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This oral history interview with Sacramento activist Joe Debbs was recorded over two Zoom interviews on Friday, November 19th and Sunday, November 21st, 2021. Joe Debbs attended the meetings from his home in Elk Grove. The interviewer Harvey Jones attended the meetings from his home in Antelope. The interview primarily covers Mr. Debbs’ experience living in Sacramento’s Oak Park neighborhood, from his childhood to his ongoing activism in the community. The interview also addresses the experiences of Oak Park’s African American community more broadly. This interview was conducted as part of the City of Sacramento’s historic preservation grant related to African American experiences in Sacramento.

Joe Debbs is a long-time resident of Sacramento, having lived in Oak Park and Curtis Park for most of his life. He has also been a life-long activist for his community. Mr. Debbs was referred to this project by members of the community. Mr. Debbs attended Sacramento City College and California State University, Sacramento. He has worked as a trainman for the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad. Currently, he works as a community activist and aide to California State Senator Richard Pan.
Harvey Jones is a graduate student at California State University, Sacramento. He is currently enrolled in the Capital Campus Public History Program. He is participating as an interviewer in this project through a course that is part of a partnership between the Public History Program and the City of Sacramento’s Office of Historic Preservation.

HJ = Harvey Jones (interviewer)
JD = Joe Debbs (interviewee)

HJ: When and where were you born?
JD: I was born in a little country town called Harmony, Oklahoma.
HJ: And when was that?
JD: In the 1940s, 1944.
HJ: What were your parents’ names?
JD: My mom’s name was Alberta. My dad’s name was Johnny.
HJ: Did you have any siblings?
JD: I have two brothers, Pat and John, and sisters Dolly and Leanne.
HJ: You said you moved to Curtis Park when you were young. How old were you when that happened?
JD: I came to Sacramento in 1955. We moved across the street from Curtis Park, but in those days, it was still predominantly white. But our neighborhood surprisingly, was diverse. We had African Americans, white, Filipino, Mexican. We were in a typical American neighborhood.
HJ: So, you were in your teens when you moved to Sacramento?
JD: No, I was in fourth or fifth grade when I moved here.

HJ: You talked about experiencing the beginnings of racial integration in Sacramento. Can you describe the relationship between different racial groups in your community when you were growing up?

JD: Well, it was much different then, than it is today. Especially given some of the things that happened today on the news, the exoneration of a white kid murdering some black people.¹ Back in those days, white people would have been just as upset as black people. Everyone would have been upset at that type of event. We were still race conscious, but not to the point of open discrimination. It was overt. White kids, black kids, Asian kids, Mexican kids, we all played together. We were a melting pot of friends. And no one could come and threaten or as we used to say beat up on any of our crew because we didn’t play that. We were all for one and one for all, unlike today, so the diversity was really different.

HJ: So that was a group of friends who lived in your neighborhood?

JD: Neighborhood and school. Even when we went to school, in those days schools were rivals. We had what they call the Metro League, C.K. McClatchy, Hiram Johnson, Sacramento High School, Grant Union High School, El Camino. So, we always competed in sports, and sports was a big thing in those days. Whenever schools visited each other, Hughes Stadium was a popular venue. That’s where we had a lot of our track meets and football games. Whenever there were some differences or what have you, we were all on one side regardless of what you

¹ Mr. Debbs is referring to Kyle Rittenhouse, a teenager who was acquitted of murder charges after shooting two white Black Lives Matter protestors in Wisconsin.
look like. If you were from McClatchy, then you were down with McClatchy, regardless of color.

JD: We didn’t have any real differences the way we do today. I’m not saying there wasn’t prejudice, there wasn’t discrimination. I’m saying the kids are the ones who kind of taught the old folks. Because even when you went home, some of the parents didn’t like the kids hanging out with some of the other kids. You could tell when they got in the car and you’d say “Bye, so and so.” And they would look and the parents would ask, “Who is that?” You could almost read their lips, but it never prevented them from being our friends and we were their friends.

HJ: You said you moved to Oak Park at some point from Curtis Park. Was that with your family, or was it when you were on your own?

JD: While we lived in semi–Curtis Park we were still participants of Oak Park. Because we were African American. That’s where the majority of the African American churches were located. We did everything that was considered African American in [the] African American community. Our schools were integrated, but in Oak Park the majority of black folks went to what they called Stanford Junior High. And then Sacramento High School.

JD: When I got older, I moved to Oak Park proper. But everywhere we went, we were still considered Oak Park to anyone that wasn’t black. And even black folks knew that we didn’t go to Sac High School because we had cousins and friends that all grew up in Oak Park. We played little league and we did all our sports together. We were all kind of together even though we lived in different neighborhoods. But for all intents and purposes, I identify with Oak Park as well as kind of Curtis
Park. Because Joaquin Miller was a predominantly white school, California Junior High was predominantly white, and we went to C.K. McClatchy which was predominantly white. While we attended predominantly white schools, we still participated with African Americans as relates to our social [needs], our spiritual [needs], and whatever else. We were still considered Oak Park. We kind of had the luxury of wearing hats from two communities, and we liked it because we had cover from both sides. It was great.

HJ: You mentioned McClatchy Park as being a gathering place. Were there other specific gathering places in Oak Park for the black community?

JD: Actually, the majority was Oak Park, they called it McClatchy Park, and on Sundays we would go to William Land Park as well. On Sundays too we would low ride a lot with the Chicanos in those days. They would low ride in their cars, and we would do the same thing. But we would go down there because we had a lot of Chicano friends and we’d hang out with them.

JD: We didn’t have gangs, it was quasi. In those days, we didn’t have gangs who actually identify like they say the Bloods and the Crips. We just identified by neighborhoods. We didn’t really have names for the gangs, we just had neighborhood affiliation. Anytime there was any type of disagreement, it was neighborhoods. We had fights and skirmishes, too, but we didn’t fight to kill each other. We just fought to make a point and we fought with honor. We didn’t use weapons and all of that. Every now and then people would have a tire iron or this and that, but no one ever really got hurt or got hit because we just didn’t have that kind of hate and that animosity for everybody. Gangs as we know them
today, they didn’t exist then. They had them, but they were bigger, they were out on the fringes, and they would come from LA. And we had a gang, they were called the Untouchables and they were from Del Paso Heights. And Oak Park and Del Paso Heights used to have these fights all the time and they were kind of known by everybody. That was the extent of the gangs. We didn’t have gangs as we know it today, it was more neighborhood community affiliations and turf.

HJ: Were you closer to the other black residents of Curtis Park?

JD: Yes, we were. And that’s because we were considered kind of like middle class. My mother owned a home, we had a car, houses. So, people thought we were kind of a class above them. But we weren’t and we didn’t want to be and didn’t try to be. We were just fortunate. We always looked at ourselves as being poor, or low income. We weren’t even close. Because our parents, although they were separated, my dad was always around in our life. He stayed in the Bay Area, but my mother raised three kids by herself.

JD: We grew up in Curtis Park, but we still associated ourselves [with Oak Park], because we stayed by the railroad tracks and they used to say over the tracks, but that was some of the other blacks that stayed on the west side of the tracks by Hughes Stadium. The railroad tracks were sort of like the cutoff point. In any town whenever you see the railroad tracks, on the other side in any city black folks stay close, or the railroad tracks are what separates the black from the white in any city, especially in the South. The railroad tracks were like a kind of demarcation. And although we were on that side, we still knew a lot of the blacks, such as the Johnsons. We had a mayor here; his name is Kevin Johnson. He
wasn’t even born then, but we grew up with all of his relatives and his family. They all stayed on that side, and they had the Callaghans, they grew up in Southside Park, and we had the Walkers.

JD: We had families who had four or five people in their families. So, we made up a large part of a gang if we wanted to be a gang because we had siblings at different age levels and in those days, you couldn’t hang with somebody who wasn’t your age. You couldn’t hang with your brother’s older friends, you had to stay with your age group, you can hang out with your brother’s younger friends. Everybody had a pecking order as relates to age. We all knew our place, so to speak. We still congregated, we still looked after each other and protected each other. But we didn’t have a gang per se. We were identified by neighborhoods, and [my family] was kind of unique because we identified with two neighborhoods. And we were recognized for two neighborhoods, which was a good thing. I loved it.

HJ: What was your first job? Did you have a job as a teenager in Curtis Park or Oak Park?

JD: No, we used to do summer jobs. Out on American River [Drive] and Watt Avenue, on the north side of Watt Avenue there used to be hop fields. Hops is what you make great beer out of. And they were on this long, nine-foot wooden structure with string, and the hops would grow on a vine. And the hops would itch you to death. We used to go get work permits so we could work in the hop fields, you had to be eighteen. We would do summer jobs, we would go pick tomatoes.
When they were building the first housing at UC\textsuperscript{2} Davis, we’re the ones who went out and cleaned them. We always hustled for a job. Getting up early in the morning, you go down to Old Sacramento, and a bus would take you out to the grape fields, the tomato fields. Many of the migrants would be down there because they followed the work. That was our work, but we just went out there to play.

JD: My first serious job was working for the railroad. I became a brakeman, a trainman for the Southern Pacific Railroad. I rode trains, locomotives, caboose, that sort of thing. In those days, they didn’t hire African Americans. This was in 1964. But we had an individual who went to the legislature, called them out. And they went to the companies that didn’t traditionally hire people of color, such as Bell Telephone, Southern Pacific Railroad, and Coca Cola. They went to several companies, and they committed to hiring blacks. I went to the railroad. And little did I know that it was going to be a hell of a challenge, because they didn’t have any African American out there, not one. They hired seven of us at one time. That was my first real job. And I encountered real, raw racism.

HJ: So that would have been after high school?

JD: Right after high school. Several of us were approached and asked where we wanted to work, and they placed us there. We also had another experience called the Inspirational Choir. It was a gospel choir that travelled all around the country. And it was housed out of Shiloh Baptist Church, but it wasn’t the church’s choir, an individual who was wealthy came to all the ghettos where

\textsuperscript{2} University of California, Davis.
African Americans lived. Seventy-five women, seventy-five men, boys, and girls. We made records, we traveled, we got to see celebrities, we went to the Seattle World’s Fair, we stayed on a ship. We did things that poor kids didn’t do, so we had a different upbringing. When we were coming up, our parents somehow eked out experiences for us that normally African American kids wouldn’t experience. We were pretty fortunate for youngsters to have the experiences that we had in Sacramento, given the fact that Sacramento was still very much segregated.

HJ: You also said that you went to Sac City College and Sac State, was that while you were working as a train conductor for Southern Pacific?

JD: Yes, because Southern Pacific was seasonal at first, we couldn’t work all year round. It allowed you a chance to do some other kinds of things, and when those times presented themselves, I went to school. And it was a real good experience just to go, but we unfortunately didn’t go all the way through like most students because they had the money. Our parents always encouraged us to go to college. And then we had counselors at the schools that would always ask you what you wanted to do. But oddly enough, they never really pushed college to us African American kids, it was our parents. They’re the ones that tutored us.

JD: There was a lot of discipline coming up. We didn’t just do what we wanted to, and that kind of resonated in our lives later on because we put into practice what our parents taught us, and we weren’t in and out of jail. Every now and then somebody would get in trouble in the crew, but it was nothing serious. We did a lot of things in Oak Park and people knew us, and a lot of the white people knew
us as well. Our parents made it a business to know many of the neighbors and people of other colors. And they were very color conscious as well because they always taught us how to react to some of the racist kinds of things that might occur and how to handle it. We were always being taught how to do things and one of those was staying out of trouble. We did it pretty good.

HJ: Were you or your parents part of any community groups in Oak Park?

JD: Church groups, yes. We had to sing in the choir and be ushers. My mother went to PTA\(^3\) meetings. As I got older, my wife and I always made sure we attended my boys’ different events at school because that’s what my parents did.

JD: In terms of just joining an organization and belonging to the NAACP or the Urban League?\(^4\) No, because they didn’t function like that then. But when I was a youngster, I grew up like an advocate in the community, calling things out when you saw things that weren’t right. Sometimes we would have our differences with the police. They did crazy stuff and that has always been a problem. Then parents and people in the community would speak up. For example, the pastors and ministers were always the spokespeople for any injustices that might occur in the community, unlike now.

HJ: Was there a different police presence between Curtis Park and Oak Park, or within Curtis Park or Oak Park compared to the rest of the city?

\(^3\) Parent Teacher Association.
\(^4\) The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League are civil rights organizations.
JD: Not really, because in those days the community always knew the police and the police knew the community. They already had neighborhood policing, that was nothing new. Some of the police even lived in Oak Park.

JD: But it was much different than it is today. Today, people are on edge. The policemen who are in our neighborhoods don’t know the community like they should. I’m not talking about confidential informants. I’m talking about relationships, because many of the communities had problems with burglaries. If we had a problem with a burglary, all the community people in that area would get together and they knew the police. And they didn’t mind busting a person. Even if he was African American, if you burglarized somebody’s house you had to pay. And that kind of mentality is what kept us level with the police.

JD: Now, you always have some outlaw policemen who like beating up on black folk and Latinos. That mentality is never is never going to go away because they’re going to keep hiring them. But we had policemen who would tell them, “Hey, you can’t do that!” I’ve heard them do it, they would stop them. And they would let you know that there was nothing else that they could do, but they would ream them out. They just didn’t do the things they do today and get away with. They used to have what they called the elevator ride, all policemen do that kind of stuff, [where they] take you out into the country and beat your butt and then bring you back. They did that kind of stuff, but the things that go on with law enforcement today is not like it was.

JD: There are some good policemen who would like it to go back to those days. But as long as there are policemen who are afraid to speak up and call it out, its not
going to go away. But we had [police] who at least who at least called it out when it happened in the street. They didn’t call it out in public, but they did call it out among themselves, which was great. I knew some folk who became police, and I’ve seen them tell [other police], “Leave him alone, get out of here!” We didn’t have the turmoil and tension we have today with police. We do have some decent police, but as long as you have people in control who bully the folk and you have people afraid of you rather than comfortable with you, you’re going to have that tension between law enforcement and the community.

HJ: You’re saying there isn’t as close a relationship between law enforcement and community members or community leaders today, as there was in the past.

JD: In the past, it wasn’t as volatile. Nowadays, we have more contact with law enforcement leadership. We didn’t have as much then as we have today. But my point is we didn’t have the volatility back then. Even though we had some relationships, there are lines that weren’t crossed as blatantly as they are today. Now many of us know the police chief, we know the DA, we know him personally. Back then the average community person didn’t have that relationship. The pastors did, they were smart. Whenever a congregant went to jail or they got beat up, they would get on the phone, and they would call the DA’s office, they would call the chief, they would call some of the judge friends they knew, they would call some of the black attorneys. Today, we have more communication than we did back then, but it wasn’t as blatant and volatile. Nowadays, the murders, shooting people and saying the gun went off and all of that, that never happened to the extent that it is today.
JD: The community today has much more access to law enforcement leadership in terms of having a quasi-open-door policy. It’s much wider than it was when I was growing up, because we grew up think police were bad because of the things we saw them do. If five or ten of us were walking down the street and we saw police come and turn the corner, we’d automatically start running. We would hide and we’d get home and [our parents] would say, “Why were you running?” Because it was the police. “But what did you do?” Nothing. We were just taught to run from the police because anytime the police stopped you, you automatically had done something. That’s what the police thought. So, we didn’t give them a chance to chokehold us and beat us up, we always ran. Even if you didn’t do anything, you run.

HJ: Was there strong support for the Civil Rights Movement in Oak Park?

JD: To the extent that every city had people who were conscious of civil rights. For example, when the little girls got killed when the church in Birmingham got blown up. We were all over that. We were youngsters, but we cried. We wanted to do whatever we could. Martin Luther King came to Sacramento, and we met him, I met him. Whenever anything [big] occurred, we reacted to it.

Our first Zoom meeting ended abruptly so that Mr. Debbs could go to a doctor’s appointment. We concluded the interview in a second Zoom meeting on Sunday, November 21, 2021.
HJ: I wanted to clarify something you said in our last meeting. You said that when you began at Southern Pacific was the first time that you directly experienced racism. Did that mean specific behaviors from people there or just the fact that they had not hired black people before?

JD: That was the first time I experienced raw racism. Usually, it was covert, but here it was overt. People said things, not even caring or realizing that you were there. They made racist remarks, they made racist moves. I had never experienced it to that extent. The mechanisms of racism became real to me at an early age, but as time progressed it got worse. I began to put my finger on it sooner than later. It was something that I had to deal with, that you have to be prepared at a young age to deal with in-your-face racism, especially when you leave your home or your cultural safe space, which I did. The railroad was one hundred percent white, or maybe there was someone hiding that I didn’t see.

HJ: Were you and your family aware of redlining\(^5\) in Sacramento?

JD: Yes, when it occurred, I knew exactly what it was. Because, economically, I made more than the average black person. For example, let’s say I made $100,000 a year and the average person in Oak Park made $50,000 a year. But [banks] didn’t know that. And my credit was good. I could go to any lending institution, supposedly, but as soon as I gave my address I was automatically questioned. And they really didn’t know who I was. They didn’t know that I had a job, that I didn’t have a criminal record, and that I was a good citizen. On paper, I wasn’t a good citizen because I lived in Oak Park.

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\(^5\) Redlining was a discriminatory practice in which public services and investment were refused to residents of neighborhoods belonging to racial minorities.
HJ:  And you said you had a job with Amtrak?

JD:  I started out with Southern Pacific and then Union Pacific bought Southern Pacific out, so I began to work for Union Pacific. And then yes, I worked for Amtrak for a few years as a train conductor.

HJ:  And during all that time you lived in Oak Park?

JD:  Half that time I lived in Oak Park. And as I got older, I moved, ironically, back to Curtis Park. I was thinking about running for office and I though Oak Park was a good place [to run] because I grew up there. And I moved to Curtis Park because it was in the same district. I've been in Elk Grove the past fifteen years.

