that a lot of it--and I hate to use this word--was out of necessity. There was a stronger feeling of spending your money where, to use a phrase, it would recycle itself. And there wasn't the friendly feeling with the white proprietors that there was-- Because they could go into the little corner store, and if you needed a little credit to last you until Friday or Saturday, it was available. But in the other stores it wasn't as accommodating. It was like in the Reverend Vernon Johns story. An example that I think illustrates what I'm trying to say was when he was in there shopping, and he handed the money [to the cashier], and she threw the change back at him. And I think Reverend Johns said, "Hey, now, this is an opportunity," and he started growing and selling the vegetables, which led to his downfall, you know, because they couldn't conceive of a minister selling watermelons, etc.

WOODS: Right. Okay. [laughter]

STEVENS: But he was ahead of his time.

WOODS: So was much of your responsibility in the black community?

STEVENS: Yeah. My responsibilities covered the black communities. Well, when I was a district manager, it was the black communities of Los Angeles. Primarily I covered

the downtown area and South Central and Watts.

WOODS: Compton?

STEVENS: Yeah. Long Beach.

WOODS: So were blacks moving--? How far west had the community gone?

STEVENS: Oh, well, hey, when I came here Baldwin Hills and Ladera [Heights] were really the places to live. I don't believe there were too many out near Westwood, you know. But primarily it was sort of centralized. There wasn't a migration like to Thousand Oaks or Westlake [Village] or anything then. That has happened since I've been here, because most of those houses were just newly built. There were those who wanted to get to the 'burbs, as I've read somewhere, the suburbs.

WOODS: So you had a chance to look at Detroit and Los Angeles at about the same time. What was sort of the economic power and social conditions, if you compare the two cities, of the black communities, of the average black family?

STEVENS: I would say that my first impressions are that perhaps the black families of Detroit were more closely knit. Like in the neighborhood where my wife and my children and I lived, we knew all of the neighbors, and all of the neighbors knew us. The neighbors were all involved in activities that would encourage the youngsters. Out here it's a little more isolated.

You know, you're lucky if you know the person next door or behind you or whatever. Certainly you might have experienced the same in Baltimore, you know, where you knew everybody and you felt within yourself a bigger part of the whole than just being relegated to doing your own thing.

WOODS: Do you think that people out here were a lot poorer compared to--?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, not necessarily, because there are people who, as a result of the wars and everything, worked in the aircraft factories. And I do believe that economically some of them made some very good money for those times because of the defense. You also had the same situation in the factories in Detroit. But I think with the airplane factories and with the naval depots and the air force and the Marine Corps out here and everything, certainly that was a great economic boost for the areas.

WOODS: And the war was still going on?

STEVENS: When?

WOODS: When you came out? Vietnam? Or it had just stopped?

STEVENS: When I came out to California?

WOODS: Right.

STEVENS: Oh, yes.

WOODS: And that was generating a lot of jobs for the economy?

STEVENS: Well, I think the Vietnam War-- Let's see. What

year was that?

WOODS: It ended around, I guess, '74.

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, I was out here then. But my brother Kenneth [Stevens] was in the Vietnam War.

WOODS: So how did you get integrated into the community? What organizations did you join? Who were your first contacts? What church did you associate with?

STEVENS: Well, when I first came out here--because my wife wasn't here, as I told you--I went to the First A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal Church]. Bishop H. Hartford Brookins was there then. And I had my business card. I put $100 on it. Then I went to the Second Baptist [Church]. Dr. [Thomas] Kilgore Jr. was there. I put $100 on the card. So I made three or four of the large churches. I was raised an Episcopalian, and really I think my first involvement with the Episcopal church out here was when my wife came. Because I was running back and forth a lot of weekends to Detroit to be with my family. But I got active with the Urban League, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], you name it.

WOODS: Immediately?

STEVENS: Yeah. Because I was a life member of the NAACP and belonged to the Alphas [Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity]. I got associated with the Los Angeles chapter of the United

Negro College Fund. When we moved in, I guess, about-- Well, we moved in '71, but from '73 to '77 I was the city commissioner of environmental standards for Culver City, California.

WOODS: Okay. Let me just ask you a few questions about the organizations. You immediately started talking to or joining the Urban League. Who was the head of the Urban League when you first came out?

STEVENS: John [W.] Mack. And I knew John Mack when he was the director or the head of the Urban League in Flint, Michigan, back in his early days, when his hair wasn't cut as close as it is now, or it hadn't receded in spots as it has now.

WOODS: So you were already familiar with him, and he sort of drew you in?

STEVENS: Well, we became associated, because there were certain programs that sponsored and benefited the Los Angeles Urban League.

WOODS: Before you came out?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. Well, you know, I worked with the Urban League. And that, incidently, is how I obtained my job with Anheuser-Busch, through the Urban League in Detroit, Michigan, yes, through Dr. Francis Albert Kornegay. He was the director. Then I became involved with a lot of other things.

WOODS: With the Urban League, what type of joint programs were you doing at the time?

STEVENS: Well, we would try to assist them with the sponsorship of their dinners and various programs like the donation of Christmas baskets for the hungry or the poor. And we would help them with various programs that they needed assistance with, you know, financial assistance.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JANUARY 18, 1995

WOODS: So when you first came, who was the head of the NAACP?

STEVENS: John McDonald. I'm trying to think who was there before John McDonald. I know I was on the board of the NAACP when I came out here.

WOODS: You were appointed soon after you came?

STEVENS: Well, you're elected at their annual meeting.

WOODS: So you basically had the same kind of relationship with them in terms of helping them?

STEVENS: Well, I've always felt near and dear to the Urban League because, as I expressed earlier, that's how I gained my employment with Anheuser-Busch. And I never missed an opportunity to let folk know that the Urban League was an organization that sat down and tried to successfully obtain, not through threats or intimidation, advancement for our folks. Whereas the NAACP--and it was needed and is needed--it was a little more militant, you know, via boycotts and other actions that they deemed necessary to obtain a place for us in industry, etc. The Urban League, through training and motivational opportunities, accomplished quite a bit and was like the NAACP. Although they're different, both of them are highly respected, especially the Urban League. And through the years I attended

their national conventions as well as the Urban League and the SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and all of them. In fact, I attended even the sororities and fraternities and the black accountants and blacks in government, you know, all of the conventions.

WOODS: How much funds would you have annually for community projects?

STEVENS: Well, it varied. I'd say that in the position that I retired from maybe somewhere about $800,000 or $900,000. But that would cover, you know--

WOODS: The whole western states.

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: How much would you have for L.A.?

STEVENS: Probably, I would say, about 60 percent.

WOODS: So were you working in all the western states from the beginning? Or that's the position--?

STEVENS: No. That's the position from which I retired.

WOODS: What was the political situation in Los Angeles when you first came? That was before [Thomas] Bradley was mayor, I think.

STEVENS: Let's see. I think Sam [Samuel W.] Yorty was in, and then Bradley came in. And of course, the mayor-- We had a good relationship. I found him to be a person of exceptional depth. He was a very smart man. He was formerly a police

officer and retired. He was a lieutenant in the LAPD [Los Angeles Police Department], and then he was a city councilman in the tenth district. Then he became the mayor. That's all history now.

WOODS: So you met him before he was elected? He was on the city council?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: So you say he was a man of exceptional depth. What about him impressed you most?

STEVENS: I think probably just sincerity and his desire to try to represent all of the citizens of the city.

WOODS: What about Gil [Gilbert W.] Lindsay?

STEVENS: Gil Lindsay? I met Gil Lindsay maybe about twenty-five years before I came to Los Angeles. He was at a Shriners convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was acquainted with my aunt and uncle, Dr. and Mrs. Theodore [M.] White, in Detroit. He and his wife, Theresa-- We had a good relationship. I could go down and sit down and talk to Councilman Lindsay, and he was never too busy or anything. In fact, I can remember one occasion when he had a call from overseas, and he told his secretary that he couldn't afford to be interrupted because he had this important meeting going on. We were sitting there in his office having a cold one and some Hennessy [cognac]. He was a very likeable person.

I used to see him all the time, and we always stopped and had greetings and salutations for one another.

WOODS: What about Augustus [F.] Hawkins?

STEVENS: Well, Augustus Hawkins I knew through going to Washington, D.C., primarily. We formed a relationship from attending the [Congressional] Black Caucus. He was very instrumental and did a lot with Kenneth Hahn, who was the supervisor who was responsible for Martin Luther King [Jr.-Charles R. Drew Medical Center] hospital and the [Charles R. Drew] School of Medicine [and Science]. And I served on that [hospital] board for nearly eight years.

WOODS: Who are some of the other political leaders who impressed you when you first got here?

STEVENS: Well, there was Julian [C.] Dixon and Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.]. He was in the [California State] Assembly. And Gwen Moore, Diane Watson, Dave [David S.] Cunningham, Nate Holden-- He was a California state senator. We still have a good relationship. Rita Walters when she was on the school board. Bernard Parks--he was a captain in the LAPD and later became an assistant chief. Let's see. Clyde Johnson with the [Los Angeles County] Black Employees Association. Ernest Shell, who was with Golden State [Mutual] Life Insurance [Company]. He formerly lived in Detroit, he and his wife Juanita. Besides being friends, we served on

the board at Charles [R.] Drew along with Dr. Jack L. Moore. The list could go on and on.

WOODS: Who would you consider to be some of the major business leaders in the black community at the time? How influential were they?

STEVENS: Well, you had Clarence Avant, who is now with Motown [Record Corporation]. You had Berry Gordy [Jr.]. You had [Leon H.] Washington [Jr.], who owned the Los Angeles Sentinel. They were very influential. Of course, you had a lot of the pastors of the various churches who were influential in the development and the focus of the community, like Reverend Thomas Kilgore [Jr.] and Bishop Charles E. Blake, for example.

WOODS: Okay. You said you had some involvement in media advertising. What was radio like at that time? What kind of spots did you run in the early seventies?

STEVENS: Well, in a lot of the spots, as far as radio, there was quite a bit of crossover in the industry at that particular time, and there was some in television. But rather than to have really segmented advertising, they tried to insert into the general advertising that which they felt would accomplish the purpose. Rather than, say, a black on a black spot, they would have maybe a black, Hispanic, white, and try to use it as a general spot. Although there were some black spots that were specifically created-- I can remember a spot with--

His name was Tony King, and he was an umpire in a Budweiser commercial. I can remember another commercial where four fellows supposedly had a house party, and they were playing cards and drinking beer. And there were other spots, but primarily where they could they tried to use crossover, where it could be adaptable for any situation.

WOODS: So did you have any dealings with Washington for the Sentinel?

STEVENS: Yes, I did. Because one of the key things that I learned early was that you could forestall a lot of things that might arise if you had a good relationship with the media. Because I had a relationship both here and in Detroit where if there was something that was seemingly negative they would call me and let me know. And I always felt that it was an opportunity and a plus for us to advertise in our media, because it told a different story than the story that you read in the daily papers, that it was representative of the things that seemingly were of interest to us.

WOODS: And when did you start working with the United Negro College Fund [UNCF]?

STEVENS: Oh, really when I came out here to California. And then soon after a friend of mine came out here from Detroit--I knew members of his family but I didn't particularly know him--Vince Bryson. He is now president or CEO [chief executive

officer] of the Magic Johnson Foundation. I became active and supportive of them by sponsoring a golf tournament, the Lou Rawls Parade of Stars Charity Golf Classic. That was in 1991. Well, in '91 we were the founding and title sponsor of the Lou Rawls Charity Golf Classic. I think I got a plaque for that in '91. I received a UNCF Frederick Patterson Volunteer Service Award from the UNCF, and I received their Distinguished Leadership Award.

WOODS: It was part of a national campaign by Budweiser?

STEVENS: Yeah. But then on a local level we tried to embellish what they were doing on the national level. As a result, we formulated a good relationship with the UNCF. And Chris [Christopher F.] Edley was there at that time. Now we have William [H.] Gray [III].

WOODS: So the [Lou Rawls Parade of Stars] Telethon began about twenty-five years ago?

STEVENS: Well, I don't think it's that old. Well, let me see. I would say it's in the good twenties. You're about right.

WOODS: So were there any problems from any of the radical groups that were around at the time?

STEVENS: No. I'll tell you, there is a necessity to support our black-owned schools. Lou Rawls went to Anheuser-Busch and talked to Mr. [August A.] Busch [III], and Mr. Busch agreed

to fund the telecasting. And Lou has been a superb person in relating his story. In fact, I think that he has been recognized by so many colleges and folk that when you even go with him through the airport or any public place, he's recognized for his contribution. Because a lot of our colleges would have had to close over the years, and this has sustained them and given them a breath of life.

As you know, a lot of those who go to UNCF schools probably wouldn't be able to make it in one of the other colleges. You know what I'm talking about: the Yale [University]s, the Harvard [University]s, the [University of] Michigans, UCLA, USC [University of Southern California], whatever. I'm on the board of Saint Augustine's [College] in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the classes maybe have twelve to fifteen students. So being a professor yourself, you realize the amount of extra attention that you can give a student. The salaries for the professors aren't as great as they are at the Big Ten schools, for example, but there's the dedication and the willingness to try to help these youngsters to find a meaningful place in life.

WOODS: Yeah. So when did you start work on the UNCF?

STEVENS: Oh, I would say about twenty-three or twenty-four years ago.

WOODS: So you were able to sort of become part of the Los

Angeles community pretty quickly?

STEVENS: Well, I guess being bashful, shy, and timid, it created a problem at first, but like the old song, I soon overcame.

WOODS: What was maybe your typical week at work when you first got here and got settled in?

STEVENS: Well, when I was a district sales manager--and I have some material that I'll give you--I would go out to the office and--

WOODS: And the office was located where?

STEVENS: In Woodland Hills.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: Well, no. When I first came it was at the brewery in Van Nuys at Roscoe [Boulevard] and the 405 [Freeway]. But I'd go out to the office. My work then was primarily visiting wholesalers. I was sort of the liaison between them and the brewery insofar as related to our corporate principles and marketing objectives. I would call and work with their sales people and call on accounts to try to help strengthen them, because we had some wholesalers who had multiple brands, and by that I mean other than those brewed by Anheuser-Busch. So to try to keep them from devoting too much time to what we felt was not their bread and butter, I would work with them and make sure that we were represented in the marketplace

properly.