HJ:  When you say you were thinking about running for office, is that when you became a community activist?

JD:  I've always been a community activist even when I was working for the railroad. People would always hit me up about running, saying I have the interest, I have the fire in the belly, I react to a lot of things and respond. Based on that, I was always calling out something that was unequal or unfair, especially in the community. At a young age, I was on the board of directors of the NAACP, I was involved with the Democratic Central Committee, I was always involved with some community-based political or social advocacy groups striving to make things better for low-income people.

HJ:  You talked about how community activism was a reaction to the construction of Highway 99. Can you describe the community’s reaction to the highway construction?
JD: Many people look at it as progress, but regress is integrated into that as well. By that I mean, we need a major thoroughfare such as Highway 99, but it became a dividing line between the haves and the have nots. While we were still trying to gain a footing in equal housing and equal schools, the highway served as a line separating the low income from the middle-class folk. That was something that we noticed, but no one really started jumping up and down about it until a little later. Decisions were made by the city council about Highway 99 and Franklin Boulevard. You couldn’t to Franklin Boulevard without walking all the way around [Highway 99]. And we were saying, in most cities they have an overpass which allows kids from the community to walk across the highway, go to middle class schools, and come back. Many people had to enroll their kids in some of the other schools [that were further away], because they didn’t have real access to the school that was just right across the way. Pretty soon, we began to wake up and notice the differences. And [the city] had to do something about it, which was to put up overpasses and thoroughfares which would allow us to go from one community to another because some of the middle-class folk, for lack of a better term, didn’t want us that close to them.

HJ: Did the isolation of Oak Park as a community have an effect, after the highway construction?

JD: Yes and no. It allowed the city to upgrade itself by having a highway that let us go from point A to Point B a little faster. But a lot of times people become used to abnormal. Many of us were used to being segregated in that manner, not knowing that the intention was to keep us segregated. We were used to it until
parents began to make inquiries as to what school they wanted their kids to go to. People that lived close to the schools obviously wanted their kids to go to the school in the neighborhood. People began to notice the changes and see that this has been happening all the time.

JD: We didn’t have supermarkets in Oak Park. We had small ones, but the closest [supermarket] that we had was Safeway which was on the other side of Franklin Boulevard. But on this side, we had kind of like a farmers’ market called Arata Brothers. And every Saturday everyone would go there and get fresh meat, fresh vegetables, shopping, and that kind of thing. It wasn’t a shopping mecca like the big stores are now.

JD: It was segregated unbeknownst to a lot of people because we were used to advanced segregation. In housing, we used to call them projects. Then as time progressed, they started calling them condos, but they were different names for apartments. Everybody knows, you put mostly African American and Hispanic low-income people of color in the projects and apartments. Everybody else that wasn’t people of color they put in houses. That was another noticeable type of segregation we had. And in those days, people were satisfied because they had nowhere else to go. We thought we had made progress, because to be truthful, we had to fight to even get into those apartment projects called New Helvetia and Seavey Circle. African American lawyers had to bring a lawsuit to allow black people and Mexican people to live in New Helvetia. So, it’s always been a struggle in Sacramento.

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6 Public housing in Sacramento was racially integrated following the efforts of African American lawyer Nathaniel Colley.
Did the quality of the housing in Oak Park decline over time?

Anytime you have apartments or projects, there’s always a decline. They always develop into a low-income slum because usually they’re built for profit. They’re built for people to take care of them, but they don’t, they spin them off and they leave. And soon you get some manager who doesn’t care, and they don’t keep the apartments up. They don’t do repairs or fix the plumbing. As a consequence, the apartments turn into slums. If you don’t do upkeep and maintenance, any house will fall down just from being lived in. If you were fortunate enough to own a house, it was a challenge to make sure that house stayed in good shape and you didn’t get written up, which is what they’ve started doing now in Oak Park.

Back in those days there was a downside to living in low-income types of houses because the powers that be didn’t feel it was important to maintain their upkeep.

Was that a reflection of the redlining that was happening?

That was before redlining, but the same mentality that employed the redlining is the same mentality that allowed those conditions to flourish. The mentality is to keep them down. The old folks had a lot of wisdom. They said, in order for people to be rich, you have to have some poor. And that’s the way the American system kind of works. If you don’t have any on the bottom, then the ones on the top will eventually come down to the bottom.’

I think that’s a good segue into one of the topics you mentioned, which was gentrification. Can you describe how that began in Oak Park?

It slowly reared its ugly head. As African American and Latino homeowners got older, they wanted to move and upgrade. They didn’t leave because it was a bad
community. They just wanted better living conditions because the houses were old. First, many of the white people moved out, and black folks moved into some of the neighborhoods. But we couldn’t buy, the houses were always rented. And then, many of us began to own our own houses. Our parents owned their houses. They knew that owning property in America made you a player in the game. My mother bought our house, our neighbor’s parents all bought their houses. And the miracle there is that my mother and father were separated, but my mother was the one who paid for the houses. In many of our communities, we had situations where the male wasn’t in the home, but we still maintained our housing. But we also had many African American families whose mothers and fathers were together, and they found out they needed to own their property.

JD: Well, when the old folks left, then we have what we call white flight. White flight means white people did not want to live in the community anymore because too many people of color were in the city. [White people] moved to the suburbs, so a lot of us bought our own houses. Then, when we moved we gave it to the younger set. And when the younger folk of the families got the property, they started selling the property. They didn’t see the social and economic advantage of owning a home until it was too late. But many of the white people did, and they knew how to pump resources and dollars [into the homes]. We still had redlining, but it only applied to people of color. Redlining used to be your address, now redlining started to change by looking at what color you were in addition to your address. Even if you stayed on Eighth Avenue, which is where black folks lived, white people started buying houses on Eighth Avenue. When they looked at the
residency, that you’re white, and see how much money you made, you got a loan. Many people [of color] could not get loans based on the redlining practices.

JD: When you couldn’t get a loan, you had to sell your house. You had the vultures already looking because if you couldn’t make an upgrade [on your home], you would get cited by the city. Then, people would go and try to get a loan from the nearest bank in the community. If it’s, let’s say, an eight percent loan, that eight percent goes to eighteen percent if it’s somebody that looks like me. The lending practices became predatory, and many people had to sell their homes. The predators would sit back and they would get on the computer and see this house has been cited for takeover. When the [city] would cite you, they would give you a ticket that would put a lien on your property. But if you didn’t do the upgrades, that lien could mean your going to be kicked out or you’re going to keep getting cited. You had to find someone who would lend you the money. Many of the people couldn’t because they got older, or they didn’t make enough money. White folks who could afford [to upgrade the homes] came in, and that exacerbated [the problem]. Pretty soon folks coming in would buy a $90,000 house for $20,000. And the youngsters took the money and ran.

JD: Once the white folk come in and they can afford [the upgrades on homes], the [value] of the houses shoots up. You sold the house for less than $60,000, they come in and do some rehab to it and then they sell it for $180,000. Then they rent it out for enormous, and people can’t pay for that. Now you’ve priced [people of color] out of the low-income community. That’s a paradox in itself, that you
can’t afford to live in a low-income, undesirable community. So, there’s a dead cat on the line somewhere.

HJ: You talked about how you were able to sort of resist the citation, but hat other people were forced to sell. Is there anything you think the community could have done to resist that trend of being forced to sell?

JD: Yes, the city should have relaxed [the regulations]. First of all, we have a lot of slum lords who don’t even live in Sacramento, but own property. They tried to address that problem. But we were talking about putting some money in a trust, where some of these homeowners could get a low interest loan they could pay off to fix their houses. They wouldn’t have to go to the lending institutions that have traditionally discriminated against them. But the policy makers have to pass laws against predatory lending, against gentrification types of moves that are going on now, because they’re displacing a lot of people who have had this property over the years. They can’t even afford to live in the community that they were born in, which was labeled as lawless and anything negative. But if its that bad, why are people trying to move back into that?

HJ: Do you think they’re more interested in improving Oak Park’s reputation by having the values go up?

JD: Well, anywhere you live, you would like for the property value and reputation to go up. I’m not mad at them for that part, because if you can go and get a house at a low price, you will. They are trying to build a community up, but the irony is the same people who criticize it are the same people who are buying the property. As the old folks say, there’s a dead cat on that line, but I’m not mad at
them for trying to improve themselves. And some of those houses are really nice houses with a historic presence about them. Some people are buying up houses for that and they’re trying to build a community up. But it’s kind of funny, when black folk and Latino folk are trying to get loans for businesses and whatever, they always got turned down. Now suddenly, there’s a lot of money flowing in the community on Broadway, rebuilding and putting businesses back in there. It just depends on who you are. Nothing has changed.

HJ: When you were talking about gentrification in our initial meeting, you mentioned McGeorge School of Law, and I think Rainbow Bread. Can you explain how those factored into gentrification?

JD: What McGeorge did, I think their intentions were honorable. They wanted to expand the law school. Futuristic is the game, you have to be thinking twenty and thirty years ahead of time, and that’s what they were doing. They were just buying up any property on the west side as much as they could because they had a plan to build a campus. Their plan wasn’t to gentrify the community, it was to increase the size of McGeorge. As a result, they did buy all of the houses and they didn’t knock them down. They increased the housing for their students. They didn’t do any community building. Yes, it looked good, it was a good tax base. But what did the community get out of it? Were any low-income community kids given grants to go to law school who had the desire? Was there anything given to the people you’ve taken so much from? I can’t say McGeorge was part of [the community building], although they thought they were twenty-five years ahead of the plan. You’ve got a beautiful campus over there. And the side that they bough
the houses on really didn’t hurt a lot of people. They used those houses for their campus, they didn’t knock them down or run people out.

JD: And then McClatchy Park now, they put in all kinds of toys so to speak, they’ve got a skateboard park and what have you. When low-income people were living there, do you think they would think about doing something like that? Nope. African American people still do hang out [there]. They tried to discourage people from coming there, because that’s where a lot of the youngsters go to kick back. Black folks are social people. Like, we go to the barber shops. That’s where we go to see everybody every Saturday, every Friday. That’s what McClatchy Park is. People gathered to go socially mix, and talk, and see each other. That scares some people who are not black when they see more than ten black folks at one time, the think it’s a gang. They didn’t understand the cultural value of people getting together and going to Oak Park. That used to throw up a red flag, but finally they started noticing that’s what [black folks] do. And it’s not a bad thing.

JD: Yes, some things were happening in Oak, same as Curtis Park, same as William Land Park, same as Southside Park. Oak Park has always gotten a bad name. Because whenever you have a majority of black folks or Latinos living in a community, they always get this unfair characterization of how dangerous it is. That kind of thing is untrue. If you’re walking down the street in downtown, and somebody got stabbed, they keep it quiet. Or if you’re out in Fair Oaks, they don’t turn in stuff like that, it used to be kept very quiet. And that’s because the neighbors say, don’t vilify our neighborhood. Many of the upper middle-class communities never really reported some of the things that happened in those
communities unless somebody does something really atrocious. But in low-income communities or places where people of color live, they always characterize is as a scary place. That’s just what happens in communities where people of color live. Folks don’t know it until they hear about it or talk to people like me. Nobody ever takes the time to find out. And you have no reason to want to know it. When you read newspapers and see it on television, you assume that it’s like that everywhere.

HJ: I think that covers all the main questions I had for you. Is there anything you think I skipped over that you want to add?

JD: Oak Park is a historic site. There’s a lot of good history that comes from Oak Park, a lot of good people. White, black, and Latino. I hope people realize the historical elements that came out of Oak Park and still exist. Because you can see it coming back, you can see the potential if there’s a renaissance going on here in Oak Park. Unfortunately, the renaissance doesn’t include some of the original players, i.e., people of color, as it did back in the day. Whenever you have a renaissance, you always have to have people of color. Because it’s artists, it’s entertainment. It’s all of those things. It’s educational institutions, libraries, right in the middle of the community. We have to help feed this renaissance and get people to understand who we are in Oak Park.

JD: People still call me “Oak Park Joe” to this day. I still identify with Oak Park, I have property in Oak Park, I have relatives in Oak Park, Oak Park will always be my home. I ride through two, three times a week. I don’t ever want to leave. Sometimes we forget where we come from. It’s the worst thing you can do
culturally. Hopefully people who came from here don’t forget because they were made in Oak Park, and they need to give back to Oak Park. We’re proud folk in Oak Park. It was a serious melting pot. I love Oak Park.

JD: One thing that bothers me, you always get these politicians and some of these new community leaders and they try to rename [Oak Park]. The past ten years, I’ve heard people saying South Oak Park and North Oak Park. There’s no such thing as “South” Oak Park or “North” Oak Park. Technically, you can say it’s the south end of Oak Park. But the reason they are trying to rename Oak Park is to try to culturally upgrade and separate [one] community from the other and that’s how you get these uneven cultural changes. Because when you start saying “North Oak Park” it changes the makeup of the community in people’s minds. Oak Park is Oak Park. When people come, especially these gentrification people, and try to rename the community? Nope. It’s always been Oak Park period.

HJ: I think for the project overall, it would be helpful to have a bit more biographical information about you. Can you tell me more about what you’ve done as a community activist?

JD: When I was a kid, I used to live in Curtis Park, like I said, and I got married. I worked for the railroad. I got married a little early as a youngster. And I lived in these low-income community apartments called Kennedy Estates down on 65th Street and Power Inn Road. When I moved there, that was a large part of my advocacy because we were all new families, youngsters, had kids, we were married. They were still working on [the apartments]. It was mostly African Americans, Latinos, some Asians, and some white folks. We were pretty tight.
The builders decided they were going to turn off all the electricity. We had newborn children. We had to warm up their formula and we needed heaters and all that. They went and got us hot plates to cook and heat up our food. A hot plate had one or two burners on it and you plugged it into the wall. But they didn’t even tell us. And we said, how are we going to cook food for our kids and warm up formula? So, I rounded up all the people. Kennedy Estates has two to three hundred apartments. And everyone that wanted to go, I took them down to the Holiday Inn and made the city pay for it. They were pissed [laughing]. I went down to the Holiday Inn and told them, “Hey, I made a deal with them. The city has to pay for this.” And we were going to sue them and this and that. The mayor was pissed, the city council, but they paid for it. But it taught them something: don’t do that to us just because you didn’t think.

JD: I along with some other people raised a lot of hell. Whenever we saw something going on in the schools, if an incident occurred with the school, I was always over that. I always knew the mayor; I always knew the leadership. I always familiarize myself with the chief of police. My mother taught me in order to get things done, you have to know who’s in charge. Never start at the bottom, start at the top. I still do that to this day. I was running for city council, but I got out because it takes a lot of time, and I would have been hamstrung. I’m not the quiet kind of guy and you have to compromise when you’re an elected official. I didn’t make a good one. I never got along with the mayor because I just never could follow. I’m just not a do it kind of guy. I have to do what’s right.
JD: Through the years, I’ve been on a county planning commission. I’ve been on the board of the NAACP. I was on the gang task force when we had the Bloods and the Crips first come out years ago. We knew what the red and the blue meant, but most law enforcement didn’t so we put together an organization to get them to understand. My nephew was one of the first victims of gang brutality. We went out and found out who the culprits were, and we had them prosecuted. But we didn’t want to start putting young black men in jail. That was the intent of some of the law enforcement people. If somebody is dangerous from our community and they murdered somebody, take them off the street, but don’t try to take all of the low hanging fruit and put them in jail. These kids can either go be a gang member or they can go the other way and be a productive member [of society]. We have to do prevention, not apprehension.

JD: When gang violence first hit Sacramento it was terrible. The Bloods and the Crips in Oak Park and the south area. I knew them, I had relatives in it. My daughter got shot and it almost started a gang war. I had to go to them and sit down and talk. You see it on television. Some guy in his community goes and talks to the gang. That’s true stuff. You have to sit down and talk to them. “Don’t go out shooting and killing everybody!”

JD: We knew what, and how, and who. And we tried to protect [the kids] because law enforcement just puts everybody in jail, they don’t care what color. I had some friends in law enforcement and they were good dudes. They helped keep people out [of prison]. We have a lot of good people, then we have some bad people. There were some trying times, but I’ve been doing it all my life. I’m working right
now for a senator. I do community outreach. I help people who need things like medicine. These parents, these mothers, and these people with their boys, it’s a handful. In a house where there’s no father which I’m a witness to, it can be a challenge. People need help and you have to help the folk you can help and keep rolling.

HJ: And the senator you’re working, is that Senator Richard Pan?

JD: Yes, Senator Richard Pan, sixth senatorial district, he’ll be terming out. I used to work for city councilman Ray Tretheway. I was also in a county planning commission. In those days, Elk Grove was part of our region as well. Any time you do any building or if you want to cut some trees down, you always have to go get a petition or a license. It was a good experience. I was privileged to be able to do that. I used to intern for a congresswoman by the name of Maxine Waters. She’s a congresswoman from L.A. I worked for her when I was a kid. So, I’ve had some history.
Interviewer: Danielle Baza. (916) 416-7407, dbaza@csus.edu.

Danielle Baza is a first-year graduate student in Sacramento State’s Public History MA Program. Born and raised in Elk Grove, California, she graduated with honors from UC Davis in June 2021 with a degree in History and a minor in Native American Studies.

Interviewee: Ginger Rutland. (916) 284-3388, ginger.rutland@sbcglobal.net.

Ginger Rutland was born October 30, 1948 in Ohio. She moved to Sacramento at age four with her parents, Bill and Eva, brother Billy, older sister Elsie, and twin sister, Patty Jo. She attended Howard University and returned to Sacramento after graduation. In Sacramento, she pursued a career in journalism at KCRA 3, Channel 4, and eventually went on to become editor of the Sacramento Bee.

Date of interview: Tuesday, December 7, 2021.

Location of interview: Zoom meeting from each participant’s respective houses.

List of acronyms: DB = Danielle Baza (interviewer), GR = Ginger Rutland (interviewee).
Summary

I interviewed Ginger Rutland to supplement Sacramento’s efforts to document the African American experience within the city. Though not born in Sacramento, Ginger grew up in the city, spending her life from ages 4-16 in/around Curtis Park and Oak Park. After attending Howard University in Washington, D.C., she returned to Sacramento to pursue a career in journalism. She spent the majority of her career as a member of the editorial board for the Sacramento Bee. Aside from her career as a journalist, she is an active member in her community (that of Curtis Park and Oak Park) as a playwright and educator. Her mother, Eva Rutland, wrote a memoir in the 1960s entitled *When We Were Colored: A Mother’s Story*. Eva was born in Atlanta, Georgia, but moved to Sacramento when her husband was assigned to McClellan Air Force Base. The memoir encompasses her experience as a middle-class Black woman, raising her children in the era of integration. Ginger later republished the memoir in 2007, and together, she and her mom traveled around the United States promoting the book and sharing their experience. Ginger also adapted the memoir into a screenplay and presented the play at the Sacramento Theatre Company and then the Guild Theatre in Oak Park. Ginger currently resides in Curtis Park with her husband, Doug. She has a daughter, Eva, and two grandsons. In this interview, she recounts her experience growing up in Sacramento and reflects upon her career as a journalist, and the work she has done with her mother’s memoir. Though she is aware of racism and the segregation her family and the Black community faced/s, Ginger emphasized that she has had a happy life in Sacramento, and that it is important to tell the stories of the simple people – those most often overlooked because they are ordinary.
Interview

DB: Okay, today is December 7, and I am conducting this interview with Ginger Rutland via Zoom as part of a project for the City of Sacramento to document the African American experience with Sacramento. I am in my own house, and Ginger is in her house as well.

DB: Would you please state your name and spell it for the record?

GR: Ginger Rutland, G-I-N-G-E-R R-U-T-L-A-N-D.

DB: And your date of birth please?

GR: October 30, 1948.

DB: So, to start things off, how are you connected to Oak Park? I know you orchestrated a play based on your mother’s memoir, *When We Colored*, at the Guild Theatre, but do you have any other connection, aside from the play?

GR: Well, when my family moved to Sacramento in 1852, I was four years old. There were very few places where black people could buy homes, and my father was taken by a colored real estate agent to places like Del Paso Heights and Oak Park. He didn’t like any of the homes he saw there, and so one day he went out on his own and he saw some children, some Asian kids, playing across the street from a house that had a “for sale” sign on it. And he said, “Oh if they sell to Orientals, which was the term in those days, then they must sell to colors.”

GR: And in fact, they did sell to coloreds. So, it was a house on 27th Street which was really just on the outskirts of Curtis Park, not far from Oak Park, but on the border of those two. It was between Broadway and Second Avenue.

GR: That was where people of color, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, could buy homes in those days. So, in 1952, he bought a house at 2622 27th Street and that’s where we moved when I was a child.
Did you stay there until you left the United States when you were 16?¹

GR: No, we lived there until 1958. My parents had constantly been trying to buy a home in a better neighborhood in the ‘burbs [suburbs] and so on and so forth, and they were rebuffed time after time because they were black.

GR: Finally, my mother found a lot in a neighborhood that she could afford and where she wanted to live. It was a new neighborhood, South Land Park Hills. They wouldn’t sell the lot to her, I don’t exactly know who ‘they’ were, but she couldn’t buy it herself.

GR: So, she went to one of my father’s colleagues at work. And the colleague, a white colleague, bought the lot and my parents had a home built in a newly developed area. And they had their home built, and that’s how they sort of punched their ticket into the middle class and bought themselves a middle-class home in the suburbs.

GR: Anyway, about Oak Park. My connection to Oak Park – we lived in the outskirts of Curtis Park, but Oak Park was just down the road. Oak Park had a business district there, the 35th Street Corridor, and that’s where my mother did her shopping. She shopped at Gostick Brothers, and I think there was a clothing store there owned by the Acevedo’s which were a prominent family in town – I think one of them became a mayor at some point – anyway – it was a vibrant area, that’s where we went to church. There was the Oak Park Congregational Church, which was the black congregation church, and we were raised as congregationalists, and that’s the church we attended in Oak Park.

GR: We went to the library, the Oak Park Library. At McClatchy Park there was a swimming pool. I didn’t really learn to swim very well, but that’s where I went swimming. And the library was not just a library; there was a huge community center there – really quite beautiful – and still there. But now it’s owned, I think, but McGeorge. But at that community center I took ballet and tap dancing and what, at the time, we called acrobatics. So Oak Park was where we socialized.

DB: What was your experience with your neighbors when you lived on 27th Street?

¹ Ginger’s father had been a civilian worker in the Air Force, first stationed at Tuskegee Army Air Force Base. In California, he worked at McClellan Air Force Base. In 1964, he was stationed overseas, and the family moved with him.
GR: It wasn’t a bad experience. My mother and my father made lasting friends in the neighborhood, but it was white for the most part. My sister and I had just gotten out of fifth grade and were in sixth grade. We went to Alice Bernie School and I think we were the only black kids in our class which was unusual because when we lived in that little house in Curtis Park, it was a much more diverse community so we went to Sierra School, which is now Sierra Two Center. But anyway, we went to Alice Bernie which was a brand-new school – we were probably the second graduating class from that school. And the neighbors were just white. Did anything untoward happen? No. People were fine. I don’t ever remember, however, going into anybody’s home in that area. My mother joined the Congregational Church which was on 35th Street down the block from where we lived. So, for the first time we went to what was a white church. Another congregational church, but it was a white church, which was unusual for me.

DB: Did you usually attend church there or at the Oak Park one?

GR: No, my mother left the Oak Park one and she went to Parkside, which is still there at the corner of South Land Park Drive and 35th Avenue. That’s the church we attended when I was a teenager.

DB: Why did she choose to leave the Oak Park church?

GR: You know, my mother believed in integration, she said “Well, if we’re going to integrate, let’s integrate. If that is the thing we should do, then let’s do it.” And it was literally two blocks from the house, and so that’s where we went to church. She became a Sunday School teacher, and I think my dad was part of the youth group Sunday school teaching thing. It was awkward for me though, I must say, because you were just entering puberty, so you were beginning to date. And while you had white friends, when you were a little kid – when I was in Curtis Park and Oak Park, we were little kids, and we would go to birthday parties across the street to the Japanese kids’ house or the Chinese kids’ house. But now we were of a dateable age – junior high, high school – and we separated as a group. The black kids went one way, the Asian kids went one way and the white kids went another way; that’s where the separation began – when you got to junior high school.

DB: When your mom chose to leave Oak Park [church], did her friends from the Oak Park Church follow suit or did they have reservations about integration?

GR: Well, the people at the Church were from all over Sacramento, they weren’t necessarily from one neighborhood. Sacramento was a little different then; the blacks were spread out, and if you were an upper middle-class black you were trying to get into
a better neighborhood and you didn’t go to just one neighborhood. Some people went out to Carmichael, some people went to Rancho Cordova. They went to church at Oak Park, but they lived in different parts of the city.

DB: What schools did you attend for middle and high school?

GR: First we went to Cal middle school, which is still there at Vallejo and South Land Park Drive or Land Park Drive. This would’ve been around 1960 or so. It was the height of the Baby Boomer age, and it was an overcrowded middle school. So, they had us on two different tracks; there were morning classes and afternoon classes… they split it. By the time I went into the ninth grade, which was the last of the junior high school grades, they had built another school in South Land Park Hills. It was brand new, and … we were the first graduating class from Sam Brennan Junior High School. Then when we went to high school, we went to McClatchy. And we took a bus to McClatchy High School. They had not yet built John F. Kennedy; I was too old to have gone to John F. Kennedy.

DB: Do you recall whether your classmates were predominantly white, or was it mixed?

GR: There was everything. I think the probably the largest minority were probably Asians. I think Fong was the dominant name in the school, there were more Fongs than anything else. But there were Asian, there were black. The Hispanic population wasn't as big as it is today, and there were white [students]… If you look at the yearbook most of the kids were white, with a sprinkling of black kids and Asians.

DB: And your friends growing up in grammar school, I know you mentioned that once you guys went to junior high, you sort of split off, but did you usually have friends who were black as well, or was it a mix?

GR: When we were at parties – and parties where actually people danced – you were a teenager types, that was all black, that was totally separate. The black kids were with the black kids, I assume the white kids were with the white kids, and the Asian kids had their parties too. But there was no mixing; I didn't go to somebody's house party, who was white nor did a white person come to my house party. We didn't hate each other nor were mean to each other. We were in class together – my brother was a big athlete and so he was on teams with people of all colors – but our social lives were separate.

DB: And the memoir by your mom mentioned that your sister Elsie expressed to your
mom that the white people they encountered on the street during a walk were “bad” simply because they were white. Your mother equated this “chip on her shoulder attitude” to the fact that Elsie had started school. What kind of views of white people were expressed during your education?

GR: I think that part of my mother’s book was written when we were still living in Ohio, and I think the world in which we lived was predominantly a black world in Ohio. Now, mind you, I don’t even remember it – I was four years old when we moved to Sacramento but my sister [Elsie] is four years older than I am. And… she’s in a black world socially; that’s our parents’ friend group and that’s her friend group. I’m assuming that my sister didn’t hear negative things about white people from our parents. My parents were sort of very welcoming to everybody, but I’m sure from our friends, probably yes there were [negative] things said – what they were saying I don’t know.

DB: So why did you move back to Sacramento after college?

GR: I came home. I was in Washington DC; I was working I worked briefly for some sort of government job. I hated it, I wanted to get into journalism, and I came back to my hometown not thinking that I would stay here, but as things turned out I got a job, first with Channel Three. And then it [Sacramento] became the place where my career began and sort of flourished, so I stayed in Sacramento.

DB: And after your parents moved to Sacramento, did they ever relocate again or did they stay here until the until they passed away.

GR: They lived here what they lived here until they passed away. In 1965 my father was transferred to Germany and the family moved to Germany and I spent a year in France, going to a university there. But then when his tour in Germany was over – he had been a civilian assigned to a NATO unit in Germany – when his tour was over, they came back to the United States, back to Sacramento, back to their home, and he worked at McClellan until he retired in 1985. And that’s where they lived until both of them passed away.

DB: So what happened to the house while you guys were overseas?

GR: We rented it to a very close friend who stayed in it until we came back and then she built another house …. So, we were the first blacks in that neighborhood, and there were empty lots all down 35th avenue, and then there was us, and then there were to
the west of us there were white people and to the south of us there were all these white people. But once we moved there, it was years and years before anybody built [on the lot next to us] and then it was a black family. Then the family that moved to the next lot on that block was also black, and so that part of the street became inhabited by black people in a very concentrated way, while most of the rest of the neighborhood was white. It has since turned over, like my parents’ home is now occupied by a white family and I don’t know who else lives there, but in the in the turnover it has turned white again.

DB: Where do you currently live?

GR: I live in Curtis Park … two houses down from the park itself at the very North end of the park.

DB: And did your siblings stay in Sacramento as well, or did they move elsewhere?

GR: I have a brother who still lives in Sacramento and for a while he had a house in Curtis Park and then he moved out to a fancy place in Carmichael …. And then my sister had a home in the Pocket [twin sister], and my other sister moved – she lived in Oakland for her career – she was a social worker – and she still lives in Oakland. But now my [twin] sister lives in southern California, in Laguna Beach ….  

DB: And did your siblings all go to college as well?

GR: Oh yeah, yes.

DB: Did they just stop at their bachelor’s degree, or do they have advanced degrees?

GR: Well, my sister is a lawyer, so she has a law degree, and my other sister has an MSW [master’s in social work] and my brother he just finished college and he just became a lobbyist. He made more money than everybody else but that’s all right.

DB: Are there any instances of discrimination you faced as a colored woman in journalism that you’d like to discuss?
GR: I don't think so. I entered the profession in 1971-72, and it was right after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and there had been riots across the nation. And newsrooms were looking for black people, frankly, they were looking to tell the stories of those communities, because it was difficult to penetrate those communities when you have an entirely white working force. So I think I had an insight, being what they called a twofer – both a woman and a black person – that I was actually more successful in my career early on.

GR: So, but what I did find interesting is that once, for example, I started work at KCRA 3, Channel 3 in Sacramento, you know – “Where the news comes first,” the NBC affiliate here. When I was hired, I was the only black woman at the station and they didn’t hire any more black women until I left. It was as if you're the first one in, then you’re it – we've reached our quota. That was the sense that I felt, and this is what I heard later: a number of white people who applied for the job and didn’t get it weren't told, “I'm sorry we don't have a position for you” or “You're not qualified.” They were told “I'm sorry we've got to give the job to a minority, because of affirmative action.” When, in fact, they hired numerous white people and they didn't give any more jobs to anymore black people until we moved on .... I moved on to Channel Four in San Francisco and then they hired another black female to replace me, but that's my sense of what happened at Channel Three.

DB: And what about your experience at Channel Four?

GR: I was the capital reporter for Channel Four and I was in Sacramento [BREAK].

GR: Okay, all right so Channel Four. I don't remember anything untoward or bad happening. I physically wasn't in the news station that long because I was in Sacramento and the station was in San Francisco. And actually, I had a great time; I was treated fairly, and there were a number of other black women at the station, not just me. If you wanted me to tell you stories of racism, it didn’t happen. I can’t tell you stories of woe because there are no stories of woe to tell you about from my career, particularly at Channel Four. I earned an Emmy doing a series of stories of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, which is in San Luis Obispo. It was a big deal because there was a bunch of controversy about nuclear power plants, whether they should be built, whether we should have them at all – it was a huge uproar over the building of the plant. I stayed in San Luis Obispo for a month or more doing a special and reporting on the controversy. Regarding that I won an Emmy, and I did a bunch of reports on immigration and Mexican farm workers, particularly on pesticide related issues. I did stories on Cesar Chavez, Jerry Brown was the new governor, so I got a bunch of stories about him, and Linda Ronstadt and all that. It was a great 10 years at that station.
DB: And then, after Channel Four, is that when you moved to the Sacramento Bee?

GR: Yeah, in 1988, the Bee came to me and they were looking for somebody for their editorial board, and they hired me. So I went to the editorial board, and I was there for 25 years – long time.

DB: Who else was on the editorial board?

GR: Well, the editorial page editor was a fellow named Peter Schrag. There was me, a black woman, four white guys and another white woman on the board.

DB: And what kind of work were you responsible for there [as a member of the editorial board]?

GR: Everything. I mean, I wrote about everything. I wrote about public employee pensions, I wrote about transportation, I wrote about criminal justice, I wrote about race relations, I wrote about any subject – homelessness, and so on and so forth. I was afraid to be pigeonholed as the reporter on black issues and poverty issues... But I wasn’t – I had a huge portfolio, and one of the biggest parts of my portfolio were public employee pensions, which I learned a great deal about. I became this sort of resident expert on that subject area.

GR: I spent a lot of time on air pollution, and I became sort of the resident expert on air pollution, and the California Air Resources Board and its catalytic converters and requirements on cars and that sort of thing. And I was eager to do that, I was eager not just to be the spokesperson for black folks and I was given that freedom.

DB: And as an editor were you responsible for any hiring processes?

GR: No, I was just a member of the editorial board. I didn't hire anybody, but people who came into the editorial board after me were sort of interviewed by everybody on the board; it's a community, the board, you work in concert with each other – it's not your personal opinion that gets on the editorial page, it is the collective opinion of the group. And so you have input, but ... your bio isn't there. So, when someone new was being brought in, we were given the opportunity to talk to that new person before that new person was hired and we were asked our opinion, but I wasn't exactly the person who
did the hiring. I was consulted. Particularly when they changed editors, when the boss changed.

DB: Is there one thing that stands out the most on how Sacramento has changed since you moved back here after college?

GR: Physically, Sacramento changed tremendously. When I left there was no W-X freeway. There was no highway 99. And those roads almost destroyed Oak Park. It hindered it in; it cut it off from East Sac, it cut it off from Curtis Park. There was this ugly strip of concrete and smoke and cars and trucks. So when I first came to Sacramento, I could walk from my home in Curtis Park into Oak Park, and go to the Oak Park Library. It was an easy pleasant walk. Now to make that same walk, I'd have to walk over a freeway.

GR: There was something in Sacramento called the West End. Now it's all t-shirt shops and taffy pools, and all of that that's Old Sacramento. But that was the West End, and … people considered it a slum. It was where the poor people lived. Capitol Avenue, with all of those high rises that are Capitol Avenue – that was a community of burgeoning that was torn down in in the years when I left Sacramento. And they built that sort of barren strip that is now the Capital Corridor where you'll never see people walk, you just see buildings.

GR: That had been a big community, but in the interest of slum removal and renewal, that was all torn down and most of the people displaced were black. The other thing that changed was Southside Park. See, Southside Park is split in half where the freeway goes through it – the W-X freeway. That park had been split in half …. It went all the way from Broadway to N Street, and they cut it in half. I remember that park because that's where our family went for Fourth of July; you sit in that park and watch the Fourth of July celebrations, but that park was damaged by the freeway. I don't think they would have damaged William Land Park, which was in a in a whiter neighborhood. The damage was done to Southside Park. And that whole neighborhood that is the W-X freeway had been a black neighborhood. There was something called the Women’s Civic Improvement Club, which was a stately old building where my parents went to play bridge and where young black women who came to Sacramento to work at McClellan or Mather or one of those government entities – it was a place where they could live. They couldn't live in the regular motels or hotels or apartment buildings – those weren't available to them [the women], because they were black. But then these nice genteel young black women could live at the Women’s Civic Improvement Club. That was torn down …. Nat Colley, a Yale educated black attorney, the civil rights icon for Sacramento, his office was where the Macy's is today, and it was torn down. His second office was off of P street and it, too, was torn down to make way for the freeway. So, these black businesses were uprooted to make way for the freeway.
DB: Do you know where they relocated to?