I had in my area at the time-- I was the district manager. I could sell nearly half of the beer that was produced in the L.A. brewery in my area, because I had Dodger Stadium. I had the L.A. [Los Angeles Memorial] Coliseum, the [Los Angeles] Sports Arena, the [Great Western] Forum, the Hollywood [Park] race track, you know, all of the big concessions.

WOODS: So basically you would be traveling back and forth from work to visit the wholesalers?

STEVENS: Yes, and then whatever other special assignments they assigned me to. And then when I became the manager of special field markets--western region--for Anheuser-Busch, my responsibilities included planning and overseeing the corporation's community involvement activities in the western United States and marketing and promoting the Anheuser-Busch beer brands.

WOODS: When did that start?

STEVENS: Nineteen eighty. And that's the job that I had at the time of my retirement, December 31, 1993.

WOODS: When did the "Kings and Queens of Africa" promotional program start?

STEVENS: Oh, I want to say in the late sixties or early seventies.

WOODS: And what was the idea behind that?

STEVENS: I think it was probably more than twofold. I think primarily it was an educational vehicle which we felt--or Henry [H.] Brown felt--would give folk some knowledge of our history that had been denied us. And I think another part of it was to take young artists-- because really there were no photographs or anything--and give them an opportunity to study through history an individual and then to recreate him or her as seen through their eyes. And we would unveil the pictures at different places, like some were at the Black Caucus, NAACP, and Urban League national conventions, etc. We'd have the artist come. And some were from New Orleans, Atlanta, Detroit, and different parts of the country. We used to send them around for various community involvement programs, but the paintings took such a beating that the restoration was very expensive. So then they were made available through reprints, and the originals are hung at the brewery in St. Louis.

WOODS: So the reprints were distributed widely?

STEVENS: Yes. And every year the wholesalers around who had a market where they could utilize them, they were made available at no cost to them, and they were distributed to schools and libraries and government offices, etc. Because I can remember, even up until my retirement, I'd get requests even from those who were incarcerated. They wanted a picture. Because I think

that there's a feeling of wanting to be knowledgeable about that which has been kept from you.

WOODS: So it was very popular?

STEVENS: Oh, it was very popular. In fact, he had requests from overseas, and Henry was sending them everywhere.

WOODS: Henry Brown?

STEVENS: Yeah. And then I would have some sent to my office, and then a lot of teachers and professors wanted copies for their students, etc. But it was a most popular program.

WOODS: You also mentioned that you would travel to Washington [D.C.] a lot.

STEVENS: Well, I'd go-- Of course the Black Caucus is there all the time, but then the national Urban League would meet in Washington. Then here would come the national NAACP. They would meet in Washington. You know, they usually followed each other. Now, the year before last, the Urban League was in Indianapolis. Now, this year the NAACP went to Indianapolis. Now, you take the Alpha [Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity], now they're going to Indianapolis. You know, we follow one another.

WOODS: Just one last question: When did you start working with the Black Caucus? And what kind of relationship did you have with them?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. Anheuser-Busch had a very good relationship. We always had an exhibit booth for the caucus.

WOODS: The congressional legislative weekend?

STEVENS: Yeah. And we also would sponsor or be a contributing sponsor for their banquet. We also would be involved with Sony [Corporation] for a fund-raising concert for them. But it worked very well for both Anheuser-Busch and the congressional people, because it gave us an opportunity where we could sit down and discuss things face to face. If I wanted to call Congressman Julian Dixon, you know, Augustus Hawkins, or Maxine Waters, or any of them in the country-- I think that was a good thing, because sometimes inadvertently there are things that we could help them with, and there are things that they could help us with. [laughter] You know? I'll just put it like that.

WOODS: Okay. When did the company start working with the caucus? I think it started in the late sixties.

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, from its inception.

WOODS: Okay. I think that's going to be enough for today.

STEVENS: All right.

WOODS: Is there anything that you wanted to add?

STEVENS: No.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE
FEBRUARY 21, 1995

WOODS: I just wanted to devote this session to talking about some of your civic activities. Before we go into that, you mentioned that you were very familiar with the club scene that was going on in Detroit I guess in the fifties and things like that. Did you ever come across, say, Berry Gordy [Jr.]?

STEVENS: Yes. Berry Gordy had started Motown [Record Corporation] on West Grand Boulevard. They had a printing company, the Gordy family, and it was on Beaubien [Street] and Frederick [Street], but I'm not positive now. I know it was on Beaubien.

WOODS: I guess one of the questions is-- There's a new book out--it's not new now--by his wife [Raynoma Gordy Singleton]. I guess his first wife wrote a book [Berry, Me, and Motown: The Untold Story]. A lot of people are doing histories now of those early Motown years. What was so, I guess, unique about the Detroit music scene during that period? Were you familiar with his activities and how he was able to--? Were there just a lot of music acts--?

STEVENS: Well, I think that Berry was a very creative person and certainly very knowledgeable about music. I think that is the reason that he was able to attract stars like Diana Ross and the Jacksons, etc.

WOODS: Okay. In terms of your affiliations, I guess what would be important is to state how you got associated with different organizations and your activities and any larger insights that you might have about them. I guess we can start with Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. How did you become associated with Saint Augustine's?

STEVENS: Through the association and acquaintanceship of Dr. Prezell Robinson, the president. He extended to me an invitation to join the board of trustees, because they needed somebody, they felt, out on the West Coast who could help them reach their desired goals.

WOODS: Okay. And what is the size of Saint Augustine's?

STEVENS: Well, Saint Augustine's is-- It says right here, "In 1993-94, students typically from thirty-seven states, Washington, D.C., and thirty-four foreign countries-- New student applications for 1993-94 was 3,640 applications for 600 openings, or six times the number of applications as openings."

WOODS: So the student body is approximately 2,000?

STEVENS: Yeah, roughly around 2,000.

WOODS: And when did you become a member of the board of trustees?

STEVENS: In 1990.

WOODS: Okay. And you're still serving?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: How did you meet Dr. Prezell Robinson?

STEVENS: Well, as you know, Saint Augustine's is an Episcopal college, and he was here attending and participating in a worship service at my church. He came by the house--I had met him on an occasion or two prior to that--and then he asked me if I would serve on the board.

WOODS: And how often do you visit the institution?

STEVENS: Well, generally they have about four or five meetings per year, you know, the board. I don't attend all of them, but I go when it's necessary to lend my support and my vote.

WOODS: When was it founded?

STEVENS: Wait a minute. Let's see here. In 1888.

WOODS: So it's a predominantly black college?

STEVENS: Yes, it is.

WOODS: Does it benefit from the United Negro College Fund [UNCF]?

STEVENS: Yes, it does.

WOODS: And you didn't go to a historically black college when you were young?

STEVENS: No.

WOODS: But you do have an interest in education?

STEVENS: In education. Because that's the salvation for our young people, especially our black males.

WOODS: So you're generally pleased with what's going on at Saint Augustine's?

STEVENS: Yes, I particularly am, because it really houses a beautiful campus, and the class sizes usually run maybe about fifteen to eighteen students. And there's an opportunity for tutoring, etc., so that when the students leave there, whatever their discipline might be, they're really able to move forward.

WOODS: Do you assist any other educational institutions?

STEVENS: Not per se. I was on the board for the Charles [R.] Drew School of Medicine and Science for six years.

WOODS: We'll get to that. Okay. We'll just go down the list of some of the other ones. You're also now a board member of the Golden State Minority Foundation.

STEVENS: Yes. I'm on the board and executive committee.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: And that primarily is-- [tape recorder off]

WOODS: So the Golden State Minority Foundation--

STEVENS: Yeah. It's headquartered here in Los Angeles, and also, it functions in Houston, Texas, and in Detroit, Michigan. What it does is it gives graduate students assistance for scholarships. The scholarships run, as a rule, $2,500 per student and up.

WOODS: So it's primarily for business students?

STEVENS: Well, that's the way that it started, but now we grant scholarships for most disciplines.

WOODS: So it's attached to the-- It was founded by the--

STEVENS: The Golden State [Mutual] Life Insurance [Company]. The Minority Foundation was started by Ernie [Ernest] Shell and Dr. Francis [A.] Kornegay and Ivan J. Houston.

WOODS: I guess Golden State had played a major role in the black community in Los Angeles since the turn of the century.

STEVENS: Yes. Well, actually, Golden State Life Insurance is presently headed by Larkin Teasley, and it's one of the largest black-owned insurance companies. As you can remember, there was a time that the other companies wouldn't make their policies available to Afro-Americans--you know, prior to integration.

WOODS: Right. Okay. So what is your opinion of the role that Golden State plays in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: Well, I think Golden State is really a tremendous citizen not only to the community but to the city and to the state. Besides funding scholarships for graduate school, it also funds elementary and high schools with moneys to provide those little extra things that are needed to produce the type of students that are necessary. Like maybe for some children that wouldn't have an opportunity to have a cultural evening, maybe schools would send in a request for a bus or to help

them with tickets or reward students, many different things.

WOODS: A lot of the black insurance companies have gone under in the past thirty or forty years. How has Golden State been able to continue its viability?

STEVENS: Well, not only by their assets but by the fact that they have bonds that can be purchased by individuals. And that is primarily how the foundation is supported, by wills and grants. Then they have their dinner every year, which is a primary fund-raiser. It helps to support the foundation, which invests the money through stocks and bonds, portfolio, etc.

WOODS: It's often been said that one of the wealthiest black communities in the country is located in Los Angeles. Is that one of the reasons why Golden State has been able to maintain--?

STEVENS: Not necessarily. I think it's primarily due to the fact that the Houston family has been long entrenched in Los Angeles. I think that is basically why they set up their headquarter office here in Los Angeles. They have numerous other offices throughout the country.

WOODS: Who do you think are the major black families in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: Well, certainly I would include in there the Houstons,

the Hudson family. I would include in there probably Celes King [III] and his family, also the Reverend Dr. Cecil [L.] "Chip" Murray. I would probably include in there Dr. Thomas Kilgore [Jr.] and his family. WOODS: That's the Second Baptist--?

STEVENS: Well, he is the pastor emeritus now, but I would certainly include him.

WOODS: Of the Second Baptist Church?

STEVENS: Yeah. I'm trying to think. But I know that the names that I mentioned are prominent families. Certainly among the prominent families would be Maxine Waters, the congresswoman, and her husband [Sidney Williams]; Julian [C.] Dixon and his wife [Betty Lee Dixon]--he's a congressperson; certainly Augustus [F.] Hawkins and his wife [Elsie Taylor Hawkins]; certainly I would put in there Tom [Thomas] Bradley and his wife [Ethel Mae Arnold Bradley]. Well, I guess that's about all that come off the top of my head.

WOODS: Would you include the [John W.] Mack family?

STEVENS: John Mack? Well, John Mack is certainly a prominent family and an organizational head. You know, he heads the Urban League here in Los Angeles. I guess it was in the seventies or late sixties when John came out here from Michigan. Because he was the head of the Urban League in Flint, Michigan, and then was promoted. But certainly he's made quite an impact

on the city and its environments.

WOODS: If you compare the sort of leading black families in Los Angeles to those in other cities, do you notice any differences or similarities?

STEVENS: Well, I would say, underscoring everything, that I think that there is, like there is in other cities, the need and the necessity to try to put forth an effort to fight the various evils like racism, etc., and to do away with the bank's redlining. And I think that's what this empowerment fund [Operation Hope] is about, with the city and federal government, is to try to make available those things that are commonly thought of as items that we might take for granted, that are denied us. As you look around in not only Los Angeles but in most cities, there are still bits and pieces of racism, etc. This is why it is so necessary that organizations like the NAACP be supported, because that's really our voice in the black community and throughout the country.

WOODS: What do you think of the recent election of Myrlie Evers-Williams? Do you know her?

STEVENS: Oh, yes, and I've known her for quite a few years. I think that she is really a dynamic lady, and I think that she will do the job that's necessary to get the national chapter and the branches back on the footing that is necessary. It's so necessary that we work closely with her to help her in

her mission, because, as you know, Congress at the present time is trying to legislate bills that will have an effect on the poor and one-parent families and those on welfare. It's going to affect our health coverage and insurance. And they seem prone to not do anything with the minimum wage, and this is going to have a dastardly effect on us blacks in particular.

WOODS: Okay. When did you first meet Mrs. Evers- Williams?

STEVENS: Well, it was out here in Los Angeles. She was quite active in the community. I think I've known her for maybe about twelve, fourteen, fifteen years. But I certainly remember when she was appointed to the [City of Los Angeles] Department of Water and Power after leaving ARCO [Atlantic Richfield Company]. That's why I'm trying to say twelve, fourteen years altogether. And then as I traveled to various national conventions, she was always a participant.

WOODS: Did you ever have a chance to work with her on any particular project?

STEVENS: I'm trying to think of what it was, because I've worked on so many projects. But I know that there was something that I had to do with Myrlie.

WOODS: But she was very active throughout the community?

STEVENS: Yes, and always willing to step in and share her capabilities and her knowledge with others.

WOODS: Okay. Maybe next we'll go to the Good Shepherd Manor for senior citizens.

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, that's operated by Christ the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church. They own it. And needless to say, I was on that from the early seventies up until last week, at which time I submitted my resignation from the board.

WOODS: What function did you play on that board?

STEVENS: Well, on that board, generally what we did was to review the various aspects of management--and, you know, it's a HUD [United States Department of Housing and Urban Development]-operated property--and to make sure that the business at hand was taken care of, whether it was that the elderly are fed daily, five days a week except Saturday and Sunday, or making sure that the building was maintained properly. We were interested in whether they had recreational outlets such as ceramics or
whatever and trips. We reviewed the bills and everything--total management.

WOODS: So that was also coming out of your service in your own church?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: What is your church again?

STEVENS: Christ the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, 3303 West Vernon [Avenue]. I'll extend you an invitation to come

some Sunday.

WOODS: Okay. And who's the pastor?

STEVENS: We're in the process of obtaining a permanent pastor. Right now we have Reverend Giles Asbury, and he is our interim. So he'll stay, hopefully, until we get a new priest. Usually the procedure is that about six to eight weeks before the new priest comes the diocese sends a supply priest so that he really doesn't stay up until the actual transfer of the responsibilities.

WOODS: And how long have you been in attendance at that church?

STEVENS: Since 1971. I'd say probably around-- Well, my family came out here September 15, so right after that was when we became active participants.

WOODS: Have you noticed any changes in the church over time? In the congregation and its activities?

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, when we first joined Christ the Good Shepherd there were quite a few Anglos, and now we have Afro-Americans. We have quite a few parishioners from Belize. Now they're trying to extend the ministry to the Hispanics. But it has gone full circle.