GR: I know that Nat Colley finally built his office on S Street which is right across the street from where the Safeway is right now. Anyway, I just know that these people, these whole communities – Chinese, Japanese, black communities were uprooted in the name of slum removal, in the name of renewal. And all of that happened in the early 60s, in the mid-60s, when I was away either in Europe or at college. And when I came back, Oak Park was a changed reality – all the stores were gone, they were boarded up, it was dead as a community.

DB: And the Women’s Civic Improvement Club you mentioned, was that relocated somewhere else?

GR: The Women’s Civic Improvement Club moved to Oak Park, and it still operates today, but it's not the same thing that it [used to be]. In the 50s it was run by a group of nice, old colored ladies, and it had nothing to do with government. It was black people who recognized that they needed a place where young black women could live in safety. And they organized it themselves, then it became a government entity …. It became a different kind of place, so it's operated as a childcare center, but I don't know what else they do. There was something about it, originally, that was organic that grew out of us, that grew out of this black community in a need, and it was self-sufficient, and people got it. When it became a government enterprise that had to depend on government funding and then it had to be accountable to the government. And it lost something in that, in my view.

DB: So, do you feel that integration actually ever came into fruition in Sacramento, or do you feel that it's still an ongoing process?

GR: Sacramento is probably the most integrated place I know and I've lived in a lot of different places. It's truly integrated and I don't mean that it's integrated in a way that there are black people with Asian people – I mean people actually know each other, they are invited to each other's homes, they marry. My husband, for example, is white; my daughter is half-white, half-black, so when [we went] to her wedding, the bridesmaids were white, they were black, they were Chinese. The groomsmen were Indian and Japanese, and the group wasn't something that people just made up, I mean it was their friends.

GR: And Sacramento was like that. My daughter grew up in a world that was far more integrated than the world that I grew up. Her friends were every color, and they actually socialized together in a way that never happened when I was at McClatchy.
DB: Did your daughter attend McClatchy as well?

GR: My daughter attended McClatchy High School, she went to Cal Middle School, and her friends are every shade of the rainbow and every class too. So I think Sacramento is billed often as one of the most integrated cities, but it is quite frankly well-integrated. What there is here today, that was not here and is not good -- there's an underclass that exists today that didn't exist when I was young. I mean people who are desperately, desperately poor and we didn't have tent cities like we have now. The difficulty of buying a home was not so much the price of the home, but there were these restrictions, these racial covenants there -- there was a practice of not allowing blacks into this area or that area. Now the barrier is just the sheer cost of homes, which is a tremendous barrier.

DB: And where did you meet your husband?

GR: I was working as a reporter; he was a friend of my brother's who worked at the Capitol. He and my brother were buddies and my brother introduced him and that's how we met.

DB: And what year was that?

GR: Probably -- I don't know... '74-'75, something like that.

DB: How did your family react, was there any reaction that you were dating a white man?

GR: No. Something interesting -- I went to Howard University in Washington D.C., which is the historically black college in D.C. .... I would not have dated him had I been at Howard. Because at Howard, it was an anathema to be dating a black person; we were into black power and black separatism .... But when I got back to Sacramento, that all sort of fell away. And I met a guy that I liked, and he liked me. And we dated and then got married, had a daughter, and now have two beautiful grandsons.

DB: And did his family have any reaction?

GR: That's a very interesting question -- his family is from the South, from Texas, and they are classic dustbowl people who came to California in the '30s and worked in the
fields for a while. Then his father got a job with Southern Pacific Railroad in San Luis Obispo and that's where he [her husband] grew up. And they lived in a very segregated world, and it must have been pretty shocking to them, but they accepted me and I love them dearly and they love me. They recognized that had they not accepted me, they may have lost their son. And I've been to Texas, I met his family. They're all a little more conservative than I am – they are from Texas. But other than that, it's actually been, I think, a growing experience for both families.

DB: In the introduction to your mother’s memoir, she mentioned her dislike of the phrase “African American.” What are your views on that, do you share that sentiment?

GR: As a journalist, I didn't like it, because it was too many syllables, and I did both TV and I did radio – and African American – that's [counting syllables on fingers] 7 syllables. “Black” is one. I think the crankiest among us get to decide what we're called. So, I have all these Hispanic older women who say, “What is this Latinx? I'm a Latina, my husband is a Latino.” The language has gender basis, it's what it is – that's what makes it beautiful. So they're very upset about how the academic community has adopted these terms that they don't approve of. I don't disapprove of African American; I just find it cumbersome and pretentious. And “black,” for me, is just easier. I also frankly like “colored” as a descriptor. It was a white term that was used to describe us way back when and I still rather like it. Fighting over titles and names and whether we capitalize black or don't capitalize it, is silly to me. I mean we've got some real problems having to do with race in this country – serious problems – and whether you capitalize black, don't capitalize black or call us colored instead of African American or African American instead of black is silly to me. My mother's differences were somewhat different. Her objections were, “I'm not an African, I'm an American. And I've been in America longer than most of these people who just call themselves plain Americans. She was quite clear on that, that she didn't like the designation.

DB: Can you describe the work you’ve done with communities and schools, since the republication of your mother’s memoir?

GR: I've been to almost every school in Sacramento to just tell my mother's story. I think her view of everything is that – and I share her view – the black narrative is in general grim. The way it is told in America today …. that we're all poor, that we're violent, that our husbands are lazy or are nonexistent, that we're promiscuous. There's this picture of the black experience that is inconsistent with my mother's experience of the black experience.

GR: So, she [her mother] is a middle-class black woman who was born in 1917. Her father and her mother were both college graduates, and she's a college graduate and
her children are college educated. So here are three generations of college graduates that had these middle-class lives and middle-class existence. There is this swath of black America that is middle class – solidly middle class and upper middle class – the black people I associated with when I came to Sacramento in 1952 were doctors and dentists and lawyers for the most part, or they were social workers, or they were teachers – they were the professional class. There’s this huge swath of black America that never gets talked about but has always been here, and Mom wanted to tell their story because it doesn’t make the evening news. It’s the angry, the cranky, the dysfunctional, that make the evening news and people get a distorted view of what young black Americans are because of that distorted view. And for the most part they’re just like everybody else – they have aspirations for their children, they pay their taxes, they go to work, they come home, they try to buy nice homes – so she wanted to tell that story and I think that's the value in her book. It’s not “the black story” [forms air quotes with her hands], we’re not a monolith. But it is a black story, and it's pretty solid in America. Michelle Obama’s family, they were more of a working-class family, but still intact family: mother, father, kids raised well, expected to do well, and that's out there in droves. But it's not the narrative that you usually hear.

DB: Were you involved in any community projects, aside from the work you've done with your mother’s memoir?

GR: Not really [laughs]. Journalism is interesting as a career – they make have this false notion that you're not supposed to be touched by anything, you're supposed to be a blank slate in order to be objective. So, my mother was blind – she went blind at about age 50 – and her writing career actually took off after she went blind. And the Society for the Blind asked me to join the Society for the Blind, and they [her bosses] said, “Nope, can't do that, you might write about the Society for the Blind and it might taint your writing.” So, no, so I haven't participated in much but because they hardly want you to vote – you have to be that pure – it's silly.

DB: Wow, I did not know that.

GR: Yeah, so there are certain restrictions on things you could do. And this was at the Bee. I’m sure it wasn't that restrictive, but I’m raising a kid, working full time, I’m not doing much community anything.

DB: So there’s a picture of you and your twin sister as angels in the Oak Park congregational church Christmas pageant. Did you enjoy partaking in such events and or were you more, as your mom said, a casual Christian?
GR: You know, as kids, the mother drives the church thing and your father goes along with it. In the 50s everybody went to church on Sunday, that's what we did. So, yes, of course, I was in Christmas pageant. And even in school, they had Christmas pageants -- at Sierra Elementary School we didn't call it the Winter Festival -- in the 1950s we called it the Christmas pageant -- and I was in the Christmas pageant at the Sierra school. And yeah I love Christmas -- I don't even remember that being in that angel pageant thing but I'm sure I liked it. That's what we that's what we did at Christmas time. We sang all those songs, and I still love them.

DB: So did you raise your own child going to church?

GR: No, I was too lazy, but she now goes to church. She's married to a Jewish man, who had a bar mitzvah .... And she's now going to church, which we didn't do a lot of when she was growing up -- I'm sorry actually, it's one of the things I regret in life. But she believes. Her husband is an engineer, he doesn't, but she believes.

DB: And why do you harbor that regret?

GR: Because I think it's a positive force in people's lives -- they teach you good manners, good morals, good whatever -- if you get into the right type of church they teach you how to be generous and how to be giving and how to be kind and generous and respectful to your parents and all kinds of good things they teach. And there are some [churches] that are intolerant, and I don't go to those churches, I go to the good ones.

DB: So why did you choose to republish your mom's memoir?

GR: In 2005 my father died. We had his funeral, and my father was quite a public figure -- he'd been on the school board, he'd been big at McClellan Air Force Base -- he was a volunteer with boy scouts, a volunteer with the Red Cross -- he'd been quite an active community person, and the church was packed, it was packed. And my assignment at the funeral was to read a chapter of my mother's book called "The Trouble with Papa." And it's the story of my father, and after I read that, everybody in the church wanted the book. It had been out of print for a number of years, so we decided to republish it. The original title was The Trouble with being a Mama, which I always hated. And we changed it to When We Were Colored: A Mother's Story -- which my siblings didn't like, but they weren't doing the work I was, so I got to change the title. And I added the family photos which had not been in the original. .... When the book was written I was a teenager, I wasn't paying a lot of attention when it was originally published. But as an adult and as someone who worked in journalism and watched Sacrament and knew
Sacramento during the years in which my mother lived, suddenly I recognized the value of her simple story. She's a simple middle-class black woman telling the story of what it's like to move from the segregated South to an integrated community – what schooling is like, and I realized what a powerful story that is and was. And so I became sort of attached to it myself – I turned it into a play and the play's been a big draw here in Sacramento.

DB: How often do you put on that play?

GR: Well, I originally performed it at my church, which is the Pioneer Congregational Church – the big church right across the street from Sutter's Fort – which is the white congregational church where we were not actually welcome there when my family came in '52 but now anybody could come in. But anyway, I performed it there, and it was just wildly successful and then I rewrote it, I made it a little stronger. And it was picked up at the Sacramento Theatre Company, which is the Wells Fargo Pavilion where they do the music circus. That was in 2019 and it broke box office records, they couldn't they couldn't get enough performances – they had to add performances and performances – it did very well. Then I did it again at Oak Park in the Guild Theatre in part because theatre in Sacramento is very white – if you go to theatre everybody is white and everybody's old – and I wanted the black community to come. So I purposely put it in the Guild Theatre in Oak Park …. it's just beautiful, it's been renovated, and it's just a lovely space. And in that performance my niece, my brother's daughter played my mother – she's an actress in Los Angeles, she looks like my mother – and anyway, so I did I did it there, too, but yeah that was kind of a disappointment because the pandemic sort of interrupted it. So, I'm hoping to be able to get it again on stage somewhere here.

DB: Do you have any plans right now for that or are you still waiting to see how –

GR: Well, if you know the people at B Street or Capital Stage, could you please tell them I'd like to stage it there? That's what my plan is – to try to persuade them to do it because I think it's a Sacramento story that deserves to be heard. It's a uniquely Sacramento story.

DB: How did your mom feel about the republication.

GR: We had a ball. ..... My father died 2005 and [the book] didn't get out there till 2007. And for the next couple of years, my mother and I went around the country – we went to Atlanta, we went to New York, we went to several places doing book events. And I think for an elderly woman – she's in her 80s and 90s now – she never got recognized as a writer, and she was pretty damn good. She wrote as a young person, as a new mother,
she started writing stories and she would send them to Red Book Magazine and to Ladies Home Journal and Women's Day and they would publish them. So, this is a black woman writing in these magazines in the early 50s and then she compiled all in this book, which did fairly well when it was first published. Then she goes blind at about age 50, and that's when her writing career took off. She became a harlequin romance writer, and she wrote about 20 harlequin romances. She's writing while she's blind so she can't use a mouse or anything – she has to remember the keystrokes for opening up a page, for finding where she is in the story. For finding her story she's got to memorize the keystrokes – she was amazing. And then she had one of the first voice-activated computers, so you go to her house, and she'd be writing [imitates her mother speaking aloud to the computer], “T-H-E, space, C-O-W, space, J-U-M-P-S, period.” Anyway, so using this voice synthesizer and this computer she wrote about 20 romance novels. And then she wrote another novel that was called No Crystal Stair which was a fictionalized account of her life. … It's the story of middle-class blacks and the struggles that they deal with, and how they maneuver through America – this racist America – and I think it's important to understand, which is not understood a lot, how much joy there is in being black. There’s all this talk about racism and all the bad things that happen – we don’t talk about the joy – the music, the food, the church, the community, family – the joy of being black. I think my mother was trying to tell that part of the story too. I think it’s a story that still needs to be told, over and over and over again.

DB: What would you say your proudest accomplishment has been?

GR: [laughs, shrugs] It’s yet to come. Probably republishing my mother’s book. That was a big deal for me. And going across the country with her.

DB: Was it difficult for you to take her story and put it into play – like the writing process and having it performed?

GR: It wasn't difficult writing it because my mother's book is full of great dialogue so essentially, I stole her dialogue and I used it. And my mother wrote a sequel to this book, and she was going to call it The Trouble with Being a Grandma or Grandma Stories or something like that. I had been working with her while she was in her waning years of her life – she kept writing the sequel and so there’s the stories that she tells in a sequel are just hilarious. And they're poignant – she went blind, so she has a chapter called “Going Blind I see More Clearly.” And she's the only person I could know who could write about blindness and going blind and make it funny. And she said, “The trouble with going blind is you begin not to see, and then she goes on a riff about how you could put cinnamon in the greens and pepper in the applesauce. All of these weird things that she did because she couldn't see. It's a funny riff on going blind and she also has a chapter about her children, how they got divorced or got remarried. And she
writes about divorce and mix up in marriages and mix ups and all of this stuff. She writes about her grandchildren, who was my daughter, and I think she [Ginger’s mother] said at some point in it she's writing on a form and the form, as all the school forms asked, “What's your race?” And she [Ginger’s daughter] wrote “white.” And I think maybe it was me or my father who said, “You’re not white.” She said, “Well, I wrote black last year – I change it every year. I’m white this year.” So, she took it upon herself to solve the problem of the mixed-race kid by just changing it every year. …. I put all that in the play and it's really funny. It's about a black woman who marries a black man who comes to Sacramento, and then she faces integration and then her children get married and some of them married black people and some of them married white people, so you've got these blended families that it goes from all of that, and it tells all of these stories about that. And it's funny and sweet, and her audience when she wrote the book was white mothers. Her children were just entering this white world and she was afraid they were going to be mistreated and she had lived in this cocoon when she was very protected, this upper middle-class cocoon in Atlanta, Georgia, where she was precious. She wanted to tell these white people that “my children are just as precious as yours. And just as fragile. Please be kind to them.” That was her message, and she saw her audience as white mothers and she wanted to tell them that. So the stories are really about children, and how easily they could be hurt and how bruised they could be. As a mother they're out there in the world, and you really can't protect them from that. Anyway, my mother was a really good writer.

DB: And what do you feel is the most pressing either social or political or economic problem facing the black community in Sacramento today?

GR: Well, I don't know if it's facing the black community, I think it's facing all of us. And that is homelessness. I mean it just breaks my heart, and so many of the people that I see on the street out there are black – disproportionately so – and historically I know why that is: I know about housing discrimination. I know about criminal justice discrimination, but it's not just black people. We're like the new Calcutta – the New York Times used to call it. With this, the thing that worries me is that I don't know how to solve it. I've been writing about it for a gazillion years, and I've seen every plan and read every plan – “housing first, no they've got to get sober first, blah blah blah.” I looked at it, and I don't know, we need to rethink how we design our communities.

DB: And going back to the play in Oak Park, how was that received by the community there?

GR: Everybody who saw black or white, liked it, because everybody can relate to it. Everybody has lived the experience that if you’re black, you've lived it, and if you’re white, you recognize it – it's an experience. What I liked about when I presented the play was the number of middle-class black people who come up to me and say, “Oh
gee, thank you. Thank you for telling my story, that it's not the drug addict, it's not the guy who went to prison. It’s not the single mother story again and again and again. It is the story of ordinary black families living through an extraordinary time in America, and it's their story and it reflects them in a very authentic way. And they aren't often reflected in that way.

DB: And since your retirement, what sort of projects have you been working on, or what are you involved in?

GR: I did tell you I have these two beautiful grandsons – I babysit sometimes. My husband is disabled – he had a stroke – and I’m his caretaker so I’m involved in that. I play pickle ball, which is a wonderful sport for old people – watch out for your knees. I take classes at City college. I’ve taken a playwriting class, I’ve taken a gazillion art classes, I’ve taken stage construction design classes. I’m writing a screenplay based on my mother’s novel *No Crystal Stair* …. I wrote a book which I sort of finished – I’ve been writing it forever about my experience as a journalist. One of the things that most impacted me as a journalist were a series of stories I did on farm workers. Many of them were in the country, undocumented, and they had been exposed to all these different pesticides, and they were giving birth to children with these horrific birth defects. There was this one child who was born with no arms, no legs …. And it was just shocking – his mother must have been exposed to every kind of chemical you can think of, and when you are exposed in the womb, the unborn baby is impacted in a way that's just… [trails off]. So, I wrote a series of stories about it, as it when I was working at Channel four, but I also am writing a novel about it, and I want to turn that into a movie. Anyway, so I’m doing lots of stuff. [BREAK]

DB: Okay, so what would you say, is the most meaningful place in Sacramento to you? This can be either from your childhood or the life you've made since you returned [to Sacramento]?