WOODS: And have the activities of the church changed also in terms of their--?

STEVENS: Well, I think their community outreach changes as the community changes. Because, as you know, now, right at

our church doorstep almost, we have the cultural center from Leimert Park with all that it has to offer, which years ago wasn't there--you know, the Crossroads Theater and complex that Marla Gibbs has and the businesses that are there. They weren't there a long time ago. So it changes. But the housing in and around the church, per se, like up in Leimert, the demographics haven't changed that much, I think because of the cost of the homes, etc., and the reluctance of people to move when they've paid for their homes.

WOODS: Right. You said it was on Vernon?

STEVENS: Yeah, 3303 West Vernon.

WOODS: What's the cross street?

STEVENS: Eleventh Avenue.

WOODS: All right. Let's see. You're also on the board of the Pacific Rim [Apartments] housing for the crippled and handicapped.

STEVENS: That's the Crippled Children's Society.

WOODS: In Inglewood?

STEVENS: Yeah. That's housing that was also built under HUD with assistance from the city of Inglewood along with moneys from the Crippled Children's Society to provide housing for crippled and handicapped persons.

WOODS: And how did you get on that board? Who invited you?

STEVENS: Mrs. Mordena Moore. She's the president of the

Pacific Rim housing.

WOODS: Okay. You were about to say something about your church and the cultural area around Leimert Park. I guess that has been expanding?

STEVENS: Yes, it has. You know that it has brought a new life and vitality to the area.

WOODS: So more people want to stay?

STEVENS: Well, no. People want to come, and they want to shop, and they want to visit the stores, because quite a few of the stores relate some of our history in a way.

WOODS: And is the church involved with this whole transformation?

STEVENS: Well, the church is right at the perimeter and as such tries to associate and accommodate those busines-ses and so forth that surround it. We have parking facilities that they can use a lot of times when they're having a concert or there's not enough street parking available.

WOODS: There has been some talk about the city redeveloping the area.

STEVENS: Well, they're in a phase of that. That's with Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas. What they're going to do is in different phases. They're trying to have new power-illuminated lighting, and they want to plant flowers and trees and beautify the area.

WOODS: Okay. Was the church affected? There were a couple of places that were burned during the [1992 Los Angeles] rebellion.

STEVENS: No, we weren't, because we're a little removed. Though the primary targets--and there were some right around the vicinity--that were demolished were like liquor stores and some businesses. And I'd say that the businesses that were greatly affected were those that were owned by Koreans or Asians and in some instances some of our businesses. I think that that stemmed from the fact that the proprietors or proprietresses weren't friendly or understanding, and as a result they suffered.

To use an example like O. J. [Simpson]--well, everybody knows O. J.--but he had eight chicken venues, and all of them were burned down, eight Pioneer Chicken establishments. And that's probably because of who was running them. Maybe they didn't know that he was the owner--right?--because he probably didn't spend enough time around there. But by far most of the places that were burned or destroyed, looted or robbed, I guess they were owned by Koreans or Asians. That primarily was due to the fact that as they infiltrated into our community they would come into the businesses and offer a substantial amount of cash for a buyout, and a lot of us took it. That's why you don't see as many businesses that we own after the

riot as we did before the riot, because I think a certain fear came over folk, you know.

WOODS: Of black businesses?

STEVENS: Yeah. "This is my ticket to get out of here."

WOODS: So a lot of them were bought out after the riot?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: You mentioned Pioneer Chicken. A lot of black business suffered during the riot, such as Golden Bird. And then there was--

STEVENS: Oh, yeah, well, Golden Bird, I think because-- I know the Sternis family very well. I think they lost a couple of places, but they were actually able to reopen in a short space of time. I think what hindered them was what I had referred to earlier, a lack of availability of borrowing funds. In those businesses, the insurance is so high and everything that you're really not operating on the type of margin now that you would have, because you've got workman's comp[ensation] and this thing and that thing, and it's really very costly to be in business.

WOODS: Why do you think that there are so many black establishments, businesses, and organizations that were attacked during the riots?

STEVENS: Well, I don't know the exact number of the total, but I think it was in instances like-- I know a couple of

folk that had leased their businesses out to Koreans, like Woodley Lewis on Manchester [Boulevard], he lost his restaurant. He lost his ice cream parlor and his liquor store. They burned the whole thing. And I think it was because when they were getting together to damage these businesses they associated who was in there and who was running them rather than who owned them.

WOODS: So you think that some of the black business people didn't have a really clearly identifiable presence in the community?

STEVENS: Well, I wouldn't say in the community; I would say as far as their businesses were concerned. And as a result, the people who patronize those stores-- And you know, what was it? Like that Latisha-- What was her name? You know that young girl?

WOODS: Latisha Harlins.

STEVENS: Yeah. You know that was the case, a cultural misunderstanding. And I think that probably set in mind feelings of a lot of folk as it related to their presence in the neighborhood. And I'm talking about the Koreans and-- Because the Koreans suffered, I think, the heaviest damage.

WOODS: How did your church respond to the riots?

STEVENS: Well, what they tried to do was to make available-- Because we supply food on a regular basis to people in need

and clothes and so on.

WOODS: So you have a soup kitchen?

STEVENS: No, not a soup kitchen. They come and get it--

WOODS: A distribution center?

STEVENS: Yeah, a distribution center. And then the priest has a discretionary fund where for emergencies he can give out money, etc.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

MARCH 1, 1995

WOODS: Okay, we're still going down your affiliations.

STEVENS: Okay.

WOODS: And I guess we should start with the fact that you were named honorary fire chief of the Compton fire department. Was that as a result of your being on the [Los Angeles] County Fire Commission?

STEVENS: Yes, it was. And I think it was about 1986 or around in there that I was named honorary fire chief of the Compton Fire Department. They presented me with a badge and everything.

WOODS: We'll go through the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] later.

STEVENS: Well, I'm a life member of the NAACP, and I was a board member of the Los Angeles chapter for maybe about half a dozen years.

WOODS: Okay. What are some of the activities that they were involved in during that period of time? What years were those?

STEVENS: I would say roughly 1975 to '81 or '82, along in there. Then I resigned from the board; that was due to my scheduling with Anheuser-Busch. It wasn't possible to make all of the meetings, and they had a stipulation that if you missed three meetings you were out. So rather than miss three

and get put out, I resigned.

WOODS: You said the years were 1980--?

STEVENS: Well, I'd say about maybe 1973 to perhaps maybe 1980 or 1981.

WOODS: Okay. What were some of the major issues during that time?

STEVENS: Well, as you know, the NAACP is an organization that concerns itself with discrimination and housing and employment, etc. Those were probably at the forefront then, providing equal opportunity for its constituency.

WOODS: Okay. We talked about your church.

STEVENS: Yeah, Christ the Good Shepherd [Episcopal] Church. I've been a lifelong Episcopalian and also a former member of the vestry board of Christ the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church. I'm now the church finance chairman.

WOODS: Now, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, you joined that when?

STEVENS: I pledged Alpha Phi Alpha and crossed the sands in 1948.

WOODS: While you were at Wayne State [University]?

STEVENS: While I was at Wayne State. I went into Alpha Epsilon chapter, and then afterwards I went into the graduate chapter in Detroit, Gamma Lambda. And we discussed the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP, right?

WOODS: Right. And you're also a member of the Los Angeles

chapter of the Urban League.

STEVENS: And I've been affiliated with that-- Well, it really started in Detroit. I would say in maybe about 1950 I was active in the Detroit branch of the Urban League, and I've been active with the Los Angeles Urban League here in Los Angeles since '71.

WOODS: Okay. And what have been some of the major activities of the Urban League in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: Well, the Urban League is a body that is concerned primarily with education and employment. And I'd say that, especially under John [W.] Mack, it has been a vocal voice for those things that are happening in our community that affect us.

WOODS: Have you worked on any specific projects for them?

STEVENS: No. Primarily I was active in my capacity with Anheuser-Busch and helping to support some of their programs.

WOODS: So what is the relationship between the Urban League and the corporate community? Is it a good relationship?

STEVENS: Yes, it is a good relationship. Anheuser-Busch helps to fund "The Games People Play," which is a fund-raiser where they have different social activities. It's also a sponsor of their main fund-raiser, which is their banquet, and other little programs. Like we have on occasion given them money

for Christmas baskets, etc., to feed the needy and the hungry at Christmas.

WOODS: So you came to Los Angeles, I guess, right after John Mack came?

STEVENS: No. I think John Mack was here a little before I was. I can't recall. I came in 1971. But I had known John Mack in Michigan when he was the head of the Urban League in Flint, Michigan.

WOODS: And have you known any of the other major Urban League officials?

STEVENS: Well, I had a cousin through marriage [Raymon Scruggs] who was on the board of the national Urban League. And of course my friend Dr. H. Claude Hudson, "Mr. Civil Rights" himself, lived not too far from where I presently reside, and he was a good friend. My wife also had a relative, Dr. James J. McClendon--he was a medical doctor, and he was on the board of the national Urban League. And then I'm sort of prejudiced toward the Urban League, because the Urban League, under Dr. Francis A. Kornegay, was responsible for me getting my job with Anheuser-Busch.

WOODS: In Detroit?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: You also knew John Jacobs, who has retired as president of the Urban League.

STEVENS: Yeah, and who is now associated with Anheuser-Busch. But John was down in San Diego, and he was the head of the Urban League there. John has always been a close, warm friend.

WOODS: So you advised him over the years, and he advised you?

STEVENS: No, not necessarily. Because John is very astute and very capable. But we've had many conversations over the years at national conferences that we've both attended, etc. He was sort of like a mentor.

WOODS: And what's his current position with Anheuser-Busch?

STEVENS: He is an executive vice president of corporate communications.

WOODS: So does he do many of the same things that you did in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: No, no. John's department handles all of our media--voice and radio. His department acts as the official spokesperson for the corporation.

WOODS: You also mentioned that you knew Dr. H. Claude Hudson very well, who was, I believe, the president of the NAACP for a long time.

STEVENS: Yes, he was the president, and he was on the board.

WOODS: In Los Angeles?

STEVENS: Yes. You know, he was a dentist, and he got so involved

and so intrigued with the work of the NAACP that he went to law school and finished so that-- Well, actually he's a man who devoted his life toward civil rights.

WOODS: And what are some of your recollections--?

STEVENS: I heard him relate-- Like the beaches and so forth that were segregated, he had them open them up. But he's done so many things. I guess he lived to be about 103 [years old]. He was the founder of Broadway [Federal] Savings and Loan [Association]. I can remember when he was in his nineties he would call me up and say, "Mr. Stevens, what are you doing?"

And I'd say, "Well, Doc, what's up?"

He'd say, "Could you come by? I want to go to the bank." It never dawned on me that the bank was closed, but he knew how to get into the bank, and he could withdraw. I think the thing that he really enjoyed was going down to the kitchen, you know, the cafeteria area, and seeing if he could find any cookies or cake. He had a sweet tooth.

But he was really a fine person. I think he was in his early nineties when he married the last time and moved over on, I believe it was-- I want to say Redondo [Avenue], but I know it's over here a couple of blocks west of La Brea [Avenue] near Rodeo [Drive].

WOODS: What sorts of things was he interested in in the last part of his life?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. He worked with the NAACP up until almost the end. I believe he was at the convention in Kentucky, in Louisville, and he fell and hurt himself very seriously. So then I guess he stopped traveling and one thing or another. But Dr. Hudson was in the forefront of trying to better conditions for all of us.

WOODS: If you know, what did he think were the major barriers in L.A. or major individuals who were making progress?

STEVENS: Well, like I said, I think that his focus was on employment, housing, segregation and, you know, the things that we've been fighting all along.

WOODS: Did he think that some organizations or firms or individuals in L.A. were more resistant than others?

STEVENS: Well, I think wherever it arose you could count on Dr. Hudson being there.

WOODS: Do you also know his family?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. Well, his son Elbert [Hudson] is the chairman of Broadway Savings and Loan, and his son Paul [Hudson] is the president of Broadway Savings and Loan. Both Elbert and Paul are attorneys, and Paul was the president in later years of the Los Angeles NAACP. So the Hudson family has been a stalwart in the fight for equality.

WOODS: Okay. Is there anything else that you recollect about H. Claude Hudson that you--?

STEVENS: Well, I guess I've said it all. He was quite a man.

WOODS: All right. Maybe could you distinguish between the Los Angeles Urban League and the Los Angeles NAACP?

STEVENS: Well, basically they are two different organizations. One, the NAACP, is at the forefront to try to effect equality in our life. And the Urban League, I would say, is dedicated to making sure that we're equipped with the disciplines that can afford us a livelihood so that we can be useful citizens and participants in the community.

WOODS: They sort of compete with each other for some of the same corporate funds. Or do they compete?

STEVENS: Well, no, they don't compete together. But, as you would know, most organizations compete. Like the Urban League derives some of its funds from the United Way; the NAACP receives no such funds. But both are in the quest to receive corporate funds. And as you know, Anheuser-Busch was active with both of them financially and in contributing. But the Urban League, to maintain

their computer training center, they've depended on corporate America to help them. And as you read in the paper, with this recent struggle by the NAACP to survive, it was noted in the paper that a lot of its contributions had been cut tremendously. And I read the other day that since Myrlie Evers[-Williams] has taken over the chairwomanship of the NAACP, Chrysler

[Corporation] and some of the other companies are coming back into the fold of corporate contributors to help them in their fight and struggle.

WOODS: When did Anheuser-Busch start contributing to both of them?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. I started with Anheuser-Busch in 1954 in a route sales category in Detroit. But throughout the years it's been a premise of Anheuser-Busch to always put something back into the communities in which is does business. Therefore, some things are done in our local offices and some things are through our corporate office in St. Louis. And Henry H. Brown, who retired as the senior vice president at the same time I did, was very active and was very involved on a national level with various organizations throughout the country. And now Wayman F. Smith III, who's the vice president of corporate affairs, is assigned, in addition to his other responsibilities, those responsibilities to make sure that we are in the forefront of the community.

WOODS: Locally, were there any shifts or increases or decreases in the funding of the two organizations?

STEVENS: No. Because I'll tell you, our company, as you know, has maintained number one leadership since, I believe, 1957, the forefront of the brewing industry. And as our sales grew, our contributions grew.

WOODS: And if you know, has Anheuser-Busch's funding of both organizations been maintained in the past couple of years? Or has it gone down?