GR: I don’t know, the Sierra Center, because I went to elementary school there and there’s a mural on the wall, with my picture on it. And at Sierra School, my mother was the PTA President and the Vice President and the Secretary of something, and it was a very special place for me when I was a kid. And Sierra Two …. when my father was on the school board, they had all that earthquake safety stuff, so all of these beautiful schools had to be abandoned because they were not earthquake safe. And they became community centers – and Sierra Two became a community center. So where I went to kindergarten and first grade and second grade – where the foundation of Sacramento was, you know, me. That place is kind of special to me.

DB: And before we wrap up, is there anything else that you'd like to add?
GR: I just want to say that I think when these sorts of programs are put in place, there's a there's a sense that people are looking for us to tell the bad things that happened. That there's a search for, “What bad happened to you because you're black?” And I suppose some bad things happened to me, like a guy didn't invite me to the prom or something. But I lived a very happy life in Sacramento, and I can't remember being wounded by racism. I recognize it – my parents weren't able to buy a home where they wanted to, sometimes I'm followed in stores, and you know things happen, but I've had a joyful life here. And I've had many more good experiences than bad. You know there's one story I did want to tell you about.

GR: I think is important, and I think it's reflective of the time. I was on the editorial board of the Sacramento Bee, and I think it was the first year I was there, so it must have been ‘88 or ‘89 or something. And one of the things you did was interview candidates for public office. … There was a controversy about the fact that there were no black assistant district attorneys, and that was a problem for that office, and the fellow who was being interviewed said, “Well, one has to be concerned with whether the district attorney will be too sympathetic to the defendants if they're black.” And I felt like gee I'm glad I'm here because I'm not letting that one pass. Are the white candidates too sympathetic to the white defendants? I mean, this is a guy who's running to head the office that is going to prosecute criminals and he can't hire a black attorney for that job because he's afraid they'll be too sympathetic to black – it's the racism in that answer was just stunning, to me, and this is the guy at a point where he's seriously considered for that job.

GR: And it was emblematic because it reminded me that Nat Colley – that big deal civil rights icon from the South – when he came to Sacramento and he applied for a job with the county, he wanted to work in the district attorney’s office – he had graduated from Yale – and the only job he was offered was garbage man. So …. all of that came to the forefront of my mind as I’m listening to this candidate for district attorney talk about how you can’t hire black …. Anyway, there's one bad I was aware of.

DB: And how did you react to that?

GR: You're in a room full of a bunch of people – including at the time, CK McClatchy, who was the famous owner of the paper – and let's face it, he [the candidate] didn't get the endorsement of the paper – he did not get the endorsement. And there's certain things that you feel, in your career there's certain things that you write about, and that you're proud of and those are the kinds of times you want to be there, you want to be in the room.

DB: I'm glad he didn't get the endorsement.
GR: [laughs] Or the job.

DB: Well, thank you so much, Ginger, for taking the time to do this and telling your story. I really, really enjoyed reading your mother's memoir.

GR: Thank you. Good I'm glad.

DB: Yeah, I'd really love to see the play when that happens again too.

GR: Yes, I know, would you please, if you have any influence on the B Street Theatre, tell them they ought to do it. See ya.
Lloyd Gavin: January1213@yahoo.com 916-823-6757

Date of interview: December 9, 2021
Location of interview: online over zoom in Sacramento, CA

Acronyms: JT = James Tapiz (interviewer) LG = Lloyd Gavin (Interviewee)

The interviewer, James Tapiz is currently a Public History graduate student at California State University, Sacramento. He attained his bachelor’s degree in History from California State University, Sacramento in 2020.

The Interviewee, Mr. Lloyd Gavin, is originally from Louisiana, where he graduated from Xavier University of Louisiana and then was a math professor/instructor at California State University, Sacramento.

JT: Hello.

LG: hello.

JT: Okay so, today is December 8. My name is James Tapiz, I'm doing this interview for the African American experience in Sacramento.

So, Lloyd, tell me about your experience working at Sac State.

LG: I arrived on Sac state’s campus on June of 1973. I was asked to the Upward Bound program. At that time, the meetings were in what is called old library on the second floor. If I remember that correctly, the students were not very strong. And I did what I could to help them with quite a few of them did pass the first exam. In order to get to the I think it was math 49, during the end of the month I received a book from Professor of American River College they had written. And it was supposed to be in order to help students gain math proficiency.
I gave it a quick glance, and I thought it would be an excellent tech tool, students that I will decide to instruct in this program. So I reported to the department that I can at that time, the way he told me that I was really hired to be the instructor for that program. I thought there was some false communication because I thought I was hired to be a professor of mathematics. And I made it very clear to the chairman at the time that that was a just move on the departments part. he wanted to exonerate himself by saying, what we will do is ask that you teach three units of this program. And the rest of your units, you can come to the math department. I told him. I didn't think that was an obvious thing to do with to having to move my family 2000 miles and not having told me the full story. And I think he felt bad about it. So he said, What would you suggest. And I thought maybe it could be a self paced students could use, and at the end of the semester. They can take the test to see if we can move up. And I told them at Xavier, the school I had come from that you had a method of putting students in pods of five, by making them responsible for each other. That is, if one of them passed but the others failed, then the one who passed would not go on. He thought it was a good idea. He says, can we get someone to coordinate with. I said, well, I'll coordinator for this first semester in there after that will give you time to find someone to do it full time. And that's what actually happened. At the end of summer, we found someone and they moved the program, out of the library into what is now the math-science building. I guess it's called the math building, the building the math department is now in. And they gave me a little tiny room. They had someone to partition A large room into a dining room, which was about the size of a closet. And the table was put there with the multiple copies of this book. Students were not allowed to remove them, And they've worked in
flat in groups of five. As it turned out that proved to be quite beneficial because really
everybody passed exam. So the math department requested that the person who is
older be made a full time math person. But yet, over this math lab, And I was essentially
free from that program, except in name. When I didn't really have to be there anymore.
That person. later obtained Student Help, Graduate Student Help to work in the math
lab with her. And the program, became such a powerful program that any other
departments will come into the math department to understand how it worked. And what
resources they used in order to gain that particular success. So the math department in
some sense became like the queen of innovation. But it was really using a program that
was used at Xavier in which I had left. So, in some sense, I gained some notoriety and
the University of being the person who moved the math department into this new
method, new arena. And at the same time, introduce something that no other
department, really could do. As a result of that. I was asked to move into the dean's
office with Associate Dean. I rejected that I felt my role should be a professor, but the
pressure was really very great in the sense that the math department that everybody
should have a right to those activities that they champion on campus. Now I skipped
quite a bit of light, because the first year, I was under an African American president.
That mainly was the reason I was hired to see I didn't know the politics of the school at
all. I mean I just thought I was taking a job to do a particular task.

JT: Right

LG: When it turns out that was not really the case, the math department was really
under fire. Not only the math department, the entire campus was under fire for being a
racist campus. And by hiring me, the math department was sort of like showing, we are
doing things to satisfy this African American president. He didn't do well, because by the end of that year, He was terminated as president. He did some strange things, I don't want to go into all of them but they will they will weird things. But they had a lot to do with how I learned about the politics of the school. Why I was there. Why I was treated the way I was treated. And what was the ultimate theme of this whole process that I was a part of that I came in, didn't know anything about. to fill you in with more details that President was, African American, you put there by the governor of the state, Ronald Reagan will leave the campus I think Ron regan. I don't know what it was I wouldn't really want. But I think maybe he was trying to say he believed in equity. I don't really know. You know.

JT: Yeah

LG: came on the scene but the faculty senate rejected this move around a Reagan. So, they attacked, who black men, they did everything to undermine him. And they took a vote of no confidence. He stayed on as long as he could. And finally, it was clear he had to go. Well, what he did was promoted certain black people in positions to show that he was trying to follow the mandate of Governor, Ron Reagan at the time. And he promoted a lady out of the English department who had come after me and he promoted. Oh he promoted. I don't remember all these people, but what what he was doing was trying to say, I want the campus to be an equitable campus where the blacks were involved as well. My department, put me up for promotion to show that they were trying to comply with they really weren't interested in me being promoted. And the reason that I know they weren't interested is something that happened further down the line. Not that year. Well it turns out the lady who came after me, was promoted she was
an English. And there was a reason why she was smart, no no no don't get me wrong, she deserved to have been promoted. I don't want you to think that this was a bad deal.

JT: Right.

LG: It's just that when he selected her, it was political, as well as academic. She's very intelligent woman, very capable. She was from the department that the lead person of the fact that the Senate who was attacking the president. She will be more than, somewhat to pacify him, as well as because of her academic record. So it was a dual thing that's, that's what makes it so difficult because what was done satisfy two goals. But when he promoted her, he pushed me down, even though I was there also. And when he pushed me down, I became somewhat upset. And I asked what were my options at the local level. And I was told, you can file a complaint with the dean, and if the Dean saw fit, you can go to the Vice President, so I did. And I went to the dean, and the dean thought that I should have been moved up. And he, he, No no I got that wrong I'm sorry, there was, there was a person in my department. I'm sorry. I said that.

JT: It's okay.

LG: It was a person in my department. Mexican American. He had come the year prior. And he was supposed to work with the students as well. When I came, they saw released him and put me in that program. And what they did is they put him up a promotion. Because the Dean was Mexican American they were solving that problem. And I couldn't understand why he was put in. I have more credentials than him and I had been there, a year and I had given them this program that everybody say was so great. It was attached to my name so, I was told you can go to the request a hearing. [after brief pause] LG: Okay, I'm sorry about that.
JT: It’s Okay.

LG: Um, Dean did allow me to go forward. And I met with the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and we sat down into this meeting. And he proceeded to say that he was going to back the dean. And I resented his attitude and his reasoning, and I requested to see the president. He said the President is going to say what I say because I am the Vice President of academic affairs and I said I don't really care. I said I don't really care, I want him to tell me that I am not deserving of this promotion. Well, I'll give you more detail because much of it was relevant person whom that Dean was more than world Mexican American. He didn't have a PhD. And he wasn't near a PhD. I had already been qualified for the PhD, but I was just waiting for them to confirm it. So I had essentially a PhD in waiting. And they move, someone who didn't have one above me for political reasons. Well when I met with the President, the interesting thing, this is the African American president. He never looked at me. If you've ever seen the president's office. He looked out of the window, which means he was looking North And the table I was that looks south. He never once turned and look anywhere near me. When he proceeded to talk And he said, he thought he made the right move. And I told them him I didn't think so because I sent you the head of PV and just hadn't been confirmed. Because they confer at a certain time, and this person only had a master's degree there was there was nothing in confirming that degree. It was a political move. and he said, , that's the way it's going to be. And I asked him to look at me, and he refused. And then I got up And I say, No, he said, No, he said. He said, I'm certainly will be promoted next year. At that point he thought he was still be president, next year.

JT: Right.
LG: When I left that office. Competitive time I got back to the math on a bulletin came out on one of faculty chairperson say that that President had resigned. The black people on campus, they decided they will give him a going away party. I started not to go but in the last minute, I decided I think I will go so I signed up to say I was going. And we stood in line and he was the one side of the table was on the other side of the table. And he got to me and he looked at me and he started to cry. And I said, don't you worry about me I will do all right you take care of yourself. When he looked at me, he actually started crying. He knew he had done wrong. And that was his problem. We should always do, what you know is right whether people like it or not. That's the thing about Girth, that's what everybody is saying about Girth, he did what he thought was right. The next person who came in was from the business department in the middle of the year he just automatically promoted me.

JT: oh wow

LG: My department was stunned. Because no one knew why this man did. I was stunned too. So, there was no reason why he should have done it I hadn't been in the paperwork. He just automatically sent this note to the department and sent one to me email And I looked at it, don't believe this. He was in that position for just the one year, then they hired Donald Girth, and this was interesting, he was a very interesting man. Everything that's written about him that you see is not only true its beyond true. I can attest, everything that was written. When I finished with this, you understand in reality, that everything that was written was true. Donald Girth was the champion of trying to make Sac State a real community that accept people on, not what they look like, what what they can contribute to mankind. At that time, I was in Toastmasters. And I was the
governor, Governor of the local Toastmasters district, that district was very large is one of the largest districts in the world. It covered all the area from the Oregon-California border, all the way down to Manteca from the Diablo Mountains, all the way to Salt Lake City. But it's currently. No, I'm sorry, not Salt Lake City. it's about half of California. And it would go up to Iowa and go up, just passed what's the capital of the state of Washington? [Spokane] its up all the way up to. up there, through to the California Canada It was a huge district, and I was responsible for all of that territory.

JT: Yeah that’s big.

LG: As a result, I think it was the second largest district in the whole Toastmaster world.

JT: Wow.

LG: Well, that meant all the Toastmasters in there was subject to my control. Yeah. Because I learned a lot from this one thing is that when you have a task, don’t put it off. Do it right away. and do it to the best of your ability. And that's what I learned, other than they actually taught you that when you became governor. And you became governor by arriving two chairs, from a club president, all the way up club president, then you go to administrative governor, Lieutenant Governor, then governor so yeah, there's a lot of training going on in your learning certain things. And this is what they will priming you for. They will also priming you to learn how to speak extemporaneously, how to, how to. I won’t say pacify people but how to look for the best in people and draw out the best in people, those were skills Toastmasters taught. So by the time I had gotten to the governor’s position, I had developed those skills. And it turns out, even though I was the first black governor of that district, they they apparently liked, because I’ve learned to practice their skills. I really learned them quite well. So people responded to me quite
a bit. Whenever they wanted someone to come in and give a speech, they will ask me to leave Sacramento and come to them and speak. So, I found myself going as far as Reno, I was going all over that area. And people will ask me to speak. I never knew why I didn't think I was a great, but because I knew I could speak extemporaneously, but I think I was a great. It turns out, Girth heard about this. You heard about it because a speaker was supposed to come from the United States Army. As an army facility, outside of Sparks, Nevada and So they call Toastmasters say we were supposed to have a speaker who wants to come for Veterans Day Program, and he didn't show up, could you get somebody from Toastmasters. So they called me and asked me would you go up and do this. And I said, Well, I'd like to be with my family, and I said, Okay, I'll go. So I went. It was a two day thing, I had to sleep up there. The reason I had to sleep because once I did what they wanted me to do stay another day, we want to bring a High School in and we want you to talk to this high school. And I stood out in front of these kids. I think of more than one high school. And I began to talk. I talked about one hour and then I asked if you have any questions, please ask, and I'll answer and they started asking, and I will answer that question because I had learned the skills, the kernel of that base Army facility was so impressed, he contacted Donald Girth, and told Donald Girth what I had done. Girth said to the dean, I want Gavin to be a vice president and I want him to go out and speak for this campus because he's an image of equality. And I said, I don't want to do that. I want to be a professor. He asked the second time, I don't want to do that, I want to be a professor. Then the dean said you can't turn the president down three times. So, he sent me an email and he said, come and see me, I want to see you he's a very nice man, truly, was a nice man. He said,
there’s a speaking engagement I’m supposed to do but take a can’t go to and I’m gonna send my wife and I want you to travel with my wife. So, his wife and I went to UC Davis, and she was representing the university, and she will grab the whole my arm. Just as a wife and she walked in as proudly. She was making a statement, here’s this black man, And I’m black, I’m not Brown, I’m black. Here’s the black man, he’s tall, and she’s holding on to me like I’m her husband and then she spoke and she asked me to say something nice. I don’t remember what I said but everybody, they seemed that whole thing was so transfixed for me. Because people at UC Davis who was sorta, there was sort of a cloud. There was something they never expected because Sac State had this this stigma of being a racist campus and here I am speaking with the president’s wife and she’s holding on to me like her husband I came back she reported to a husband that I had done well. So he asked me to come up again. I went up, he says, I would like to make you Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and you will be in charge of outreach to the community, the black community, the Chicano community, the Asian community and I said, I don't want to do that, I want to be a professor. He says, before you make up your mind, think about it. So I went back and I sent them an email about a week later and said, I don't want to do that, I want to be a professor. He's a very, I, I didn't know what was going on at the time. But I can see he was a very righteous man, righteous in more than one way I mean, a person who felt he was anointed to do a particular job and he was not going to renege on that job and that job was to wipe away the racial discrimination that was associated with Sac State. It turns out one of the people on the board was black, he fought with Girth, which I never could understand more than anybody else there. But Donald Girth got a particular proposition passed over
California State Assembly. I think it was first to start off in the assembly And it was passed that there could be no discrimination, race, creed, color in public education. This man even though he was still on the board, moved out of California into Oregon, and he was still let him come in and he was still fight Donald Girth, but he didn’t look like me, you could tell one of his parents would have been light skin. And there was always that problem among black people, your skin color determines the image that you had. If your mother was one color and your father was a dark color, you know, or if your father and mother were both dark in slavery, you kept in the field. But if one is light, one dark, then you can come into the house you know, that stuff, that stuff still exists. It probably will never go away. But Donald Girth knew about that. He was quite aware. And that's why he wanted me to do that because he knew I could speak extemporaneously. I had the skills because that Colonel, that Colonel gave me all kinds of credit, Not only that, he gave me a medal, It's upstairs somewhere that Colonel, give anybody who went over and above the call of duty. So Donald Girth pushed me. He really did push me. When I finally learned about the politics of Sacramento State, that's when I was beginning to learn. So you will really hire for really one and only one reason. You will have to work with people at the bottom and you were supposed to stay there. But because you have brought this new program, and everybody else was on board with this program and fascinated, you were able to leap out of it by the grace of God. Well, the other part of the story was Donald Girth had a vice president for academic affairs, who’s a member of the math department. In fact, I think he was called a provost. He gave him a new name. It turns out she wanted me out of the department and she asked me what she, let me think about this because I want to get the details correct. She worked with the chairman.
The chairman did everything he could to make my life miserable, that Chairman still has power on that campus, which is surprising because he's retired. Anytime a person came to him about any situation that remotely talked about me, he would send it to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, who's the Provost now and that means she was in charge of academics. She was sent down to him and tell him to pressure me to leave Sac State.