STEVENS: No, it has been maintained. Like the United Negro College Fund, as you know, corporately it's a sponsor of the Lou Rawls [Parade of Stars] Telethon. And then in local areas we support various fund-raisers, etc., to help them. We also are one of the major sponsors of the Magic Johnson Summer Weekend in Los Angeles, which consists of a basketball game with the all-star NBA [National Basketball Association] basketball players and a banquet and has raised several million [dollars] to support the efforts of the forty-one member colleges of the United Negro College Fund.

WOODS: Okay. I think you had given me a figure earlier of maybe $800,000 to $900,000 a year that you had access to in terms of the community programs.

STEVENS: Well, it was between I'd say maybe $800,000 or something like that-- I wish you just wouldn't put the figure in there.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: We just say that it was a sizeable amount. And the reason I do that is because of competitive reasons.

WOODS: Okay. So what were the different organizations that were funded? You don't have to give me a number. But you

said the NAACP--

STEVENS: The Urban League, the United Negro College Fund, Golden State Minority Foundation, the Good Shepherd Manor for senior citizens, West Angeles Church of God in Christ, Ruth Moore Toys for Tots.

WOODS: West Angeles-- There was a specific project?

STEVENS: Well, West Angeles-- We supplied them money to help feed the hungry.

WOODS: And Ruth Moore's Toys for Tots is an annual Christmas--?

STEVENS: Yeah, that's an annual thing, and it's usually at the Marriott Airport [Hotel]. Ruth Moore died a little over a year ago, but the affair was held this past Christmas with her daughters handling the activity. But there are numerous other activities like the Lou Rawls Parade of Stars [Charity] Golf Classic that benefited the United Negro College Fund.

WOODS: And then there was the Magic Johnson Summer Camp.

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, that was a corporate thing.

WOODS: You mean there was a difference between the national and local?

STEVENS: Yes. You see, corporate, they had their budget, and I had my budget out here.

WOODS: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about Ruth Moore? You mentioned her name.

STEVENS: Well, Ruth Moore was a lady whom you might say was--

Well, she was just a person who touched so many people. Ruth Moore, towards maybe the last four or five years of her life, she just said, "When are you going to send the check?" They would have this luncheon, and perhaps she would have two thousand or more kids. Well, I think she was in social work and everything, but she took great delight and enjoyment as she watched the expressions upon the children's faces. Because they were children who undoubtedly wouldn't have had any Christmas had it not been for Ruth Moore. Several companies contributed toward the affair. And then she had some of the movie stars, everybody, involved, including the athletes, you know.

WOODS: Politicians.

STEVENS: Yeah, everybody. So it grew to be such a large affair. I didn't go this past Christmas, because when you get retired you have an option.

WOODS: So in general both the-- I don't know what the corporate name was. When you say corporate, that's Los Angeles or western states?

STEVENS: No, when you say corporate-- In this instance our home offices are in St. Louis, Missouri, and then we have offices around the country. Where I was assigned out in Woodland Hills, that was a regional office.

WOODS: That's western states?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: Well, the Pacific region is what they call it. Up until my retirement our office covered thirteen states. Now they've added new regions. See, we had five regions. Now they're up to ten regions. So out here is the Pacific region, and it encompasses California, Nevada, and Hawaii.

WOODS: Okay. So the regional office was--

STEVENS: Well, I was assigned to the vice president's staff.

WOODS: Of the regional--?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: And there I had the responsibility for our marketing activities as well as our community involvement programs.

WOODS: So the regional office was very involved with a number of community activities?

STEVENS: Very much so.

WOODS: Okay. Were there any community organizations that were sort of critical of Anheuser-Busch either because of, I guess, franchise--? You mentioned the story about Jesse Jackson.

STEVENS: Well, you know, Jesse had gotten some wrong information--and I guess that was back in the eighties, the early eighties--about Anheuser-Busch. And then he came to realize that he had been given wrong information, and he

apologized to the company. Because our minority employment has roughly run well in excess of 25 percent over the country.

WOODS: So at that time he was sort of talking to a lot of the major food and beverage companies about franchises?

STEVENS: Yes. Well, you could remember that they had an agreement that they were trying to effect at that time, like with [Adolph] Coors [Company] and with Kentucky Fried Chicken, for franchises. In fact, I was kind of surprised, because I didn't see that many, and I haven't seen that many, spring up as a result of those negotiations.

WOODS: This was in the early eighties?

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: You mentioned earlier a particular incident when he came to California.

STEVENS: Oh. When he came to California, because of our involvement and our association with just so many groups and everything, Maxine Waters, our congresswoman, and those told Reverend Jesse that his habit of having a press conference outside of the brewery and spilling a can of the product, that he couldn't do that here in California, so he might just as well forget it. So Reverend Jackson got in his limo and drove off.

WOODS: And there was another instance. You had mentioned that you were at a conference with him and-- The cigar story.

STEVENS: Oh, yeah. Well, we were in Fairfield, California. He had come to Fairfield. And I didn't know at the time that he was allergic to smoke. I lit a cigar, and his eyes started running, and he said, "I've got to go."

WOODS: Okay. And I guess that was the early eighties when there were questions about increasing minority franchises--

STEVENS: Well, not necessarily franchises. I think--

WOODS: Distributors?

STEVENS: Well, yeah. Our distributors have always been in the forefront. And I think perhaps we have more ethnic wholesalers in our system than probably any of the others. But I know Anheuser-Busch is continually looking. It has even helped some of the minorities with financing so that they could obtain distributorships, whereas without their help and their assistance it would have been impossible, because as a minority there still remain questionable doubts about financial institutions making available funds and resources.

WOODS: Did you ever think about becoming a distributor?

STEVENS: Well, I asked several times, and I put in an application, but for one reason or another I never got one. But I didn't let it upset me, because I enjoyed my association with Anheuser-Busch. And as I say, I felt it was a two-way street. They were good to me, and I think I was good to them.

WOODS: So that was in the early eighties that the whole issue about distributors came up? I guess employment was a big issue in the sixties and seventies.

STEVENS: Yes, it was.

WOODS: And distribution was the big issue in the eighties?

STEVENS: Well, not only in the eighties. I think that distribution was even a concern maybe in the late sixties and seventies and eighties and is still probably a consideration in the nineties. And as we go into the new millennium it's still going to be of concern.

WOODS: Did Anheuser-Busch have an official affirmative action policy or informal policy?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. They've always maintained standards in their human resources that our management had to adhere to. You'll notice that you've never read where there have been any of these harassment cases, and I think that's because the policies as set forth by senior management have avoided those types of conflicts that so many companies are faced with presently.

WOODS: Okay. By the late eighties there were a number of other issues that were sort of launched against the alcoholic beverage companies. There was the anti-drunk-driving movement, and by the early nineties there was a movement against alcoholic

beverage companies targeting advertisement in the African American community. How did you respond? And how did the corporation respond?

STEVENS: Anheuser-Busch has a department in Saint Louis that addresses those issues. And we were very active--
or the company was very active and is very active--like with Mothers against Drunk Driving, our "Know When to Say When" programs, our programs where our wholesalers participate in taxi rides home, you know, if you've had too much, the designated driver programs, etc. And those are implemented by our wholesaler-distributor family
with billboards, etc., that denote the seriousness of drinking.

The company has always preached that beer is a beverage of moderation and that if consumed properly you don't get into this alcoholism or whatever. We have programs that go into the schools and teach the children that it's not right to imbibe, you know, that we're very concerned. You remember some years ago we had Spuds McKenzie, you know, the dog, but it became a symbol that young children were taking to, and that was the demise of Spuds McKenzie. Because, you know, they came out with
T-shirts and everything. Anheuser-Busch has always gone along as a good corporate citizen to do away with things that would antagonize the community, and that only makes for good

business--right?--good business sense.

WOODS: I know in New York there were some attacks in Harlem against some billboards. I don't know if--

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you, primarily-- That was addressed. You know, we have so many churches, for example, in our community. And with the malt liquors in particular, I think that was a part of a program that was attacked by a lot of ministers throughout the country because of the feeling that malt liquors contain more alcohol than the regular beers, which wasn't necessarily true. But a lot of the boards were placed near schools and churches, which offended a lot of folk. And then during that same period ministers took to whitewashing billboards. And I can truthfully say that we never emphasized the strength or the powerfulness of the malt liquor. Like some of them have the bull, and some have the tiger, some are named after firearms, you know.

WOODS: That's from Baltimore, Colt 45.

STEVENS: Yeah, so I'm just being truthful. [tape recorder off]

WOODS: I guess we were at Anheuser-Busch's policy with regard to targeting ethnic communities, and you were saying that that wasn't the policy. In terms of brands, it wasn't the policy to fortify brands.

STEVENS: To denote or to emphasize strength or power, and

by power I meant the alcohol content. We've always been sensitive as to the type of advertising that we executed in our neighborhoods throughout the country.

WOODS: All right. Maybe we'll move to your involvement with the Prince Hall Masons.

STEVENS: Well, I got into the Prince Hall Masons I guess around '88 or '89. I joined Cedars of Lebanon number 65, which is my blue lodge. From there I went on to acquire the additional degrees in Los Angeles consistory number 26. And then in 1991 I received the thirty-third degree in the Prince Hall Masons, Prince Hall affiliation.

WOODS: What are some of the activities the Prince Hall Masons are engaged in in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: We have a Robert W. Brown Scholarship, which is named for our deputy for California and Hawaii. They give scholarships. They're active with the [Martin Luther King Jr.-]Charles [R.] Drew [Medical Center] prenatal care clinic. They make, along with the supreme council, a sizeable donation every year. They visit and give gifts and things to like the McClaren children's care center. Well, it's not a care center, but McClaren Hall. And they do quite a bit with religious organizations to assist them. It's really an organization, to me, that exemplifies the need for one to help another.

WOODS: And where's the membership drawn from? Who are the members?

STEVENS: Well, the procedure is that you have to be recommended to get in, and that is only after you've expressed a personal desire to want to become affiliated.

WOODS: And what are some of the occupations of the members?

STEVENS: Well, for example, we have John Hill III, who owns Angelus Funeral Home, both the father and the son, John Hill Jr. and John Hill III. We have Alvin [I.] Niles, who's the presiding judge of the Los Angeles Municipal Court. Tom [Thomas] Bradley is a member, who was the former mayor. Gil [Gilbert W.] Lindsay was a member, who was a Los Angeles city councilman for the ninth district. We have Dr. Donald [W.] Ware, who is very active. There's a cross section. And I introduced you just a few minutes ago to James Doyle, who is a member. But we have members in most of the professions and applications that comprise our communities. Thurgood Marshall was a member. And you could go on and on, but nearly everybody who's anybody belongs to the Prince Hall Masons.

WOODS: All right. Now, some of your other affiliations: You're on the advisory board of the Harry A. Mier Center of the Crippled Children's Society.

STEVENS: Also in conjunction with that I'm on the board of the Pacific Rim [Apartments] housing for the crippled and

handicapped, which is under the auspices of the Crippled Children's Society. That's independent living for those who are disabled.

WOODS: We'll save the fire commission for another time, because I guess that's going to be a long discussion.

STEVENS: Yes, probably so.

WOODS: Are you still also on the board of the--?

STEVENS: No, I was a former board member--

WOODS: Of the Culver City--

STEVENS: YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. Also in Culver City I was an environmental standards commissioner.

WOODS: What were some of your activities on the YMCA board in Culver City?

STEVENS: Well, actually the YMCA board is sort of in charge of the management of the Y, the various aspects--you know, fund-raising, etc.--to make sure that it is able to maintain its programs and place in the community.

WOODS: And the Culver City environmental standards board, you were on there from 1973 to 1977.

STEVENS: Yeah. What it was responsible for was sort of like--Well, the smoking ordinance was initiated when I was on there years ago. And the aesthetics, like the placement of signs and the size of signs to make sure that they were not oversized,

that they blended in.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

APRIL 13, 1995

WOODS: Mr. Stevens, could you briefly tell me how you got involved with activities related to several fire depart-ments in Southern California?

STEVENS: Yes. I was appointed by [Los Angeles County] Supervisor Kenneth Hahn in 1983 to be his appointee to the Los Angeles County Fire Commission. I served on that until 1987, when the board of supervisors invoked the "sunrise clause" abolishing the commission. It was due mostly to [Los Angeles County Fire Commissioner] Fred Klein and myself being involved in bringing to focus some inequities in the fire department as related to its management. And then, after these allegations surfaced, it resulted in Chief John England retiring and several changes being instituted.

WOODS: Okay. This was the Los Angeles County Fire Department?

STEVENS: Yes. I might add that I was the first black county fire commissioner, and evidently I'm the last one, because they haven't had a fire commission since the one that I was appointed to.

WOODS: Okay. And you say that allegations surfaced in what year?

STEVENS: I believe it was 1987.

WOODS: What were the allegations?

STEVENS: Well, there was an instance that I brought to the supervisor, Kenneth Hahn's, attention of an employee who had financial responsibilities with the department, and he was in the $30,000- or $40,000-a-year class salary-wise, and he bought a $350,000 home, and we came to find out that he had embezzled the money from the fire department funds. And as a result, when it was first alleged, the chief transferred him to another department and kept him on the payroll for a year, whereas the normal procedure would have been to have suspended him, to our way of thinking. Also, Fred and I, we were over at the county fire station 58, and the captain in conversation mentioned that they had-- We had inquired about the extra departmental car out there in the parking lot, and he stated that that was used so that when the fire chief's wife called they could take her different places--shopping, etc. That was against policy, because in case of a fire you need all of the personnel on trucks.

WOODS: So there weren't any specific racial allegations at the time that surrounded the chief's resignation?

STEVENS: No, not per se. Because most of those things had really been ironed out. Because, as I've stated before in the prior interview, when I first got on the commission and I asked for knowledge of the number of blacks in managerial positions, the highest we had at that time was three captains.

And certainly that wasn't representative of our population base in the county. So that was really our focus.

But what the chief really wanted was for us as commissioners not to have any contact with the firefighters or anything. But the firefighters, they had what they called the Stentorians [of Los Angeles County]. That's an organization composed of black L.A. city and L.A. county firefighters. I was privileged to meet with them several times as related to a possible grievance that they had. Also there was Clyde Johnson; he was the head of the Los Angeles County Black Employees Association. And through all of us working together, little by little we were able to combat employment inequities and work towards making the fire department representative of the community.

But you know that prior to the time that the fire commission was established, and even after it was established, there were instances where like now Assistant Chief Herschel Clady had to retain legal counsel to fight for promotion opportunities, and there were little side things that arose relative to the fire department.