JT: oh no

LG: And I said to him. I came, no I said to him, that I did everything I was supposed to do and if you look at my student evaluations, they all said that I was a very hard Professor, but he is fair, they all said that. This is what most of those people tried to do. I learned something about how the system was working. I learned that most of those kids thought that if they came to class, they will automatically be passed, because I mean, they actually will say that to me. As I wrote on the first day, you are graded by your test and your homework, your test falls in a certain group and you get an A in another grouping going to be another group is C D or F. I don't care if you got here before me. It has nothing to do with it you don't even have to come, as far as I'm concerned you just have to pass the test. They had never heard of that. and I couldn't I didn't understand the school I had come from, Xavier, if one person fails in a group of five, everybody feel so everybody worked together, make certain nobody feels right. I was trying to understand what's this I come all the time. And they would get visibly upset at me. And I finally figured it out when I was teaching, he made me teach statistics. Statistics something, I didn't know anything about he just gave it a book he said you want to teach them. He said, you're going to teach this. So I took the book and I started
teaching it. And I turned out to be one of the best teachers there was one better than me because he had been teaching it the longest, and he was very good. But all the kids say, go to Gavin. And they will pass the test. And I didn't have a problem but I remember one girl. It was one semester, gave me this class, it's really a statistics course for business people and I passed out my paperwork and said this is the way we work it, we we have three tests and a final. The tests will amount to 60% of the final grade. The final 20%, and the homework made up the rest. And this girl came, and she scored an 80 on the first test. And she was happy, because, well, for that group that was a challenging course. The next test. She scored 60. It was getting harder for her.. And when the third test came around, it was, was actually called dead week, and you can't give tests. So I told the class. I have to give three tests and I can't give it until next week, I say, how many of you are in favor of me giving a test hands all went up, I don't remember if her hand, her hand may not have gone up. She sat right in the front, near me. So when the test came on that Tuesday. The chairman came to the door and knocked on the door. He said, you can't give this test, this is dead week. and he said, you have the one students came to me and said, you forced them to vote, so you have to abort test. She wanted those two scores. I say that the test is to be aborted, the chairman said someone complained against the test, and went to the Vice President and that I can't give the test. And everybody must have three grades. So, this means that you will have to come back next semester and take your third test. And they all said Oh no! I said you have to take three tests and we only have two, so I cant construct my final grades because it's based on three tests. A final and homework. Oh, then look at that woman. When I said, first semester, I mean the first Saturday of next semester,
come to this room at 8am. I will have your test, if you don't show up, you get a zero.

They all came back, you see there were seniors in there, they were saying I have, I have a job waiting for me, I think I might have said, well, there's not much I can do about that. I said, people hired me, who told me I can't give this test so here's what I'll do, If you give me the address of the person to whom you're going to work, I'll write a letter, and tell them what your status. And what I think would like may happen to you. But I can't say definitively, quite a few did that you know and I will look at what they have. And then I will make the decision. I think this person, more likely will pass. That's the way it went, first saturday of next semester we all came back to the room. She was there take the test. I went to the office to grade. So, I hurriedly did everything. The chairman came to the office. The interesting thing he said, how did she do? He wasn't worried about the whole class. And I said, I'm gonna tell you the truth, that leading me the lowest possible passing grade, I said if I could have subtracted one, she would have failed. But I said I tried, but I just couldn't. The vice president came to the office and said to me, Lloyd, we would like to leave us the next day, and allow us to move my family 2000 miles to come to you and run over. Right. So that's quite a trip. That's quite a trip. 2000 here from New Orleans on the way to Sac State. I'll find you a position. She said, I'll find you a position, anywhere you go. And I said, That's, she, she stormed the way she was angry. I'll never forget that this happened before so, as I was coming out of the building, She was coming downstairs, she was in the math department. And I looked at. And I could tell is going to happen to this. And by the time I got home, which is 20 minutes drive in the campus. I got a call from a member of the math department, and
said, this is Sandy, just had a massive stroke. And she’s in Mercy Hospital, you can you can feel the energy you know?

JT: Yeah.

LG: Yeah. Well, I got in my car and I went to mercy. And there was this woman in a fetal position. That's what happened And I, I held a like a baby, you know, my chest.

I took a book that I always liked. And I was reading from this book, as I read. I can still feel. She's giving off energy it was not a good feeling. When I came to the end of my passage. And I said to her, I will come back and see you. of course, she couldn't speak.

And then I let her go, a year later, that person call me sir, Sandy wants to see me and scheduled for you to come to her house at 10am, I got there and her hand was frozen, she could barely talk here.

JT: Yeah.

LG: And I said, How are you, and she answered, but I'm gonna be truthful with you, my understanding of what she was saying was not very clear. So I reached over, like I did when I had her in the hospital. She responded and not responded, you know, like she yeah, yeah okay then she's, and I said, we will see each other again. And I left. Wally had come in and that's why they told me, he said you know you have a white man's job He graduated from the same school I graduated and see what they had told him, we want to hire this black guy, and we get rid of black president, He's gonna leave, then you will come in, Well I didn't leave, I was there 20 years, I see him teaching at night, part time, and I would see him, and he would always look at me with this this disdain. I knew he didn't like me, but I never knew the reason for. But it wasn't until that meeting with Sandra that realized it, Oh, that's it, so it cemented itself because I would always go
to the symphony with seats from the physics department. He always in front of me what
is like way behind my wife, and I guess that the Physics Department didn't want black
people in it, so they were part of wishing to get me out.

JT: Right.

LG: Well, that's not obvious to you because I didn't give you the span of that story but
I remember I went to a Symphony. And the person who didn't like me, who had teaching
at night, who they hired in my spot, as I left was sitting right in front of me. I think he had
told him, that's Lloyd's seat, He's a season ticket holder. So we know it was his. And
then you could turn around and look into the face. He turned around and look me in the
face like you've ever seen Satan. I just could not believe. But there's more to that story
you don't know about physics department got in it, and the chemistry department got in
into that whole science thing was anti-black and when the math department brought me
in. They all coalesced into, we got to get him out. This story goes on and on and they
was good that came I was story, that Dean, who tried to get me to join the president,
she, she started traveling with me also. What they did is, Girth, I think yeah yeah I think
it was Donald Girth. He sent her out with me and must have said, you travel with Lloyd,
and see how he operates. That was before he wanted to make the vice president. So, I
was going to San Francisco State. I went to San Jose State. I went to Chico State. She
would go with me and she watched how I taught, and that's why he was convinced
that's why we want you to do this job because you can get up in front of anybody, and
you can sell. He later moved her up higher. She was the one who told me you can’t turn
the president down three times, and I said, well, watch me. I knew if I wasn't faculty that
he couldn't fire me, because I hadn't done anything.
JT: Right.

LG: But I knew if I joined his team, he could fire me anytime he wants because you're working for the President, but that wasn't the reason I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do it because I felt I was a teacher. I didn't feel I wasn't. They watched how I wrote my reports. You are natural at this you have cheerful reports and statistics enough, as I am not going to be an administrator there were things going on in the background I didn't know, so the pastor at St. Paul wrote to the President. I didn't notice that until I retired. And they pulled out all the letters and said look, this has happened. I mean, people were writing letters. Using my name and saying, I had told them XYZW at me. I had never even heard of these people and I said I had never talked to any of the people. I don't know what they're talking about. They used that as cover for gaining resources from the university, because they knew if they use my name the people thought it would be innovative and it would work. In fact, one of them was a black Think Tank. And they said that Lloyd said they use this at Xavier and I was scratching my head this awareness on this. I'm still befuddled by all that happened but the dean who had been pushing me to my decision said here's what I want you to do, I want you to go to Burbank school. And I want you to teach a class there. Because if you teach a class there, the kids, there will see a black teacher from the university and then they'll start coming to the university. So this was Donald Girth’s term. He wanted me out in the field. So people can see a real person, and they can say, Well, he looks like me, i'm going to go to the Sac State, and he really was clever, so I went and I taught, this is, this is what we will do, we will release you for three units at a time and you go to that school, teach a class that you think is appropriate, that they can get college credit for and they will
follow you. Well, I did, there was no book at that time of that type of thing. So I was teaching them what was being taught at the university. The kids didn't know that I didn't tell him about you gotta take notes because we don't have a textbook, there was no textbook. We will take notes to the class of 32 people I'll never forget that there, I'm going to be truthful with what they were three who beyond reproach. But most did, they would take notes. I would make time and let them ask me questions. And they would ask questions. And I would play devil's advocate, I would make up a lie, and see if they can detect them. They were very good, and these were kids who had signed up. Well, one of them was an African American male. One was a white female, and one was a female, she was Tongan. She was the nicest person that will she would come up and sit right in the middle on the front row and then let it go and look up at me like I was Jesus. I was transfixed with her you know, now don't get me wrong on smart kid now in a black male he said that, you know, He was interesting. So, as time went on, you can see how the class was emerging there was another one who did extremely well. She was very very very very dark. I mean excuse, excuse the expression but she was black. She wasn't what I call, smart smart but she's above average. And you can see her brain, you can see these people’s brain moves. And I will ask them questions. Sometimes I will point the questions that And I will screw it up to see how they respond, and they will say no, that's just not right. And that fascinated me. So to move this along. It turned out, I didn't know at that time that you know it, Burbank was the worst school in Sacramento City School worse, People will shoot guns on campus, stab each other. These kids in this room in the back, where our class was and then the front. The building you see when you drive down Florin road, that was the magnet school from Burbank of science
and mathematics. They weren't in that they were in the back. Well, but they will get a better education, when I was teaching them Well, it turns out, the boy Obviously, was the smartest of all the Boys, he, he hit a girl. and the principal saw it and the principal sent a note and said he was expelling this person I saw the note. So I went to the confidence that you got to stop this. You can't expel him, that boy is brilliant.

So I went to her, And I stood in front of that man. I said, Look, This kid is absolutely brilliant, he can be a mathematician. Don't Expell, please don't, and a tear started rolling down my because I just couldn't see him expelled. He said, I don't know what you're talking about. He's already been expelled. So, I walked out of that room, and I just never forget that man, I just had it turned out the man was related to me, but I didn't know that, you know he had gone to the army and he had become a captain. And when he got out, they gave him that job because that school was so bad and he said he would shape it up. He's gonna run it like it was a military, and he expelled this black kid, The kid went to Elk Grove School District and I never saw him again, you know.

JT: Yeah.

LG: The white kid who's obviously, the second smartest in the room, her father was a racist. she would go home and tell her father, what she learned from me, and her father told her that he had taught me that the night before. The way I found that out was I asked her something once and she said, well what did my father tell me. I said, what are you talking about last night. I don't even know your father, she said that her father tells me that he tells you what to say every night, I couldn't believe this, never still never saw the man. Never. That's it. I don't know your father. Your father has not taught me anything. I have a PhD in mathematics. Well, I don't think she graduated. I think the
father pulled her out of our program when he learned that he was exposed. And then the Tongan girl. The Counselor came to me on the, we called her V, she said, V doesn't go to any class but simply mine. She comes to your class, she does, she makes A's in your classroom listens to everything you said, she said she's gonna be a math teacher. Well okay, never see again. So the next one will be. That's not the way the game works. You gotta go to all your classes. She said why I said because you gotta graduate. They don't know what they're talking about I said no V, it doesn't matter you gotta go. So I asked to come sit watch her and see if she starts going. She started going. I don't know what happened to be but she was a smart kid. Then the third one who I said was black black black. She has a father that didn't think very highly of her. Well, that might be too strong. Her father didn't think she was a very strong student, and I told him. Well, yeah, she's not as strong as some of the other people that say but she's determined. And so that goes a long way. So he said, Where should I send her (for college). I think I would send her to a black college because black colleges they put in pods, and everybody stay together in one pod, and if one fails, everybody fails so they take care of each other. He says, okay, that's what I'll do. So, he sent her to Grambling. She graduated from Grambling, and she came back to California, and then she decided to be a lawyer. You know what she does now?

JT: what?

LG: she was an assistant district attorney for San Jose. Oh, and then she moved down to Huntington Beach, and I think she became district attorney, something like that. I'm not concerned about that, but I know she wanted the system district attorney district attorney, and San Jose. And when I saw her father once he said, Do you know what
happened to her? and I said, No, so he told me, and he was so proud. Let that be a lesson that perseverance is worth more than being smart.

JT: Yes.

LG: She was like a bulldog bite into something that she wasn't going to let it go. So he needs to thank you. She later contacted me, that's when she was in San Jose, or I think she was.. But there were others who did well and they all went to different places not one of them went to Sac State, someone went to San Francisco State, but not one went to Sac State, but it didn't matter because people had heard I brought them on campus and we have a special program for them, and I got some of the professors who I thought would do what I asked him, and when I asked them, I said, I'm going to give you a name, and you're going to give a lecture to some black kids who are coming on campus. They're going to be here for three hours, and then they're going to walk around campus, just to see what it's like because they've never been on Sac State's campus, the campus was very racist. And I said, your name will be Professor good math. The people I chose were Dick Cleveland, the husband to the woman who want to fire me to. Stan Hubert, He always fought for me. Maybe I chose Peter Griffin. Peter Griffin who didn't like me. When he when I came to the campus. He called me a ni*****.

JT: Oh wow.

LG: he was not a nice man. No, no, this is what happened in office next to me. And he came over and he said, I have a nanny I said what are you talking about.

He was let me know that he had come from a privileged family, and he had a black woman who took care of him. Peter was that type, but later. As time went on, Peter changed. You know what I told him because he was good at what he did. You know, I
didn't, I thought the kids were more important than how he felt about me. They did well. In fact, they did so well though those professors that the Chairman used the lecture to a tv audience. Wayne. And he asked me to do it for him. Because nobody else is going to do it, it was statistics, so I did. and I changed the color scheme and all, and I still have my face up there. What they did is the typed all my lectures out to Intel and the guy at Intel told the people who wanted to move up in green If you knew statistics. We could move up. And there's a class at Sac State. That comes over the air, and if you take it and pass, then you will get go up and great. I didn't know anything about it. They never told me so I was lecturing, not only to kids on campus. I would lecturing to an audience around Sacramento, Sacramento County, because they let those lectures go out, but they never got my permission. And I often wondered about it because you see I will, I remember I will be in the store, they would welcome me and say Hi Dr Gavin, and I will look at them and say hi. I was always the type of person that speaks to you if you speak back to me. I did not know that they were letting those lectures out. And then finally it came around. That's when they look at sites, they told me that they were going in town, and they want me to write a final for them. And that's it. Oh no, no, no, no, no. So they got somebody there to write their final, and everybody passed and they were so pleased that they wanted me to teach it again. But taught it three times. But this time, I knew it was going to bring people, and I was constantly saying, No, I want to be a professor. But what everybody's still remember that it's me who was a groundbreaker that set the whole program, it just didn't exist before.
An Oral History with Macia Fuller

Abstract:

In the context of the NEH African American Heritage fund granted to the city of Sacramento to preserve the history of Oak Park, the oral history features longtime resident Macia Fuller. Fuller describes and emphasizes throughout the interview that Oak Park was a multicultural community. Growing up in Oak Park, Fuller recounts her experiences in Sacramento’s public schools and college education. She describes her childhood living in Oak Park as “wonderful” and illustrates fond summer memories like hosting variety shows or going to Gunther’s for ice cream. Fuller also mentions how highway 99 isolated the Oak Park community. Though Fuller left Oak Park and lived in Fresno for eleven years, she vowed she would one day return and she did in the 70s with her husband and three children. Fuller highlights how her Christian faith led her to become more involved in the Oak Park community by volunteering at St. Hope and teaching Bible Fellowship classes. Moreover, Fuller hosted exhibits featuring her collection of African and African American art at many public institutions such as schools, universities, and the California State Fair. In most recent years, Fuller reaps how the Oak Park community is becoming “exclusive.” The re-gentrification and rising house prices are driving people who have lived in Oak Park for generations out. Racial profiling is becoming all too common and Fuller recaps how her brother was pulled over in Oak Park for “driving while black.” Fuller keeps Oak Park in her prayers and hopes to share with others that Oak Park was a multicultural community.
Macia Fuller

Born in 1946 in Sacramento, California, Macia Fuller grew up in Oak Park and attended various local public schools and pursued a degree at California State University, Sacramento. After applying to work for the International Business Machines (IBM), Fuller did not return to college and married her husband. For eleven years, Fuller lived in Fresno, but returned to Oak Park in the 70s. Since her return she has volunteered with St. Hope, organized workshops, curated and exhibited Africa and African American art, and taught Bible fellowship courses. Macia Fuller has impacted the Oak Park youth and hopes that Oak Park can continue to be a multicultural community as she remembered it once.

Christella Maldonado

Born in 2000 in Concord, California, Christella Maldonado grew up in the suburbs of Sacramento. As a first-generation college student, Maldonado attended California State University, Sacramento, and majored in History with a minor in Chicanx and Latinx studies. Maldonado’s final project was to conduct an oral history as part of the oral history methodology and practice course. Maldonado graduated in the summer of 2022 and pursued graduate study in the field of History.
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Wednesday December 1, 2021
12:30pm

Virtual Zoom

Macia Fuller: MF
Christella Maldonado: CM

*Filler words such as “uh, “um,” “you know” and “ah” are not included.

CM: Hello. So today is Wednesday December 1, 2021. I am Christella Maldonado, and I am conducting an oral history over zoom for the city of Sacramento's NEH African American Heritage Fund, the recording and transcription will be archived at the Center for Sacramento History.