I think I mentioned to you, Dr. Woods, on one previous occasion, out at Marina [del Rey], where they had the statue of a black man in front of the fire station, I went out to investigate that when I heard about it, but by the time I

got there somebody had taken a hammer and busted the statue and put it behind the bushes. They had the chief's picture on the wall with a black female head attached to it, one thing or another. But, you know, there were little insinuations that-- And I guess this stems from the fact that the fire department is a pretty good-paying organization. And to maintain perpetuity there are a lot of fathers and sons. And a case might be like [that of] the fire chief in Los Angeles city. Well, his son is deputy chief or battalion chief. But, you know, they look out for one another and raise them through the ranks.

WOODS: So how was it that nepotism was able to be so prevalent in the fire department?

STEVENS: Well, like I say, I think first of all that it was going back years ago where academics wasn't as important. Because as you know, a lot of colleges now teach fire prevention and different courses in fire care and management. And then the fathers-- You know, you retire after twenty, twenty-five years with a good pension. Meanwhile, the sons would go into the fire service, because on the average they worked maybe ten days a month. And that's not too bad. So it gave them a very affordable income. And I know that when I was on the fire commission that there were individual firefighters who were making as much as $100,000 a year. And when you compare

that to other factors and employment opportuni-ties--

WOODS: Civil service jobs?

STEVENS: Yeah. You see, that was quite a bit of money.

WOODS: How were they able to make $100,000?

STEVENS: Through overtime, etc., you know, working somebody else's shift and whatever. And there were a lot of them, especially young fellows and single guys. And a lot of them had other investments such as 7-Eleven [Food] Stores, etc., that they had bought to even bolster that income further. And as a result, when you go to the fire stations, they have premium automobiles. They were having a taste of the good American life under our present system.

WOODS: Okay. So they would be, I guess, cyclical type of investigations?

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, what happened was we used to meet at fire station headquarters, so I came up with an idea about us meeting at the [Los Angeles] County Hall of Administration. The motive behind meeting at the County Hall of Administration is that that's where we have all the news photographers. But nobody caught what was really going on. And then when these allegations started surfacing, well, then the chief got particularly upset and very angry. As a result, he had to appear before the county grand jury and explain what it was, that we didn't have any ulterior motives but we were

just interested in good clean government.

WOODS: So Stentorians had been around for-- It was an African American organization?

STEVENS: Yeah, for years. I think that stemmed from the fact that when-- Years ago, you know that the Anglo firefighters didn't want to sleep with the Afro-American firefighters, or else they relegated them to the dirty chores if they had to be assigned. But there were several black stations years ago. And as a result, this was probably their future. And then you got into affirmative action and other things so they really had to spread them around. So now you've got black firefighters that are serving the many areas that were deemed unreachable years ago.

WOODS: So do you think that affirmative action was successful with regard to the fire department?

STEVENS: What do you mean? Our time on the commission?

WOODS: What type of affirmative action policies were instituted? And were they successful?

STEVENS: Well, as related to L.A. County? Well, L.A. County has never had the problems that L.A. city is facing now. But I think that what it really did was open up the doors to opportunities not only for minorities but for females.

WOODS: Okay. You say that L.A. city had a whole different situation. What was the situation?

STEVENS: Well, you know, they have gone through allegations most recently where they took video films of the female candidates during their training, and they said that it was to protect them from any type of legal liability. But in essence it showed what I guess everybody already knows, that women by nature have weaker upper body strength than males. And I guess that's something that they're still fighting now before the L.A. City Council.

But really it kept a lot of females out of training. I know like over at 58 the Stentorians, they used to help train women firefighters by going through the physical exercises with them to help them to attain the strength to carry the hose and whatever. But though they might have been unsuccessful in getting into L.A. city or even into county at the time, they were sought by other departments. And now you see women who are in management positions.

WOODS: Okay. So you were on the county fire department board during what years?

STEVENS: I'd say from '83 to '87.

WOODS: Okay. And what were the most significant events? You mentioned the resignation of Chief [John] England?

STEVENS: Well, that was one. I think the other thing was that it sort of broke up the hierarchy of the county fire department, which then enabled the new chief--and he's a

splendid person--Chief [C.] Michael Freeman, to come in and to make those changes that were necessary to run a first-class department.

WOODS: And you recently received an award from the Compton [Fire Department]?

STEVENS: No. I think it was around '87 or '88, around in there. The chief's name was White. He has since retired. But he made me an honorary chief of the Compton Fire Department.

WOODS: Okay. So that was for your work on the L.A. County board?

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay. Were there any overall lessons learned by your experience with--?

STEVENS: Well, I think that it gave me an opportunity to grow and develop and to follow along the lines of trying to implement and improve the situation that I found was lacking. And the supervisor [Hahn] has told me many times that I did more in those years with the fire department than he had been able to do the whole lot of the years that he was the supervisor. And that was solely because I was in a position where I could express myself a little more freely without realizing the political implications or outfall.

WOODS: Okay. Did Hahn nominate you for any other positions?

STEVENS: No. That was just for the fire department. Because

at the time I had talked with him, and he had three or four different commissions. The one that we both felt I could make a positive imprint upon was the fire department. Because he had offered me like the county board of airports, but that didn't appeal to me. You know, instinctively I think as a youngster everybody-- Fire trucks going by. I used to get a bang sometimes sitting on the fire truck next to the driver, and when we'd come to the corner I'd push the button and the siren would go off, and I'd have my helmet on. Hey, I was in seventh heaven. [laughter]

WOODS: [laughter] Yeah.

STEVENS: Then I'd make some runs with them to fires. I was out like to the Malibu fire, which was a big one. We had the command post set up out there and everything. I was back with the firefighters. It gave me an insight and deep appreciation for the work that they do.

WOODS: So you said you were the first and maybe the last African American on that board.

STEVENS: Yes, the only one. There has never been talk really, or serious talk, about revitalizing the fire commission.

WOODS: So it was disbanded in '87?

STEVENS: Yeah. And then I think in '88 or something they started an advisory board, and I stayed on that for a couple of years. But really what it was was an instrument for the

department to receive technical advice and input. It had nothing to do with the firefighters themselves. It was just a meeting with the chief and his subordinates. And I felt that when Yvonne [Brathwaite] Burke became supervisor, that's when I decided that I really didn't want to stay in the position. Because it's hard if you've got thoughts and views to subject them to the point were you don't feel you're effective.

WOODS: How would you compare Yvonne Burke with Kenneth Hahn?

STEVENS: I think that Yvonne Burke is an outstanding person. She has been a United States congresswoman, and she has come through the political processes. I think she's doing an outstanding job, because she had some tremendous shoes to fill in following Kenny Hahn, because Kenny Hahn had been a supervisor for forty years or better, and his legacy is known throughout the district. People often talk about how when he was driving along and he'd see a pothole he'd write it down, and you could bet that the next afternoon or the next morning that pothole was fixed.

I think about two weeks ago at the dedication of the Gilbert Lindsay Memorial down at the [Los Angeles] Convention [and Exhibition] Center they were talking about Gil Lindsay and Kenny Hahn. They said that Gil Lindsay would have the supervisor driving, and he'd sit in the back seat, because he told the supervisor, "Well, I know everybody

in South Central [Los Angeles] and you don't." And then finally Kenny said, "Well, I'm the supervisor." Lindsay said, "That don't make no difference." [laughter]

So you know that that was an outstanding program and tribute to pay to Gil Lindsay, because he was quite a figure. When he started out, they said that he was over in the county building, and he was assigned as a janitor. But they said he had a little office, and they doubted whether Gil ever picked up a broom or anything, because everybody would come over there. And then when Kenny left the city hall, you know, Gil Lindsay was a councilman. They called him "the emperor," you know. But that was his focus. And they made a lot of fruitful gains for a lot of us.

I think that Yvonne Burke--to get back to her--is maintaining and trying to make things even better.

WOODS: So you think that there are generational differences between, say, the group like Lindsay and Hahn and maybe [Augustus F.] Hawkins and the newer generation of black politicians?

STEVENS: Well, certainly. I'll tell you, with Gil Lindsay and Hahn and Augustus Hawkins--and you can include Julian Dixon and some of those--they have not only made great contributions but they have paved the way and made sure that the road is comfortable for those who are following. You read in the paper with Maxine Waters-- She's a very dynamic

person, and she's a congresswoman. She has come out publicly and said that she's a Democrat, but if Bill [William J.] Clinton doesn't go along with affirmative action and make sure that it is maintained and kept, she and others of the Congressional Black Caucus are going to fight him down to the wire. So I think that it's this type of leadership and development that's going to carry us through. And you see we've got--what is it?--forty-one congressmen now or something like that, and evidently we're getting congressional people from areas where we've never had them.

WOODS: The rural South.

STEVENS: Yeah. Black congressmen. And then we've got Senator--who is it?--Braun.

WOODS: Carol Mosely Braun.

STEVENS: Yeah. In Illinois. And certainly we would have to agree that when one or more of us are present, this controls the trend of thought of others who might not be friendly or sympathetic to our cause. Because if you're sitting there--and you have perhaps found yourself in a situation like that--they're not as free to be as vocal as they might be had you not been present.

WOODS: Right.

STEVENS: That's a sneaky way to put it, but--

WOODS: Do you think that the generation of Hahn and Lindsay

and Hawkins had more street-level organization than--?

STEVENS: Well, yeah. I think that--

WOODS: Or are they street-level organizations like wards in L.A.?

STEVENS: Well, you have clubs and so forth. And I think that they came along and worked diligently to put in perspective the foundation that would ensure a firm-standing structure. And I think that some of the other politicians-- You know, now they're getting into term limits and everything. And what this is going to do, such as in the case of somebody like Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.]-- It's his last year. And there are several up in Sacramento where this is going to be their last term. We're going to run into a whole new [California] State Senate and Assembly of politicians who might not think or react to things that concern us or are beneficial for us.

As you know, back then, to get into a political encounter cost very little money. But you'll notice like in the race with the honorable Nate Holden and [J.] Stan [Stanley] Sanders, over $300,000 apiece is what they spent. As a result, there are a lot of folk who might be interested in getting into the political arena but the tremendous cost keeps them out. Like with [Dianne] Feinstein and her opponent, [Michael] Huffington, where they're spending millions of dollars, it eliminates. And yet the people who sometimes are attracted

are those who have the money to finance their campaigns to a great degree. Certainly their interests aren't the same as a person who's sort of--I don't want to say self-made or whatever-- But a person who's had everything, I don't think they could focus properly in most instances on what might be best for the average person.

I'm a little disturbed with Congress as they talk about this "Contract with America." It seems as though there will be little done for folk who don't have or enjoy what we used to take for granted as a middle-class living. Because, you see, they're trying to affect Social Security, everything. And if you look when they publish the list at how many of them are millionaires or multimillionaires who are sitting in those seats-- So they don't understand Washington, D.C., under Marion [S.] Barry [Jr.]. They don't understand Watts. They don't understand Baltimore and these cities--Chicago, Newark--where we have high focus. Kansas City. They haven't grown up in that environment. Because they've gone away to the preparatory schools and one thing or another, and they have been void of everyday life to the degree that most of our folk have come up under.

WOODS: You mentioned Willie Brown. I see that you received an honor from the speaker of the assembly in 1987. What was the purpose of that resolution?

STEVENS: Nineteen eighty-seven was the thirty-fifth anniversary of my employment with Anheuser-Busch, and he issued a proclamation. I've got it upstairs if you'd like to see it. I'll show it to you. It was for various contributions that I'd made over the course of the years that I've been in California to various causes in the community.

WOODS: So you've had a chance to get to know Willie Brown over the years?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: What is your opinion of him as a leader and as a state official?

STEVENS: Well, I think that the honorable Willie Brown Jr. is a tremendous leader. He is the type of leader who, even with the term limits in his present position, I'm sure that he'll still stay in politics. He has a very successful law practice. He has a very astute mind. He's a dynamic person, and I think truthfully that he has spoken out on so many things that in some instances he may be a threat to the other folks.

WOODS: Did he have much influence, or does he have much influence, in Southern California?

STEVENS: Not only Southern California but California as a whole.

WOODS: What type of influence did he exert here in Southern California?

STEVENS: Well, in Southern California he has been involved in the local assembly and senatorial races to help to elect Afro-Americans or Hispanics, whatever the case might be. And he formed by doing so, I think, a coalition that was very eventful in the passage of a lot of legislation that affected a lot of folks not only in Southern California but Northern California, too. Because you know his home base is San Francisco.

WOODS: When did you first meet him?

STEVENS: Well, I guess it was soon after I got into California. I'll tell you a little story that-- When I was district sales manager for Anheuser-Busch and they wanted to meet with the speaker, he told them he wouldn't meet unless I was present, because I was the voice that represented the community, and if they couldn't bring me it was all over. I'll tell you, Tom [Thomas] Bradley was that same way, too. If you wanted an appointment, and he knew that they had ethnic representation, he would always ensure that you were there. That's the way Gil Lindsay and all of them were. They felt that it added recognition and appreciation for your services and made the companies feel aware that your presence was felt.

WOODS: So that was your first meeting?

STEVENS: Probably so. I don't know. I've seen the speaker so many times and so many places, you know, at various conventions,

etc., over the years, and we developed a very good friendship.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: Because you know he hosts a weekend with all the California black elected officials. And I used to host his breakfast every year up in Sacramento at various hotels. As a result, I think that it afforded an opportunity to meet some of the top folks with Anheuser-Busch and to form a relationship. Because, you know, in most businesses, Dr. Woods, you need those whom you could go to in the eventuality that there was something that was desired.

WOODS: Yeah. There was talk that Chrysler [Corporation] management might get an act of Congress to stop their sales.

STEVENS: Yeah.

WOODS: So Anheuser-Busch was active in the legislature?

STEVENS: Well, at Anheuser-Busch, like all companies, they have PAC [political action committee] funds. You know that there is certain legislation that involves corporations like the one I was associated with, for example, the last time when the legislature doubled the tax on beer and so forth and so on. You know, sometimes you can tax businesses out of existence. So there comes into focus where the company through its wholesaler family would talk to the legislators or representatives or whatever to try to keep the tax from going and putting people out of work. Because, as you realize,

the biggest factor as relates to taxation of products-- The reality is, it not only affects employment but it also makes it almost impossible for a person to enjoy in moderation a beverage of his choice. Because, right now, you see in the paper, it's nothing to see a six-pack for four dollars or five dollars. And the taxation on stronger beverages has increased tremendously, too.