CM: Please state your full name.
MF: My name is Macia Fuller.

CM: And may you please spell your name out for us.

MF: M-A-C-I-A. Last name F-U-L-L-E-R.

CM: Perfect. Can you state the place you were born?

MF: I was born in Sacramento, California.

CM: And please state your parents' name.

MF: My parents were Jimmy and Bessie Royster.

CM: Thank you, Macia.

CM: And so, I would like to start off by, kind of, going through some biographical questions of when and where you were born.

MF: I was born in Sacramento at County Hospital in 1946.

CM: (…)

CM: And so, where specifically in Sacramento did you grow up?

MF: My parents were living on Third Avenue in Oak Park. When I was born, and soon after that we moved to Santa Cruz way off of Broadway in Oak Park.

MF: And I've lived in a couple of other homes in Oak Park during my childhood on Sixth Avenue, and then on 11th Avenue. But my entire, (…) youth was in Sacramento in Oak Park.

CM: And could you tell me why you moved?
MF: Oh, we moved the first time I was an infant, so I'm not certain of what the reason of that move was, but it was into a home that we shared, not only with my grandmother and grandfather when he was not deployed in the Navy. But my mother's sister's she had two, who were married with children, also stayed with us for a period of time until each of those families were, including our own, were able to purchase our own home.

MF: The other time we moved was just from I think six avenue to 11th Avenue was just for (...) a better home. My father had advanced in his employment at McAllen Air Force Base, and they were seeking just a nicer home and a nicer neighborhood.

CM: (...) 

MF: [Chuckle].

CM: Was their ever--

CM: What are your earliest childhood experiences like growing up in those homes?

MF: Very fond memories. I remember when my parents said they were moving from Santa Cruz way that I was --

MF: I made a promise to myself that I would come back one day and purchase the house.

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: We had wonderful neighborhoods, just grew up with close friends that became family. We had variety shows and, in the summer, we hardly came home for lunch, because there was so much fruit growing on the trees in the area, you know that we could just pick something and eat it and keep playing.
MF: Once our chores were done, we were free to roam. It was a community of immigrants in my entire youth.

MF: Wherever I live. It was a very integrated community. People had come from the deep south, or they had emigrated from England or China or Japan, the Philippines, Portuguese, (...) it's just a multitude of nationalities and ethnicities in our neighborhood. Oak Park was the first suburb of Sacramento.

MF: And so, all those families (...) came with the hopes of employment, and a better life for their children.

MF: In fact, the only people that spoke English at home were the African Americans, or those who had emigrated from England.

CM: Thank you for sharing that with me. And so, you mentioned variety shows and where these variety shows in Oak Park while you were growing up?

MF: They were in my parents' garage!

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: When we moved neighborhood kids would get together and we charge a nickel. And then we would purchase food and drinks and you know treats and just have a party afterwards.

MF: Just one of the things that we did. We had a lot of freedom. Freedom that I regret that children today just don't have. We could roam in what we considered total freedom without any fear at all.

MF: You know, going from house to house. Just being children.
CM: And you, do you think that this notion of being children today in Oak Park is not the way you remember it when you were a child, like it's different? Has it changed?

MF: Well, 20 years ago, I was working in Oak Park with Kevin Johnson’s (…) [Forgets name of person she was going to mention]

MF: I worked for an organization that Kevin Johnson (…) St. Hope created for the community. And I realized that there had been some changes since I was a child, and not necessarily good changes.

MF: We didn't lock our doors when I was a child. Long after I was an adult, it took a lot of convincing to get my mother to you begin to lock her door.

MF: I don't remember a break in in the community. I don’t remember --

MF: Certainly not any shootings or problems at schools, not even fights.

MF: And not even fights during the time that I was going to school, and I'm a product of Sacramento schools. American Legion, Stanford Junior High School, City College, Sac High and Sac state.

MF: So, I realized working with the young girls at St. Hope that they had street smarts, and roughness that was unfamiliar to me.

MF: When we were growing up everyone seemed to know what right and wrong was. And even if you didn’t choose to do it, you admired the people who had morals and lived with integrity, and I did see a lessening of that.
MF: There was an unfamiliarity with anything outside of the community where we had a broader environment. We could walk from Stockton Boulevard to Land Park, ride our bikes and stop at Gunther’s or Vic's and come home.

MF: Kids, during that time that I was working at St hope, didn't know anything more than what was in the neighborhood. And we actually designed our program to include taking the children in groups of two’s or three’s outside of the neighborhood to families from St Paul Baptist church on Sundays, to have dinner with them so that they could experience a lifestyle apart from the very confined and limited understanding of what community was.

CM: Thank you. And can you tell me a little bit more about your role in St. Hope.

MF: I piloted the first program for girls at St hope. Kevin Johnson was a product of Oak Park. His mother grew up catty corner from our home on Sixth Avenue.

MF: And when he began the program he intended it first, for boys, alone, and he kind of caught some flack about that wanting girls to be included.

MF: And someone mentioned my name, and I was available. I was privileged to be able to begin that program for him.

MF: I prayed a lot, because I had grown up with the grandparents of these children, but their thoughts and experiences were quite different as I had said from my own.

MF: And I wanted to way to reach them to expand their horizons. And our goal was that they would exceed their own expectations, that of their families, and the community.

CM: And is St. Hope still an organization in Oak Park?
MF: Yeah, it is. I'm not --

MF: I have been away since that time. I have been away from Sacramento, and I am not certain of the extent of that program. When Kevin took over the responsibility of Sac High, I believe that many of the program attributes were incorporated in the remodeling of the curriculum for Sac High and the goals of Sac High.

CM: Is the organization located within Oak Park, and if so, where?

MF: It was on Martin Luther King Boulevard. Just off 14th Street there in the heart of Oak Park.

CM: And so, you did mention that you are a part of the St. Paul Baptist Church.

MF: Yes.

CM: What about your experience and your experience of attending the church?

CM: Well, my husband and I began our attendance and membership at St. Paul Baptist Church after we married and were away for 11 and a half years. I was raised in Kyle's Temple AME Science church.

MF: And it is still a part of our family. The emphasis on community outreach, supporting those who need help is still quite a centerpiece of our worship experience. We've been apart because of Covid, other than zoom meetings and in our prayer lines on Sunday mornings, Sunday school, and most of that has been continued via zoom, which we're really grateful for.

MF: We've just resumed meeting again. And so, it's a blessing to be back.

CM: When did you marry your husband?
MF: In December of 68. We are coming up on our 53rd anniversary.

CM: Congratulations!

MF: Thank you. By the grace of God, believe me.

CM: My grandmother kind of says the same thing.

MF: [Chuckles]

MF: It takes prayer.

CM: You tell me why you left Sacramento, for eleven and a half years?

MF: My husband had a scholarship at Fresno State prior to us getting married.

MF: And he left school during the Vietnam War and served in the armed forces.

MF: And after he got out of the army, he returned (...) to Fresno State to complete his degree, and we were married prior to that.

MF: And then we stayed raised a family, at least three of our children were born in Fresno and we had a late comer that was born here in Sacramento after we returned.

CM: Did you notice any changes between the time you were away in Fresno and then when you came back?

MF: Oh, amazing growth.

MF: Absolutely amazing growth. Fresno reminded me of the Sacramento that I grew up in a much smaller community.

MF: Its --
MF: Many people that I knew had remained in Sacramento. And those relationships, were reignited, but many more people that I had met (...) prior to leaving Sacramento.

MF: We always had a connection we came home for holidays and birthdays and that kind of thing. But Fresno is only two hours away, so we weren't totally isolated from what was happening in the community.

MF: I would say the growth. I remember taking my three older children on a tour of where I used to live in Sacramento and explaining to them that we used to play in what was then, now, a vacant lot that was cleared when highway 99 was built.

MF: My son looked at me and said you're older than the freeway?

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: And I thought yeah, I'm older than both the freeways in Sacramento, 99 and five. Because at the time we returned in the 70s, they were just opening up sections of highway five.

CM: How you think highway five impacting the community, and its relationship with other surrounding suburbs?

MF: Hmm. Well, I think, 99, first of all, really impacted my community in terms of it going through the neighborhood. Like I said next door to my grandmother remains a vacant lot that they didn't incorporate into the freeway, but the freeway is just beyond that.

MF: I remember my mother --
MF: Really campaigning in regards to how the original plans for highway 99 were going to cut off the Oak Park community. In the original plans, it's my understanding that they only had an on and off ramp there at Sutterville and 12th Avenue.

MF: And this was a great concern to the community, and they were eventually able to secure an exit bridge where Mc George is now by Oak Park, or McClatchy Park, and then one at Broadway, whereas in the original plans, it really would have isolated the community, and it wasn't something that was desirable.

MF: Then highway five not so much the Oak Park community. But I know that a lot of homes, owned by Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese families in the downtown area their homes were taken by eminent domain.

CM: So, you mentioned earlier the amazing growth factor. Do you mean growth, as in population growth or growth as and more opportunities?

MF: Population growth, mainly. The state government has always been an area in which people appreciated employment during my childhood. The army bases you know there was McCullen, Mather, and Signal Depo were here in Sacramento. And afforded a great deal of opportunity regarding employment that had decreased when I came back and steadily decreased, after I got back.

MF: When I think about opportunities --

MF: I know people who graduated from high school and went to work in industry.
MF: Telephone Company or other companies and work their way up into management and the rest of it, that certainly decreased, educational requirements are much higher now than when I was a child.

MF: I actually left Sac State [California State University, Sacramento] before graduating because I got a job at IBM, [International Business Machines] which was more money than my father was making raising a whole family.

MF: And it was an opportunity that I didn't feel that I could pass up.

MF: But that doesn't happen anymore.

MF: No. Those opportunities --

MF: The competition between young people who have degrees is so great for jobs that once didn't require degrees

CM: So, (…)

CM: Where did you work for IBM?

MF: IBM, International Business Machines.

CM: There was a company based in Sacramento or did you have to move?

MF: There were offices here. This is prior to my getting married. I was told of a opportunity a position at IBM that I applied for and qualified for and begin working there.

MF: And after I married, I worked for IBM in Fresno as a branch manager secretary. I started as a magnetic tape selectric typewriter operator.

MF: [Chuckle]
MF: As obsolete as anything could be but was able to advance from that position to a branch manager secretary in Fresno.

CM: And so, when did you come back to Sacramento to finish your degree?

MF: I didn't. I left school and I did take some classes. Well, I was working in as when my husband was finishing school, and then started a family, took a few other classes but sadly did not finish my degree.

CM: (...)

CM: Remember the initial interview we talked about wanting to join an African American sorority.

MF: Mm hmm.

CM: Could you tell me more about that?

MF: Well, I was invited to join the Delta sororities pledge group.

MF: The first one organized here in Sacramento, but at the time I was in attendance at Sac State. And it was required that there be a certain number of African Americans on campus to qualify as a pledge group, and the numbers did not support that.

MF: So, there was not an official Delta pledge group at that time until after I married and left Sacramento.

CM: You also mentioned, within our initial interview, (...)

CM: But did you curate a museum?

MF: I designed and curated exhibits --
CM: Oh, tell me more about.

MF: That’s all right.


MF: When my husband was in the military, he was deployed to Ethiopia with the U.S. engineering Corps, and as a map compiler. He began a collection that he started sending home to me that has grown over the years that we’ve been married.

MF: I started showing things when my oldest son who is now, 50, was in preschool, wanting his classmates to appreciate the contributions that have been made by African and African Americans. (…)

MF: It grew into a business actually.

MF: I received some grants from the Sacramento School District, also from the Metropolitan Arts Commission to do programs that I kind of refined during my time at St. Hope, looking for ways to engage students, to teach the values of faith, family, hard work, education, and creative expression.

MF: And so, I designed the curriculum using folk art to communicate those ideas with students and been privileged to do workshops in the community and schools and libraries for Sac State actually.

MF: I did a teacher development --

MF: I was part of the teacher development program. I guess those who were in attendance were there for credentialing requirements for additional education.

MF: (…)
CM: Amazing work.

CM: So where is the curriculum? Is it all on paper? Is this a collection stored in Oak Park?

MF: Okay. No, it is not a museum and the curriculum that I developed is something that I have used. I haven't been involved in several years.

MF: I spent 16 years teaching and lecturing for Bible study fellowship and have done, less and less of the curating and workshops.

MF: But--

MF: So, the collection is in my home and garage.

MF: And the curriculum I have hasn't been adopted as a school curriculum of any (...) particular school, other than people who have asked me to help out in different areas.

MF: For the Martin Luther King celebrations and especially during Black History Month, that kind of thing. [ Has continued workshops and exhibits for these celebrations].

CM: You have exhibited this curriculum, then, in these events? (...)

MF: The curriculum is three folk art projects, and I designed them to show students --

MF: The first of them is a bottle doll project. My mother used to make dolls out of coke bottles, and they put grass or rope or something into the top of the bottle and braid the hairs and wrap it in a piece of fabric.

MF: I adapted that using coke bottles from the old Coca Cola plant that was in Oak Park. Their bottles that fell off their assembly line they would give to me.
MF: [Chuckle]

MF: Okay. And the children would make figures that represented themselves, hopefully the positive aspects of who they were, their ethnicity and cultural heritage.

MF: And I would talk about the African American contributions both African and African American contributions to the world at large.

MF: Had exhibits on George Washington Carver and his inventions, which are many more than just using the peanut but it's what kids only knew.


MF: They are wire sculptures that are made by children in Africa. They are just toys, they shape them into cars and things out of wire and use them as toys.

MF: And those models inspired the kids to think of ideas. I would talk to them then about where they were going in life, how they plan to get there, and what help they might need you know to do that. And when they saw my creations or the creations that I had from African sources they were inspired to create things but they don't come together easily.

MF: So, they would oftentimes get frustrated and then I could talk to them about, what do you do when you're frustrated? What is help?

MF: It's not me doing it for you. It's me assisting you or directing you. You have to be engaged and involved in the finished product. How can you get ideas from what somebody else has done, even adapt your design to something that's more doable.
MF: So, the third one is a boutique, which requires step by step procedures, and if they're not followed step by step you get results that you didn't expect and oftentimes don't want.

MF: So, then we can talk about what happens when you try to shortcut? Or the fact that your elementary school education is the mean to an end. It's just the first step. Okay.

MF: And we can talk about how, what do you do when your choices lead to results that you didn't want? Or didn't expect? That was the kind of thing that I wanted to impart to the kids.

CM: (...) 

MF: And then the exhibits were more on line of with display of African artifacts that my husband started that collection, and then the things that we've collected over the years, adding to it. Women's work, inventions, a lot of other things, depending on--

MF: Comfort covers were one of them. (...) African American quilts, the Underground Railroad and that experience.

CM: Of course. Thank you. And the artifacts you just mentioned are there also in your garage as part of your collection?

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: Well, most of the artifacts are in my home. I don't know you can see shelves and stuff there throughout the home, and then some of the things are in the garage. Yes.

CM: And by any chance have people come to visit your home to look at your collection?

MF: I used to bring children. It was easier to--
MF: My children's elementary school is behind our current home, and teachers who would come over and some home schools class groups have come to my home to see the things but mostly --

MF: I did the second great Gold Rush, was one of the places that I exhibited, California State Fair, at UC Davis, the Pers Building, and a bunch of libraries and schools.

MF: Our church had an annual exhibit that would fill a lot of space, not just my own things but also from other members of the congregation.

CM: Is there like an organization of like collectors of African and African American artifacts?

MF: I don’t know if there is an organization, but there are quilting organizations. There is a national quilters organization of African American quilters, but mostly it was just an opportunity for people to bring their own personal collections or parts of it to be seen.

MF: The first time I did that here in Sacramento was at my children's elementary school. I was part of the parent teacher organization, and we were planning some multicultural events.

MF: The teacher was concerned that she had not been able to relate to exhibits that they had had in the past or programs that they had had in the past. And she wanted to know when we were going to do Americana.

MF: And I perceived that idea was --

MF: She was having problems relating to ethnicities other than her own.

MF: And so, I suggested that we do a Grandparents Day.
MF: I wanted to show her what Americana was.

MF: And at that elementary school we had 32 countries represented. Greek, Filipino, Portuguese, family from the Netherlands, African Americans, Hispanics, Japanese, Chinese, and it absolutely amazed me, and it scared me the quality of things that families brought in to the point where I couldn't be responsible for them.

MF: But I learned that there was so much that we have in common.

MF: You know everyone had textiles everyone had some kind of, pottery or ceramic ware. The family from the Netherlands brought in a mask that I would have sworn was African it was carved wood, it had horses' teeth and hair, and it was Viking, can you imagine? A Viking mask. An authentic Viking mask? Chinese and Japanese but in porcelain masks.

MF: Just beautiful, priceless things as far as I was concerned. Not only from the family's viewpoint but as representative of the art of that culture.

MF: We saw hats--

MF: That were Filipino and Chinese that looked like African hats. I saw beadwork from Native Americans that they themselves could not distinguish from the beadwork that I had from Africans.

MF: It was so much commonality of fact that we have an existence.

MF: A common commonality of existence that is shared rather than emphasizing the differences if we could focus on that commonality, it would draw us to appreciate each other a lot more.
CM: I definitely agree with that, and I wish I could have been there too at that event.

MF: [Chuckle]

CM: I would have been you know very intrigued--

MF: I'll pass the mantle!

MF: (Laugh)

MF: If you're interested, you can talk to me. Yes.

CM: What elementary school was this if I may ask?

MF: John Carabello.

CM: Is it in the community as well?

MF: That's not in Oak Park we live in South Land Park now.

CM: So, Grandparents Day was your own invention and--

CM: Is it, is it still celebrated at that Elementary School?

MF: It's been a lot of years. Like I said, my oldest son is 50 now, the youngest one is 37.