So what you find is that it affects not only the companies, but it reduces the revenue in the hotels and the restaurants, because you really can't afford it. I was in a hotel the other week, and, you know, you get a couple of drinks and it's eleven or twelve dollars. That's pretty steep. I guess everything else has gone up. But the restaurant owners get together like to fight this smoking ban because they say that it affects their business. And if it's not across the board, they'll go from one area to another area where they can enjoy the comforts.

WOODS: What is your opinion of the black caucus in the legislature?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. You're talking about the Washington [D.C.]--?

WOODS: Sacramento.

STEVENS: Oh. I think it was very effective, because it proved or provided through various seminars an opportunity to pass

down some of the knowledge that some of the old ones had especially for new people, and they were able to help them to resolve some of the difficulties they perhaps were encountering.

WOODS: Okay. You also received a recognition award from the California State Senate.

STEVENS: Yes. I've gotten awards from them for--

WOODS: In 1990.

STEVENS: Yeah. That was a commendation that I received from the county of Los Angeles for work that I had done in the county and in the community. Also from the California State Senate I received recognition, and I got the Los Angeles Mayor's Certificate of Appreciation that year. And Mid-City Chamber of Commerce, I got their Humanitarian Award in 1990. The Black Business Association of Los Angeles Service Award; People Who Care Youth Center, Inc., Corporate Award; Sickle Cell Research Foundation Founder's Award. The Bureau of the Census, I got an appreciation award from them.

WOODS: What was that? You worked on the census?

STEVENS: Well, I helped to provide some information that they had requested. And the Supreme Council-- That was the Masons from the United Supreme Council, which convenes every year; I got their Certificate of Merit. That was in 1990. Of course, I got some others, and really what I just put down were some of those that perhaps seemed significant to

me.

WOODS: Okay.

STEVENS: For example, the UNCF [United Negro College Fund] founding and title sponsor for the Lou Rawls [Parade of Stars] Charity Golf Classic, which we founded to supplement funding for the UNCF schools. That has really turned into quite a golf classic. And here's one that I put down: the NAACP San Bernardino, California, branch Ben L. Hooks Service Award. And this [appreciation award] is the one from 1993 that I got from the Black American Political Association of California. That's all elected black officials.

WOODS: Can you tell me about some of their activities? What did they do?

STEVENS: Well, as I said, they convened once a year in Sacramento, and they have seminars and lectures about matters that pertain to the political arena. They're very active. They have chapters throughout the state, and they focus in on legislation, primarily, that will affect our folk and provide a base for their voices to be heard. I got that in 1993. That was when I retired.

And then the Forum Boxing Appreciation Award was for my association and affiliation in working as a liaison between Anheuser-Busch and the [Great Western] Forum as related to their Budweiser championship boxing programs. The Frank Award

was an award that I received as a humanitarian achiever in 1993, and that recognized various folks in various areas for their contributions. And this was a Cal Pac [California State Package and Tavern Association] Northern California [division] retailers retirement salute in 1993. It was an affair that black Northern California retailers hosted honoring Jim Williams and myself. In my case it was a retirement salute.

And in 1994, the Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs Today Appreciation Award. That's an organization of young folk who are interested in entrepreneur opportunities. Several of the youngsters have formed companies where-- For example, one of the youths, Charles Butler, has a company that he's funded where they put these machines that supply like pop and potato chips and peanuts and that to various businesses, and they've done very well.

This 1994 First A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal Church]-- They honored [J.] Rose [Nesbitt Stevens] and I one Sunday for our vision and outreach to the church and community. And this is the County of Los Angeles Fire Department Recognition Award for what I had done in particular to help black firefighters advance in the ranks. And the Angel City Links Donor Award was for contributions that I made to help them in their program for achievers to get college scholarships.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

APRIL 13, 1995

WOODS: Okay. The L.A. Stentorians.

STEVENS: Yeah, the black firefighters. They saluted me for my contributions to black firefighters. And this Promenade of Prominence, the "Walk of Fame," I was inducted into in June of 1994. And on the Promenade of Prominence, my picture, etc., is imprinted in the sidewalk.

WOODS: And where is that located?

STEVENS: On 103rd [Street] and Success Street in Watts.

WOODS: Okay. That's in a park.

STEVENS: Yeah, around the park.

WOODS: Will Rogers [Memorial] Park?

STEVENS: Yes, in the Watts-Willowbrook area.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

FEBRUARY 26, 1996

WOODS: Okay, John. Do you want to say something?

STEVENS: Yes. I'd like to particularly thank Dale [E.] Treleven, Mrs. Alva Moore Stevenson, and Dr. Clyde Woods of the UCLA Oral History Program for the many kindnesses extended in putting together this manuscript. Without their help, nothing would have been possible. I'm especially appreciative of Dr. Clyde Woods for his patience and understanding and directing me in the proper way to do this book. His help has been invaluable. WOODS: Thank you for directing me and having patience with me.

STEVENS: I'd also like to put in an acknowledgement and thank my family: my wife, J. Rose [Nesbitt Stevens], my daughter Sandra [J. Stevens], and my son John [T. Stevens Jr.], as well as my daughter-in-law Kimberly [Gibson Stevens] and my grandchildren [Marcus and Lauren Stevens] for being such a dynamic part and an inspiration in my life. They have stood behind me and given me hope when sometimes I have felt despair. To them I'm eternally grateful. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of the lives of each of you.

And I'd also in closing like to thank General Celes King III for directing me and encouraging me to do this interview.

His friendship over the years has been invaluable, and I am really appreciative of the part that he has played in my life. Thank you, Celes.

WOODS: Okay. That's fine. [tape recorder off]

Mr. Stevens, could you talk about the black business community here in Los Angeles and your experience with them? The conditions they faced, the leaders, the organizations, and how they look at the community? And their prescriptions and your prescriptions for how they could be improved and what should be done in the community by them?

STEVENS: I think that we do have some black businesses of note in the Los Angeles and surrounding communities, like, for example, our banks: Founders [National Bank], Family [Savings Bank], and Broadway [Federal Savings and Loan]. I think without their commitment to the community that a lot of things would not have been possible because of possible redlining by the Anglo banks. And as a result, they have grown. But it has been, perhaps one might term, a slow growth by virtue of the fact that as a group, a segmentation of the population, we have not responded to the services that they offer the way that we should, which would improve their capitalization, thus allowing them the opportunity to strengthen, if I might use that word, our communities through home loans, business loans, scholastic loans for scholarships,

automobile loans, and other services.

I think we have without a doubt made the other financial institutions rich to the point where they have been ignoring our community. As recently as perhaps a month ago there was a drive to stimulate Afro-Americans to perhaps return home and deposit funds in the three financial institutions that we have in Los Angeles [Broadway Federal Savings and Loan, Founders National Bank, and Family Savings], and it's been very successful. And hopefully a continuation of the drive to encourage more--especially our young people--to hold deposits in our banks will certainly lead to the focal point of our being able to do some things that are necessary on our own.

WOODS: Okay. What are some of the African American business organizations, that you have come in contact with?

STEVENS: Well, of course, you know, we have Recycling Black Dollars.

WOODS: Can you talk a little bit about what each does?

STEVENS: Well, Recycling Black Dollars is basically an organization, and they have awareness days designed to give us the hope and the encouragement of collectively doing things that could not be done on an individual basis. And making people in the business world cognizant of our dollar purchasing power I think has brought about a change in many arenas of

the business world.

WOODS: Any other organizations that you think are important?

STEVENS: You have Operation Hope, which is an organiza-tion that was started by John Bryant, a young man. What they have done is to try to assist people in becoming homeowners and lending financial support in that direc-tion. And then, of course--

WOODS: Excuse me. Who is John Bryant?

STEVENS: Well, John Bryant was in a television series. He was a young actor. Since his adulthood he has become a focal point working along with First AME [African Methodist Episcopal Church], primarily, and banking institutions to try to garner funds to help blacks in particular to acquire home ownership.

WOODS: And other organizations that you think are important?

STEVENS: You've got other organizations that play a most important part in the community. I'd be amiss if I didn't mention the Prince Hall Masons with their scholarship programs and other programs that benefit our community. For example, under the leadership of Robert W. Brown, the deputy for the states of California and Hawaii, money is given each year along with the Ren Raw Commanders, which is the Los Angeles arm of the thirty-third degree Masons. They give money to the prenatal clinic at Martin Luther King Jr.-Charles R. Drew Medical Center. That prenatal clinic was named after Rosa

Parks. The money each year goes to furnish or provide necessary equipment to sustain the lives of babies who perhaps wouldn't have a chance of surviving.

WOODS: Are there other business organizations that you think--? Is there a black chamber of commerce or--?

STEVENS: Yes. There is a black Chamber [of Commerce of Los Angeles County], which Gene Hale is the head of. And in conjunction with the black chamber you have the Brotherhood Crusade, Inc., with Danny Bakewell [Sr.] You have organizations of that nature. Certainly they focus in to make sure--like the black chamber--that there is a utilization of services that we as Afro-Americans can provide. I think it's all about trying to keep dollars in our community and make us an integral part of affording employment opportunities to people who perhaps would not have an opportunity to make a living of note.

WOODS: Have you had much involvement with the Brotherhood Crusade?

STEVENS: Well, I've supported their programs over the years. And as you know, there is not too much that goes on in the arena that affects us as Afro-Americans that the Brotherhood Crusade is not involved in. They provide opportunities. For instance, Danny Bakewell and the Brotherhood Crusade, they've built shopping centers and things in our community which have

afforded employment. They've gone to the forefront to make sure that we're not a forgotten segment.

I'd also be amiss if I didn't make mention of [Earvin] "Magic" Johnson with his theater complex [Magic Johnson Theatres] in the Baldwin Hills shopping complex in L.A. I understand he's getting ready to build some more along with Sony [Corporation]. Certainly that has garnered employment and given us a basis for entertainment which contains the money in the community and has certainly added desirable-looking facilities in the community.

WOODS: He's going to build those here in the L.A. area? Or nationally?

STEVENS: No. I understand he's going to build another one perhaps in Southern California. To date it's just been stuff that has been hearsay or in the papers, but I understand he's going into Atlanta and some other cities to build.

Then you have other business people like Zelma Sternis, the owner of Golden Bird, Inc., who is a pioneer here in California with chicken, certainly. She had a place in Detroit, and then she migrated to Los Angeles. She and her late husband [William Sternis] built several chicken distribution outlets.

And then you could go on and on. But I tell you-- You notice that since I've been here in 1971 it has taken people like those whom I have mentioned to focus in on employment

needs. Certainly you've got people in the community who hire a lot of young people, like Harold and Beatrice Patrick, who own a couple of McDonald's at the airport, and other black owner-operators who make contributions to our churches and to our students. These things are so vitally important, because we need empowerment programs to direct and to guide our youth, especially our young males, to give them an opportunity, or I should say a chance, to utilize their academic disciplines.

[tape recorder off]

And while we're on that note, I'd be amiss if I didn't mention Golden State [Mutual] Life Insurance Company, because, as all of us know, only in recent years have the underwriters of insurance been willing to accept policies from Afro-Americans, and that is how Golden State was started. It certainly served a basic need of providing insurance for families that otherwise couldn't obtain insurance. And it certainly, like other black insurance companies around the country, afforded employment to a lot of agents, which helped to a great degree to subsidize their families.

WOODS: Besides Golden State, which has-- Its operations go back across the Mississippi into Chicago, I think.

STEVENS: Well, I know they're in Michigan and several other states.

WOODS: Are there any other black businesses that have a national

presence that are based in Los Angeles that you know of?

STEVENS: Well, certainly some of the insurance companies-- I believe Atlanta Life [Insurance Company] and some of the others have offices here in Los Angeles.

WOODS: I mean L.A.-based companies, L.A. black businesses. Are there any that have a national sort of--?

STEVENS: Now, let me see. I know Magic Johnson with his AIDS Foundation [Magic Johnson Foundation], which is located in Century City-- I believe that they receive support from communities across the country which provides help to organizations to try to find a cure for AIDS, which is affecting so many. Other than that, I'm really not familiar with the national arm of--

WOODS: Well, local businesses that have national-- Well, we pretty much have been talking about the businesses that rely primarily upon black clientele. Can you speak a little bit about the businesses that mainly service corporations? Maybe advertising, public relations?

STEVENS: Well, we have several advertising and public relations firms in the city. You have Alescia Buford and Associates. She is the wife of Don Buford with the Baltimore Orioles.

WOODS: I met him when I was little, yes.

STEVENS: Certainly she is probably among the largest. And

she is assisted by Mordena Moore. You also have Pat Tobin, who services a lot of clients which include Toyota [Motor Corporation] and other companies.

WOODS: She's advertising?

STEVENS: Yes, advertising and public relations.

WOODS: You have some legal firms, also.

STEVENS: Oh, yes. Legal firms that are-- Well, the black legal firms, like Johnnie [L.] Cochran's [Law Offices of Johnnie L. Cochran Jr.]--that is not only into criminal law but civil law, because it's a large firm. He's also into entertainment law, which covers athletes and star performers in our community. I think out of that was born the need to create an awareness in the entertainment industries that we have those who excel and are in a position to afford their clients the type of leadership and guidance that will insure their perpetuity.

WOODS: I don't know if you're familiar, but are there many firms that are into the medical industry or health care industry?

STEVENS: Oh, yes. You have Dr. James Mays. You have health care centers throughout. You have Clyde Odum.

WOODS: Black Employees Association?

STEVENS: No, Clyde Odum has the Watts Health Foundation. They just became part owners of Family Savings. That's a very large organization located in South Central Los Angeles that has helped with our health care needs. And because of

the lack of facilities in the Watts-Willibrook area in particular was born the need for the King-Drew hospital. Certainly that has been a beacon of light to our community.

WOODS: To black businesses, also?

STEVENS: Yes. Because it has sort of a reach-out effect. One business will help another business, you know, and it multiplies. And even with Anheuser-Busch-- For example, in Northern California, we have a young man [Charles Bell] who manufactures boxes, you know, containers to put our beer in. Then we had people who are into the pallet business. And by them employing people to obtain the resources necessary for their product they have to go back and help somebody else. Usually this means the start-up of another business. That's why it's so necessary and important that as we grow we take somebody along with us. WOODS: You mentioned a manufacturer in Northern California. Are you familiar with any black manufacturers or contractors here in Southern California?

STEVENS: Well, in the building trades we have a lot of black contractors here in Los Angeles and the surrounding areas. And as I mentioned before, this is where Danny Bakewell and his group have been so instrumental in making sure that our contractors are given an equal opportunity, or through the bidding process, which is the means of exclusion, to make sure to have a representative number of Afro-Americans in

their employment.

WOODS: So it was a minority set-aside at one point in L.A. Does it still exist in terms of city contracts?

STEVENS: Well, from what I have read, I think the thrust to do away with affirmative action is going to hurt not only us but all minority groups, including women, because it won't afford us an opportunity to be a part of the cycle that enjoys the contracts, etc. You find that even in education, lower education or in higher education, as these set-asides disappear it becomes increasingly more difficult for those who have devoted a good portion of their life to obtaining the necessary discipline and requirements to find employment. And if so, I think in that regard it's going to be harder for our young Afro-Americans coming along to receive tenure in the colleges. I think we're going to see a noticeable drop in the students that are going to be attending college.

WOODS: We've already seen a drop in the applications.

STEVENS: And as a result, this is going to affect us and set us back, I think, to the times before Martin Luther King had his dream.

WOODS: Who were some of the larger black building trades contractors in Los Angeles?

STEVENS: Well, of course, you had people like Paul [R.] Williams. Of course, he's now deceased, but he has left a legacy by

a lot of buildings that he built and homes that he erected.

WOODS: So he was a contractor in addition to being an architect?

STEVENS: Well, I don't know about the contractual part, but I know that he was responsible for a lot of the buildings that are in the Los Angeles area. His name is synonymous with the buildings and growth of various types of commercial buildings and industrial buildings and homes, etc., in Los Angeles. Many of our churches, large churches and such, [were designed by] Paul Williams. Now, in line with other contractors, I really don't know of any who are synonymous or as well known as Paul Williams was known.

WOODS: Did you ever have a chance to meet him?

STEVENS: No, I didn't. I regretted that I didn't have that opportunity.

WOODS: Yeah. I saw one of the churches he built the other day. And I know he built the Golden State building and some other places.

STEVENS: Yes. And you know his family is still here.

WOODS: They married with the Hudsons?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: Any manufacturers that you can think of?

STEVENS: Let me see here. I'll tell you. There are some here. Just recently, within the past few years, over at Crenshaw High School the students developed a dressing for salads,

and it has gotten some distribution in the supermarket arena. You have other manufacturers, and what they have to try to do is, because they lack the facilities or the capitalization, they try to get somebody to manufacture under their label for distribution. That's a problem that we have in manufacturing. We like to distribute our own to make sure that our product is distributed where it should be available, I should say.

And you have like Barbara Walton who makes makeup for our ladies of color. I guess her products could be used by any women. But, you know, it's where they have to manufacture it, but then they have to try to do the whole process to get it in the department stores, do the makeup work, etc. And like with other companies, say like Max Factor [and Company], they have an opportunity where the distribution network is available to them, and by the time you get to that place, if you don't have good distribu-tion, everything else suffers, your advertising and all the other components.

WOODS: I know that at one point after 1965-- You might not have been around when Ted [Theodore] Watkins had his--

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, Ted Watkins had a place out in Watts. Ted Watkins only passed a few years ago. He had a grocery store, a co-op market. And he tried to give hope and guidance and inspiration to those to show them or to show us that,

hey, there was a meaningful way that we could make a contribution and as a result enjoy not only the fruits of our labor but a good piece of the pie.

WOODS: So what is your opinion of people like Ted Watkins and Danny Bakewell? Do you think they're of the same cloth?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you--and this is my view--I think that the Lord in his wisdom and his guidance planted a garden with all different types of flowers. Each flower is noted for its beauty and its contribution to making this a part of the rainbow society as we know it. I think that without people like Ted Watkins and Danny Bakewell or even the [Louis J.] Farrakhans-- I think each of them has made a contribution or tried to make us aware of who we are, where we are, and what we hope to obtain. I think that it is vital that we listen to the message. We don't really have to be concerned about the messenger but the message. And I think each of our people, like Leon [Howard] Sullivan and Myrlie-Evers Williams from the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]; the leadership of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], of which Celes King is our state chairman; the people from the Urban League-- Without their involvement in our communities creating an awareness and oftentimes, like with the NAACP, handling cases that we as individuals couldn't pursue-- There's a need for all of these folks and organizations,

because without them where would we be?

WOODS: Okay. You mentioned Leon Sullivan. Do you think there was a unique kind of a lack of business-community leader that came up in the sixties that combined, I guess, social services with economic development? I'm just making the assumption that Leon Sullivan-- Do you think that Bakewell and Watkins are in that mode? How would you compare them?

STEVENS: Well, I would certainly say that they have made a tremendous contribution in helping to insure equality and representation in arenas that collectively have brought about some change. Individually it would have resulted in no change.

WOODS: How would you contrast the two of them?

STEVENS: Between like Leon Sullivan--?

WOODS: Between Ted Watkins and Danny Bakewell.

STEVENS: Certainly, I think that both were noted in communities outside of Los Angeles. I don't know if it had or has acquired national acclaim like the Reverend Leon Sullivan. But I think that the West is far better for them having made contributions of note.

WOODS: How would you distinguish black business development in the West from other regions that you've had experience with?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. I think that black business development has not maintained the growth or significance

as it relates to other regions of the country. Now, if you're going to the South, for example, they've had to supply through services many of the businesses that dominate their communities. You had the church has been the source of inspiration and guidance. Basically our churches are still all Afro-American with a small sprinkling of other nationalities. But here in the West I think that our growth hasn't been as great. We have, of course, a few newspaper publications out here in the West, and in my estimation they really haven't sustained the support that would indicate or provide growth. Because like here in Los Angeles, where you've got the Los Angeles Sentinel--and say their circulation is 30,000 or maybe a little more or a little less--with the number of Afro-Americans, it doesn't indicate even our support of the paper.

WOODS: Yeah. I looked at the figures last night. They were 944,000 in L.A. County in 1990. That's a lot of people.

STEVENS: Yeah. So if you had a paper that had a circulation say of 200,000 or 300,000, it could even become a biweekly or perhaps a daily, you know, because there is certainly enough news. And I'm not talking about homicidal news. I'm talking about news of worth, of achievements and some of the positive things we do. Because we don't need I guess what you'd call sensational journalism, because I think that's a further exploitation of fear and who we really are and what we really

stand for.

WOODS: So do you think there's a group of economic and political leaders who are giving some direction towards a black community agenda? Or do you think there are a lot of competing voices and fiefdoms?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. I think that in the leadership role, certainly you've got many dedicated

members both on the national scene-- Just to name a couple, Julian [C.] Dixon or Maxine Waters and certainly other members of the Congressional Black Caucus who are our representation on a daily basis to insure or try to insure that legislation that is affected will benefit us across the country. We wouldn't reap the results if we

didn't have that type of representation. Here, Cali-fornia, is another state. I think that there is an attempt to thwart our leadership. When these term limits became existent, we lost a lot of our voice and elected politicians. After the end of their two terms they have to scramble. Certainly I'm proud of the leadership that Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.] gave in the [California State] Assembly. I think he'll do an effective job in San Francisco.

But there is a need to prevent half of the senate and half of the assembly from facing an election every time.

We're losing some of our most effective politicians. And certainly, as in anything else, it takes you a while to learn the ground rules, etc. And just when you become effective, they want to change the rules and put in term limits. I think this term limit, in my estimation, was just a means of getting rid of Willie Brown and the contributions that he made, because certainly he is a man who without a doubt has forced some powerful legislation

that affects us and other minorities greatly and has been the most beneficial in seeing that we were at the table when the deals were cut.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

MARCH 3, 1996

WOODS: John, we talked a little bit about the African American business community, and you mentioned some of the leading figures. In terms of the larger corporations in Los Angeles, could you comment on their citizenship and how they relate to the black community both in terms of employment and in terms of sponsoring community events?

STEVENS: Well, I think one of the foremost that comes to mind would be Anheuser-Busch, Inc., for whom I worked for forty years. They always felt that it was good corporate citizenship to be active in the communities. And not only have they done that by helping sustain the community with financial contributions, they've been good citizens in the time of peril, like in floods and so forth, by supplying water and needed clothes, giving large sums of money to the Red Cross and to the Salvation Army for shelter, by supplying food, and helping the folks in those areas to be rehabilitated. Of course, Coca Cola [Bottling Company] is pretty prominent in the community by virtue of some of their community activities, but not as prominent as Anheuser-Busch. And then you have [Adolph] Coors [Company]; they had quite a community relations department. But I learned this past week that it was closed.

As a result, their involvement probably will be nonexistent.

WOODS: I think ARCO [Atlantic Richfield Company] has eliminated most of its staff.

STEVENS: Myrlie Evers[-Williams] was with ARCO in community relations, and she did a splendid job. But she left ARCO some years ago, and she became a public works commissioner for the City of Los Angeles under Tom [Thomas] Bradley. And then eventually she wound up as the chair of the board at the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], trying to revitalize an organization that's sorely and desperately needed in our community. Because there is strength in numbers, as you probably know. I realized early on that you can't fight a battle by yourself. You never saw a war with one soldier.

And, of course, there are other companies that-- Another one that comes to mind is Nestlé [Food Corporation]. Ken Bentley is vice president of community and corporate relations nationwide for them. He started out working for me and received his training, which evidently was superb. They're quite active in the community. They supply a lot of food items and things to those who are in need or destitute in the inner cities through churches, etc. They also are active in the promotion of events, etc.

WOODS: Okay, John. Well, I've known some people who do--Like

a friend of mine works at the Center for Responsible Philanthropy in Washington [D.C.]. What they do is compare foundation giving in different cities. And generally over the years they've put out reports that indicate that in terms of giving, L.A. corporations and foundations seem to be behind other major cities of similar size. Do you think that's the case?

STEVENS: Well, I would say that as an effect of the downsizing, etc., that corporations have downsized their contributions. Wherever you have departments that are eradicated because of economic conditions you find that there's nobody there to really speak up for our needs and our concerns. Now, I would also say that a lot of corporations, I do believe, may be dubious of foundations, because they wonder how the money has actually been expended, what part goes into salaries, what part goes into entertainment, what part goes into travel. So most companies have set up entities where they control their level of giving for different causes and different purposes. So they might not have access--like in the organization that you mentioned in the East--to what might be termed private and confidential information. Because a lot of companies don't come out and say, "Hey, we're spending x million dollars a year," right? Whereas a foundation--

WOODS: Has to report?

STEVENS: --has to report. And if you go through a foundation--

In this article in today's [Los Angeles] Times, which might be relevant, they stress that foundations are not being responsive for the amount of contributions, that there's a lot of money, and that these foundations sell their roster, their list of donors. And it's very interesting that sometimes they pay as high as twenty cents a name. They have certain groups of people to send in money that they figure are highly vulnerable. They cited cases of old folks who don't know who they're sending the money to or how much is being spent for the purpose for which it was intended. I think that's a drawback, too.

WOODS: Well, do you think that like the corporate community in San Francisco was more involved in local projects than the corporate community here?

STEVENS: No. I would say that we--and I'm talking about Anheuser-Busch--spent like amounts. Of course, I think there are more Afro-Americans in Southern California than in Northern California, so if there was any difference, that would be it. And I think that's probably true of most companies. You have to spend where the action is.

WOODS: Okay. I guess the final question on corporate affairs is a related question. It might be two questions. Do you think that the "glass ceiling" is any tougher in L.A. than it is in other places?

STEVENS: I think the "glass ceiling," or the boardroom as it's commonly called, is difficult, but there are opportunities, and whether it be based on who you know or who knows you--which might play a part--there is also another side to the equation. I think that corporate America is finding out or knows of our purchasing power, and as a result it opens the door for some. I would say that nine times out of ten it is based upon your knowledge and know-how. Because there is no room on the corporate board if you're not knowledgeable. You have to know your products and all of the various segments that filter into that and play an important part. I think, as I said, that most companies realize that if we were a nation we would be the ninth richest country. It comes off the top of my head. So certainly they don't want to ignore those dollars. It's just like in politics. I do believe that Afro-Americans are going to be able to make a difference.

I wouldn't be surprised if almost to the person they would be instrumental in selecting or voting for our next president. From what I hear, [Robert J.] Dole and them are kind of worried about the Afro-American vote, but they're not doing anything to court it.

WOODS: Well, I heard him yesterday, and he was saying that he is completely opposed to affirmative action.

I guess that brings me to the last question on corporate

responsibility. It's that there's a new civil rights initiative that the governor [Pete Wilson]'s supporting which would end affirmative action. Some of the corporations that usually support Republican activities, like Hughes [Aircraft Company] and some major corporations, are saying that they won't contribute. So do you think that if the initiative passes it will really affect African American and other employment?

STEVENS: Well, undoubtedly it will. Well, there was an article not too long ago that I was privileged to read that indicated that our colleges, our level of enrollment, was high for Asians, and then I believe Hispanics, and the increase was so small for Afro-Americans. Really this is designed as a means and a tool, I hate to say, to control the life and the destiny of our young people. But it certainly affects them, and in affecting them it affects all of the other things the American dream is supposed to entail. It's all right to dream, but if you can't eat the apple pie and play baseball and eat a hot dog, well, then you're not part of the American dream.

WOODS: You're not a part of the team, eh?

STEVENS: That's my view point.

WOODS: Okay. Well, let's just ask you a few questions about some individuals I guess we had covered a little bit before.

In terms of [Los Angeles] City Councilman Gil[bert W.] Lindsay--

STEVENS: Gil Lindsay was a dynamic person. He started out as a janitor with the City of Los Angeles. I met Gil, I guess, when I was a young man. Well, I was young when I went with Budweiser at a Shriners convention. Gil was always a person who was dedicated and sincere. I can remember that his office doors were always open for his constituents. And he prided himself on being the emperor of the great ninth district, which is the downtown section. He was soon to let you know that, "You see that building? Gil Lindsay did that," you know. But he was quite on the ball. In fact, Gil wouldn't retire. He just stayed on in there and basically just died at his desk. But I think that he and his wife, Theresa Lindsay, they contributed so much. Like the Sunday Morning Breakfast Club, which was all women--

WOODS: So his wife ran that?

STEVENS: Yeah. Well, she was the president. But then after her death they took in two or three male members. It was all women. And Dr. Leroy Weekes, whom you probably have heard of-- He was a very prominent pediatrician, and he was also the board chairman of Charles [R.] Drew School of Medicine [and Science]. Gil supported that breakfast as long as his health would allow him to. He is a person who has certainly

made a mark. I was at the dedication last year of the collage that they have down by the civic center in his memory.

WOODS: I've never heard of that.

STEVENS: Yeah. They've got pictures that chronicle his life. And it's really something to see.

WOODS: That's by city hall?

STEVENS: By the [Los Angeles] Convention [and Exhibition] Center.

WOODS: Okay. I remember seeing pictures of him I guess in the thirties and forties, and he had a radio show. I guess he was real involved in politics even before he came into office.

STEVENS: Well, I don't know about the radio show or that. But like I said, I met him. And throughout the years we maintained a relationship even though he was much older than I was. He was a person whom you could sit down and talk with and gain some knowledge from.

WOODS: So in terms of the fact that his district covered much of downtown, did a lot of the corporate leaders deal with him directly?

STEVENS: Oh, I imagine they had to, because you have to go through your councilmanic office. But then to show you-- On Central [Avenue] and Forty-third [Street] like every year, Gil Lindsay would have his fire trucks block off the street,

and around that lot there they had this big pine [tree], and they'd light it up, you know, and have entertainment for the neighbors and everything. His heart was really with his folks. But he was cunning enough to get whatever he wanted from the other folks. But he wasn't a Robin Hood. He didn't rob them and-- You know.

WOODS: So in terms of corporate connections with the African American community, do you think that Gil Lindsay was more representative than Tom Bradley? Or were they sort of on a par?

STEVENS: Well, I've known Tom Bradley for a number of years. You would see Tom Bradley and Gil Lindsay, too, at most of the cultural, social, and civic affairs in the city. And I know Tom Bradley and Gil Lindsay both, they worked long hours traveling to and from. But Tom Bradley was well liked and loved in the community.

WOODS: How did they get along with each other?

STEVENS: Well, I think they got along well. Excellent rapport.

WOODS: Okay. Did you ever have any dealings with John [Lamar] Hill [III] of Angelus Funeral Home?

STEVENS: Well, yeah. John Hill III is the president of Angelus, and not only being a Prince Hall Mason, to which I'm fortunate to belong, he's very active in being a part of the community

in which he does business. And of course, they have not only Angelus Funeral Home, they have Angelus Rosedale Cemetery that they own. He is helpful in so many ways by affording scholarships to youngsters and helping to meet the needs of those who can't afford services. I think that he realizes that in order for your product to move, regardless of what it is, you have to be involved with the people who are going to need your services. He's a master at that, as was his father before him.

WOODS: Okay. Another person that you mentioned several times but we haven't really discussed in any depth was Judge Alvin [I.] Niles.

STEVENS: Yeah. Alvin Niles is a neighbor of mine here on Lenawee [Avenue], and is also a Prince Hall Mason. And Al last year was the presiding judge of the municipal courts. This year he's back on the bench. But he went to UCLA, and he won seven letters in sports at UCLA, and as a result he has a lifetime pass to all UCLA's sports and activities. I know for a fact that if UCLA was playing in Hong Kong he'd be on an airplane going to see them. He speaks very highly about his alma mater. Certainly, he is one of the most respected judges on the bench. A lot of his time is devoted to seminars and things like that where he is an invited speaker. He's been to Washington [D.C.]. He goes all over.

WOODS: Okay. What did you think of the conflict between Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas?

STEVENS: You know, I have a lot of respect for both of them. But I can appreciate Congresswoman Waters's stand, because she lives in the area where they wanted to put this low-income housing. And Ridley-Thomas represented that area, so their ideas were different. I still think that I would have liked to have seen it settled without it becoming a public issue. They finally reached an agreement. But I guess each side was persistent in trying to get what they wanted. But Maxine Waters, undoubtedly she is a very astute, knowledgeable, intelligent young woman. I'm not saying that Ridley-Thomas-- He's very astute and intelligent. But we've got to get to the place where we can accomplish with a minimal amount of bickering if we're going to succeed. I think that's even more important, as we discussed earlier, like with these term limits, you know, which was clearly a thing to end the speakership of Willie [L.] Brown [Jr.].

WOODS: They said that in the paper today.

STEVENS: Yeah. But it also means that several of our people who are holding office and who are knowledgeable and good representatives-- I feel that in this election we're going to lose not only here in Los Angeles but in the areas all across the country. We're going to lose a lot of the black

leadership that represents us in the halls of Congress and the state and House [of Representa-tives], and as a result our voice is going to be heard less and less.

WOODS: Okay. Well, there have been several articles. I think I mentioned to you last time that there have been several articles recently on this growing split within the black political community. What do you see as the major factions? Or are there major factions?

STEVENS: Well, I think that we'll learn as a group that we've got to be cohesive in order to win. I think that the Anglo, who has historically held high office, has tried to effect the change that's going to backfire on him too. Because our representatives and senators here in the state--four years, I think, for the assembly and eight years for the senate or something like that--it's going to bounce back and hit them, too. And then the only thing they can do is run for another office, and in doing so-- It takes a good part of a term to function effectively and to introduce legislation that's needed by your constituents.

WOODS: Okay. So why do you think that there was this conflict between State Senator Diane [E.] Watson and Maxine Waters? What was the origin?

STEVENS: No, the conflict was between--

WOODS: Yvonne Brathwaite [Burke]?

STEVENS: Yes, Diane Watson and Yvonne Burke. I guess a lot of innuendos were leveled, and they certainly each made their share of press. But I think today-- I hope that they have resolved whatever differences are the cause, though. They were probably not caring too much for one another during the time of the election.

WOODS: Just a few other small questions. How big is the liquor industry in California? And how influential is it?

STEVENS: Well, I'll tell you. The liquor industry in California, by virtue of the wineries and the breweries and the brewers having other--

WOODS: Subsidiaries?

STEVENS: --subsidiaries, and with the liquor companies, it's a very strong bloc. As a result, the sales keep climbing, and they have their own organizations and their PACs [political action committees], and they're very effective.

WOODS: Throughout the state?

STEVENS: Yes.

WOODS: Okay. In your experiences, have you ever come across any influence of organized crime being influential in south L.A. or--?

STEVENS: No. Well, you know, only what you read in the papers, and about the gangs and the influence that the gangs had in trying to control their turfs as far as narcotics and car

thefts, etc., which you read in the papers, which is common knowledge. But personally I haven't experienced any of it.

WOODS: So they never tried to move into the liquor business?

STEVENS: Well, I remember years ago the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters in the Seattle area they were influential up there, but not to my knowledge here in California. And there, as I understood it, it was a case where they were paid like so much a bottle for liquor that was brought in. Now, I don't know about the beer, but that was a rumor that was going around.

WOODS: Okay. There is a very strong sports culture among blacks in L.A. A lot of professionals have come out of here. To what do you attribute that? Is it the facilities? Is it the year-round availability or--?

STEVENS: Well, I don't know. I think that you have to have a certain gift to get into professional athletics. And I think that Los Angeles, being a sports-orientated city, naturally attracts through recruitment and so forth players from around the country, whether it be baseball, basketball--Oh, I almost said football, but we don't have any football.

WOODS: There are some good high school and college football teams.

STEVENS: And hockey. Like [Wayne] Gretzky, for example, came here. Well, I'm not really a full-fledged hockey fan, but

everybody knew who Wayne Gretzky was when they were talking about trading him to the Blues in St. Louis. I think, though, that a lot of times an emphasis is placed on athletics and music with our young people. But as the old folks used to say, "That's not going to cut the mustard." What we need now is to prepare our youngsters through programs that will enable them to be responsive citizens in our community. Because, as you know, there are a lot of athletes that wound up broke because they didn't have their education. I think it's a crime, though, to offer youngsters an opportunity to make all that money and to lose sight of education. But then they have to be dependent upon somebody else to help them to realize the most advantage out of their earnings and investments. A good example was Joe Louis. He wound up broke, right? And every now and then you read about some professional athlete who devoted a good part of his life to athletics and he wound up with nothing.

WOODS: Okay. Just a couple of more names. Have you had many experience with--I guess he's the councilman for your district--Nate Holden?

STEVENS: No. I live in Culver City. Yeah, I know Nate Holden. And we belong to-- Well, I used to belong to the One Hundred Black Men [of Los Angeles], and he was a member. I am a part of his tenth district athletic foundation, which awards grants

to different athletics organizations in his district.

WOODS: Okay. Clubs and--?

STEVENS: Yeah. You know, like swimming clubs, baseball and football teams, and that. Of course, this will be his last term in office, too.

WOODS: What about Reverend Thomas Kilgore [Jr.]? Have you ever--?

STEVENS: Well, yes. I've known Reverend Kilgore since I've been in Los Angeles. He is the pastor emeritus of the Second Baptist Church. He has been in the forefront in the struggle to try and promote through dignity rights for Afro-Americans.

WOODS: Do you know the organization the Black Agenda?

STEVENS: Yes. Well, that was one that was founded by him, you know. And he is nationally known for his scholarly and professional approach to so many of the problems that arise in our community, and he's able to help solve most of them.

WOODS: Okay. Another person is, I guess, Councilwoman Rita Walters.

STEVENS: Well, Rita Walters, I've known her. She was on the school board prior to becoming a city councilwoman. She is the councilwoman of the ninth district over there that Gil Lindsay used to have. I see her picture in the paper on occasion as she goes about her duties.

WOODS: Okay. I guess that's all for right now. I can't think

of anything else. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

STEVENS: Oh, yeah.

WOODS: One more thing. So you worked with Celes King [III] on the [Martin Luther] King [Jr. Kingdom Day] Parade. Is that--?

STEVENS: No, I didn't work with Celes King. I was the grand marshal one year with Celes King. Their parade is getting bigger and bigger every year. I was grand marshal some years ago--I want to say almost in its infancy, but that might not be a true statement. But it was when it was just merely getting started.

WOODS: Okay. Did you want to have any closing comments?

STEVENS: Yes. I'd like to again express my thanks and deep appreciation to you for your patience and understanding.

WOODS: Thank you. The same on the other side.

STEVENS: And I'd also like to again thank my family and those who are part of my extended family for their help in nurturing and molding me to make me what I am. I'm a by-product of everybody's efforts, and for that I'm truly thankful and appreciative.

WOODS: Thank you.

APPENDIX

Transcript of

tribute to

J.T. Stevens,

March 31, 1994

PATRICK STOKES: From all of us here at Anheuser-Busch in St. Louis and around the world, congratulations to you, J. T. We are proud to salute you after four decades of outstanding service to our company and to our worldwide community.

You joined Anheuser-Busch at a pivotal time in our history. When you began with us in 1954 just twenty-five miles from the room in which you and your friends are gathered tonight, the L.A. brewery went on line. Back then, Sugar Ray Robinson was battling Jean Stock, three thousand troops were coming home from Korea, a six-pack of Budweiser cost $1.10, and A-B was the second largest brewer in the United States.

Anheuser-Busch and members of the A-B sales force like you were determined to make great things happen, determined to pursue excellence and quality, to be number one, and by 1957 that's just what we did. And today, forty years later, we are the world's largest brewer. You were a part of the team that made that happen, and that hard work is appreciated.

From the early 1970s until now, you put your skills to

work helping others out in California. Your work with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], the Golden State Minority Foundation, and the L.A. chapter of the United Negro College Fund has enriched the lives of many African Americans. Your efforts to improve the community show that you and your company are a lot more than just selling beer. It's all about making friends, and that, J. T., should be evident as you look around the room tonight.

Your friends and colleagues in Saint Louis wish you the very best in your retirement. Congratulations and thanks from all of us at Anheuser-Busch. And now a couple of other guys who asked to be a part of tonight's J. T. salute. First, Mike [Michael J.] Roarty.

ROARTY: Hi, J. T., and hello to everybody out there at your wonderful party.

You and I started out together in the Detroit branch, I hate to say the word, but forty years ago. As a matter of fact, I preceded you as the ethnic salesman. Remember that, J. T.? You came in and took my job! And then the people in the neighborhood started calling up and asking me to come back. And when I said, "Well, you now have Mr. Stevens calling on you," they said, "You mean 'Poor John'? He doesn't spend any money. We want to get you back!"

A lot of years have gone by, and you and I worked closely together for a long time. I remember when Johnny [John T. Stevens Jr.] was small and you'd bring him to the office, and he'd show me where the Coke machine was and where the peanuts could be purchased for just a nickel, and if he had a quarter, why, he'd buy me a Coke. I remember those years and how Jimmie Rose [Nesbitt Stevens] used to sit by the door there waiting for you to come, John, and you'd blame me for keeping you out. Well, the years went by, and you've done a wonderful job for Anheuser-Busch, and we're very pleased that you're being honored tonight.

You have given unselfishly of your free time, which is apparent by the many organizations you served. You're on the board of trustees of Saint Augustine's College and served as a member of the Los Angeles County Fire Commission from 1983 to 1987 and as an honorary fire chief of the Compton Fire Department. I find that amazing. You're a member of the Christ the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church--I remember your good mother [Helen White Stevens], John, making sure about that--and the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, and you received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Shorter College in Arkansas. Is that the same college that the President [William J. Clinton] went to? These are but a few of the many groups in which you have played an important role during

your career.

John, you've been an asset to the Anheuser-Busch family and to your community. You are a charter member of the John Conti "memorial service." Our sincere best wishes to you in the future. I know we'll see you again. Our very best to Rose and young Johnny and Sandra [J. Stevens]. And now a word from the boss, August Busch III.

BUSCH: Thank you, Mike.

Success at Anheuser-Busch starts with its people. As you can see, J. T. has certainly played a role in the success Anheuser-Busch has enjoyed during his forty years with this company. I speak for the entire Anheuser-Busch family when I say that we are going to miss John T. Stevens. J. T.'s loyalty, leadership, and enthusiasm will be hard to replace. But above all, J. T. will be remembered as the man of tremendous character. J. T.'s work as a member on behalf of his community and fellow man will remain an excellent example of how total success in business should truly be measured.

It was rare in 1954 to find someone like J. T.: equally dedicated to building good business and fellow-ship--a rare combination even today. That's why it is with much regret that I join Pat and Mike in saying good-bye tonight. I also salute you, J. T., for forty years of service in Anheuser-Busch. You helped make the kind of difference that established

Anheuser-Busch as the undisputed industry leader. We have the best people, and there are few better than J. T. Stevens.

J. T., I commend you for your spirit and dedication to Anheuser-Busch, your community, and your many friends throughout the nation. You are truly deserving of this special night, and it is my personal honor to share this evening with you. Thank you very much.

INDEX