MF: And so, I have not been involved in the Elementary school for a long time. I did it for a lot of years for nieces and nephews and, that kind of thing but I have been away from it for a while.

CM: You mentioned that your exhibits have been to California State Fair and UC Davis would you happen to know the dates or the year?
MF: I can find out for you, but I have brochures from it but UC Davis, more than once and California State Fair I have to look and see for you that.

CM: So, you are currently in South Land Park not in Oak Park.

MF: No. No.

CM: And so, growing up in Oak Park. What were some fun places, what were you would go with your friends, as you were growing up and even after you returned back in the 70s, tell me about that.

MF: Well, Oak --

MF: McClatchy park or Oak Park was the center of the community the swimming pool there, my brother's playing baseball, father coaching.

MF: We went to Gunther's of course.

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: And Merlino's.

MF: Summer started when Merlino's opened their orange stand on Stockton Boulevard, and it was over when they closed.

MF: We went to the fair, of course, was there. Also, the old fairgrounds. It was a wonderful place to go.

MF: What would we do--

MF: We'd walk to William Land Park and catch all the Polly wogs.

MF: [Chuckle]
MF: The movies! There were--

MF: I mentioned that Oak Park was the first suburb in Sacramento. And when I was growing up, there were two movie theaters. There were all kinds of businesses there on-- (...)

MF: 34th Street that leads right into the park where Kevin Johnson has developed 40 acres.

MF: The Guild theater is still in existence and under his leadership has been refurbished.

MF: There was--

MF: It was just a very thriving community. McGeorge now has converted what was the library to their school facilities and the library was in the front and in the back, there was a recreation center where I took ballet lessons for 25 cents a month from city parks and recreation.

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: There were just a lot of things. The Turkey Day parade the big rivalry between Sac high and McClatchy.

MF: I mean, political leaders came to that we filled that stadium. It was quite a wonderful thing to walk to the turkey day game. I was carried on my dad's shoulders at first you know and then later went with friends.

CM: So, Sac high and McClatchy--

CM: Was this a football game that happened in Turkey Day?
MF: Yes, football game, and big rivalry. Yeah.

CM: Would you happen to know why so?

MF: Well, they were the two high schools in the area. Okay.

MF: Sac high being the oldest it was just a huge rivalry. Wonderful event. The fourth of July Parade ended at Oak Park for years and years. At McClatchy Park picnics

MF: I was trying to think--

MF: ... and we had our church events, of course, and house parties and great place to live.

CM: And are Turkey Days still being practiced?

MF: No. When Kennedy High School and all of the other schools were incorporated into it they said it was unfair, so it had to include the other schools.

MF: And so, Turkey Day thing is (…)

CM: So, there are no football games now?

MF: Oh well I don't think they're having any football games at all at City College anymore.

CM: Oh you mean Sac High?

MF: Sac High of course and McClatchy has their team as well. We're more of a baseball family so we went to baseball games forever.

MF: And--
MF: But, the Turkey Day game was at City College it was a big deal.

CM: Yeah, I see. (…) And what did they win a turkey or?

MF: I am sure there was a trophy.

CM: (…)

CM: Could you tell me a bit more about the Fourth of July parade like any anecdotes you could share with me?

MF: I remember--

MF: I recall that my father used to take me on his shoulders and then later as you grew up you went with friends and stuff to watch the parade and end there at McClatchy Park.

CM: What did the parade consist of? Fireworks?

MF: There was marching bands, veterans, and a typical big parade on the Fourth of July.

MF: The fireworks were shot off at Southside Park on Broadway, near New Helvetia.

CM: Did you ever help organize any community events like in your church, for example?

MF: We had our annual Black History Month exhibits.

MF: (…)

MF: Mainly, those were the ones our children's church programs I would incorporate some of the curriculum that I talked about making of the bottle dolls.
MF: The Black History Month exhibit was a huge affair. I can't tell you how many square feet that area was, but it was quite remarkable to see all of the things that would be included there.

MF: We had the Tuskegee Airmen come. We had Buffalo Soldiers.

MF: (...) 

MF: It was a highlight of the year.

CM: Is it still practiced?

MF: Unfortunately, Covid has curtailed many events and we have not had it in several years now.

[ FIVE MINUTE BREAK]

CM: So, you also mentioned earlier about MLK celebrations? Was that a part of Black History month celebrations or?

MF: There's a large community contingency during Martin Luther King's celebrating his birthday, and they were having it at the convention center when I was doing workshops there for kids and the community.

MF: I'm not sure--

MF: Of course, we haven't had any large gatherings in over two years now.

CM: So, that is a very important event within the community every year?
MF: Yes.

MF: In fact, the march traditionally started in Oak Park at the community center there on Martin Luther King Boulevard and went downtown.

MF: I believe last year it started at City College.

CM: Would you happen to know why the change happened?

MF: I don’t.

CM: And so, what did the march consist of?

MF: They had speakers and just community coming out in commemoration of all of the marches that were done in the 60s for Civil Rights.

CM: And have you attended them throughout the years?

MF: Yes. Many times, I wasn’t able to march because I was setting up a workshop at the convention center, but I have marched when I could.

MF: There were different aspects of the celebration. They usually came downtown and then there were speakers, and then different workshops and businesses who set up at the Convention Center just to have the community interact with one another and to network and to see what was going on.

MF: I had--

MF: There was a young lady that came from many years to visit the doll she had made. The first time she came to see it she [Doll] was still being shown.

CM: Oh, in your workshop in your exhibit?
MF: Yes.

CM It’s impactful right? Because they remember you they remember the significance of creating that doll.

MF: Right. I develop the projects on a budget, and friends from church or, people who sewed would give me scraps of fabric. It doesn't cost very much to make the things the contributions from the Coca Cola company (…).

MF: And I designed them as something that the child or adult can do on their own. And part of the fun was teaching helicopter moms, we didn't call them that at the time, but those who hovered over their children's to make their own doll and that their child surprised with what they can create for themselves.

MF: So, that was always fun.

MF: Opportunities to teach your child--

MF: Child isn't going to make good decisions unless they have opportunities to make them.

MF: When it's appropriate, and when they're young. You can't do it for them all the time, or you know coerces them into doing what you want them to do.

CM: Definitely. Yes.

CM: (…)

CM: (…)

CM: Tell me more about the 16 years that you taught the Bible study fellowship.
MF: Bible study fellowship is an international organization that exists to teach the Bible, and I started participating when I was in Fresno and my oldest son was just a year and a half, and it met my need to learn more about the Bible, myself and, fellowship.

MF: To know to have a community of others who were seeking that for themselves. And over the years I became a leader. I participated as a children’s leader by working with the preschool program there in Fresno and continued that when I came back to Sacramento.

MF: When was it--

MF: ..in 2000, I was asked to become the teaching leader for the South Sacramento class here, and a great privilege. My son asks me, “so you’re the boss?” And I said no, I'm the responsible person.

MF: I'm the one that is going to be held responsible and it's been a rock in my life for all of these years that I've grown to know that God is faithful and that I'm seeing many miracles in the lives of people.

MF: I’ve had the support and the comfort of others in times of tragedy. And it's, a wonderful way to learn the Bible through that organization.

CM: So just for clarification, you lead a class here in South Sac.

MF: Yes 2000-2016 when I retired.

MF: And then I was able to go on a mission trip actually to Africa. My husband promised to take me to Africa, he was over there with the military. He was in Ethiopia mapping the country with the invitation of Haile Selassie.
MF: And when, when he came back, we intended to go. And then there was the unrest in the country and civil war. And then, kids and it only took him about 45 years!

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: He kept his promise.

MF: We spent a wonderful year in Ethiopia.

CM: When was this is if I may ask?

MF: Oh, we went in December of 2016.

CM: And so, you didn’t come back until 2017?

MF: Mmhm.

MF: December of 2017. We spent a whole year. We were able to visit Kenya and Tanzania, other places where the organization were Fiki had orphanages and schools.

MF: And we took a trip to Israel (…)

MF: We had a wonderful time.

CM: Amazing. I can see like also like the collection behind you. Did you add to your collection I bet you did.

MF: (Laughs)

MF: Not a lot because the time we were there we were working. I had the privilege of teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth graders the Book of Revelations.
MF: And, and then training rather the women that were the mothers of the orphans, within the village. And there was over 100 students who came from outside of our compound from the community who attended the school there.

CM: That's incredible. I'm so glad you were able to go to Africa, after all this time.

MF: Me too! We want to go back.

CM: (…)

MF: (…)

CM: Another question I had was growing up, and after you came back in the 70s, how did you get around transportation wise? Did you walk everywhere? Or car?

MF: My parents had a car and that was pre-required seat belts. So, there would be a lot of us in the car. Okay.

MF: But as kids we walked everywhere to school from--

MF:. . . at least three miles from our home on Sixth Avenue and Stockton Boulevard, to Sac High, and we walked rain or shine.

MF: You couldn't wear--

MF: Girls couldn't wear pants in those days, so we'd wearing them under our dresses on cold days and have to take them off and put them in our locker.

MF: We had the bus of course. But my mom talks about the trolley line that was in Oak Park.

MF: I don't really remember that the trolley line. I must have been very young then.
MF: I got a car when I graduated from high school.

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: (…)

MF: It was a 48 Chevy. It was old it was a classic car, right?

MF: Mostly we walked. By the time we got to Sac High, there may be 20 or 25 of us, we just wind through the neighborhood picking up friends along the way.

MF: We did that (…) for Stanford high school just a mile. And again, you know there, there’d be a bunch of us by the time we got to school.

MF: Never perceived as a threat.

MF: No, never any problems or trouble in the community that ever occurred that I know of. I don’t know of one shooting from elementary to City College or Sac State that happened in the community.

CM: I would have liked to be able to walk to school from that distance with your friends and walk to school and walk back.

CM: Yeah, that’s not something that happens anymore because everything is so spread out.

MF: Yes. Yeah. And dangerous. I really mourn the fact that very young children today know that it’s not a safe world.
MF: It's not safe in the grocery store, at school, even in your homes people come into homes and take children, while the parents are sleeping. You can't be walking down the street with your grandmother without danger of someone trying to snatch you.

MF: It is very sad that kids are aware. I can imagine the anxiety that young children feel today.

MF: As a grandmother it makes me very sad. None of my children live in Sacramento. And the youngest one is eight. And just a wonderful happy kid, but he certainly doesn't have the freedom that even my children had going up.

MF: Everything's arrange play dates that kind of thing.

MF: But we had a whole community to look out for us. I'd go somewhere and come home, and mom would say Mrs. so and so said that she saw you in that you were acting like a lady, and I think gee I didn't even see her!

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: A good thing she had something to report.

MF: [Chuckle]

CM: Do you think that highway 99 changed the relationship between walking to school, and then driving to school? In what ways do you think it changed?

MF: I don't think it did because 99 laminated the boundary of Oak Park, and that was the western boundary of Oak Park.

MF: Now my youngest brother--
MF: Stanford Junior High School burn down the summer after I graduated from there. Okay, which was (...) in 60. Okay.

MF: And it must have been 1960, it's closest I can recall.

MF: They didn't rebuild. Integration had become the law of the land.

MF: And there was a lot of resistance to busing children from other communities into Oak Park, which required that the children and in Oak Park my brothers and sisters, had to go really long distances to school.

MF: I remember that next year they went from 11th Avenue off of 14th. 12th Avenue turns into 14th at highway 99.

MF: We were one block in 11th Avenue, and they walked from there to Peter Lassen, which is east of 65th Street.

MF: No buses were allowed but that's where they went to junior high school. By the time they went to Sac High which was a mile from our home.

MF: Then my youngest brother started going to Calvin Middle School, which is Land Park. So, they still (...) make it two to three miles to go there.

MF: Not only did they not rebuild Stanford they converted American Legion, which was the elementary school in the community into a continuation school.

MF: So, elementary school kids had to get to other schools as well.

MF: Not quite as far because they had Fruitridge Manor and some other schools that they went to.
MF: Starting with the 60s there were a lot of changes going on.

CM: Would you happen to know why Stanford Junior High was burnt down?

MF: There was a fire started by some kids.

MF: There was a lot of talk that it could have been put out, but all I know is that it didn't get rebuilt.

MF: No matter what the community did to try to get that school rebuilt they did not do it.

MF: The converting of the elementary school was a blow to the community.

CM: And just for clarification so integration happened when your younger siblings went to school. And so, what was your experience in school?

MF: (...)

MF: All of my education was integrated. I only had one African American teacher my entire school career.

MF: Mrs. Kempson was the only teacher that looked like me.

MF: Then we I had were--

MF: I remember in my elementary school class in my grade there was only one other African American Girl and three boys in my class.

MF: Stanford was very integrated. Kids that lived in the Fabulous 40s came to Stanford.

MF: (...) 

MF: That was before Sutter [local junior high]
MF: (...) 

MF: Sac High the same thing. Kids from Oak Park, the Fabulous 40s, and Curtis Park we were all in school together.

MF: So, it was a different experience for different ethnic groups. There were clubs that I didn’t know existed until after I became an adult.

MF: Which was ironic because my mother moved in the 40s with her mother to Sacramento and Oak Park. She was in high school attending Stanford.

MF: Only people who were in sanction clubs at the school had their pictures in the yearbook.

MF: (...) 

MF: There were no clubs that African Americans were a part of.

MF: So, she started a club there called the Booker T. Washington club. And I remember telling me that the principal hurriedly got (...) one of the coaches to stand as the school representative for their club to have their picture taken.


MF: Here I am--

MF: My mother had me when she was 19. Nineteen years later I'm in high school. And we just didn't know about certain clubs, it wasn't promoted, and weren't encouraged to attend.
MF: Sadly, things change very slowly, if at all.

CM: Do you happen to know if the club is still functioning?


MF: My sister and brothers were in school it was a little different, but it was also a more tumultuous time because in the 60s that was a civil rights movement and integration and the rise the Black Power movement, and all of that.

MF: (...)

CM: So, what do you want people to know and understand about your community, your Oak Park?

MF: I'd like them to know that Oak Park was, and always has been an integrated community.

MF: There's never been a time where it has been one ethnicity that dominated Oak Park.

MF: It's being re-gentrified now.

MF: And it is sad, and that re-gentrification is escalating what it costs to purchase a home or to even live in an apartment in that area.

MF: [Sighs]

MF: And as I said, we roamed the streets, we didn't lock our doors, and we had a wonderful life.
MF: Oak Park community is centrally located and that's one of the reasons why it's being gentrified now but it's also becoming exclusive.

MF: And that is sad to me. Kevin Johnson has done amazing work.

MF: Nicole West has worked with him and others to bring a African American presence that can be respected, appreciated, and enjoyed.

MF: Georgia Pete, Kevin's mother, has her bookstore there which is just absolutely lovely place to go.

MF: It was originally a place they wanted kids in the community to come, so that they could even read books. There's no library in Oak Park, yet.

CM: Yet?

MF: Yet.

MF: Never has been?

MF: Oh yeah, we had one centrally in Oak Park on 33rd where McGeorge is.

MF: But--

MF: The guild theater is a place for meeting and community events that are important and informative to the Oak Park community, African Americans in particular. The barber shop is there, Fixin’s is there and now Slim Huskies.

MF: But my (...) youngest brother, who is 67, five years ago now, was going to church. We have a family tradition that we would go to the family church where my mother attended at Kyle's temple on Easter.
MF: And he took highway 99, and got off at the 33rd Street exit coming into Oak Park going down toward her church, and he was stopped by the police and asked, “Officer what's the problem?” And he says, 'Well you don't live in this neighborhood, do you?"

MF: And he had to laugh. I mean this is a neighborhood that we grew up in this is a neighborhood that we know as our own. Not only was it not right to be stopped for reason but the fact that he texted out to friends just you just got pulled over driving while black in Oak Park.

MF: Now that's sad. And it's not the direction that we would hope that it's going.

MF: So, we just have to pray that things get better. It's been a long time coming. And, again, focusing on our similarities, our common humanity that we're better together than isolated from one another is the only way that is going to bring appreciation and contributions of individuals.

MF: As Martin Luther King said content of our character. To be judged on that.

MF: We've had a lot of progress. I spent two years at St hope, and those kids, not only met the goal of exceeding their expectations, the communities, and their families but they exceeded our expectations.

MF: When they were given the help that they needed academically, for social development, taught their self-worth, and given a vision of what they could become and accomplish they exceeded. Everything I thought that they might do, and they came back to contribute to the community.
MF: So, having a positive vision, positive impression about yourself that often times is reinforced by the community that you live in and is very important for all of society.

MF: So, the choices have to be there before you can make them.

MF: There has to be an awareness before you can even appreciate what goals are achievable.

MF: But like I said I'm ready to pass the mantle.

MF: [Chuckle]

MF: I know that many more people than I have been working towards that goal for a long time. We'll just keep on doing it.

MF: God willing. Okay.

CM: Of course. I just had another thought as you were speaking when you said exclusive. And what do you mean by that?

MF: In terms of availability in housing.

MF: If you can't live there you're excluded. They're not many areas, New Helvetia, which was a subsidized community on Broadway, it's been taken over by the mill.

MF: I understand that there are plans for a CV circle where my husband grew up. A lovely community of homes and apartments that you didn't have to be ashamed to come from there. Well managed, beautiful trees, and lawns to play on and stuff it's my understanding all going to be repurposed.
MF: And you can't help but to wonder where these underprivileged communities are going to find a home. Homelessness is so sad and so prevalent. Even working people are not able to afford rent, and I'm told that this current generation doesn't even have the expectations of purchasing a home. That's really sad.

MF: So, for me as a Christian, the answer is prayer. That we can only trust that God will provide and make away for those who trust him.

CM: Thank you for these beautiful words. And thank you for the time, it has been a pleasure speaking with you, learning about your story, about your history and contributions and just you as an individual.

MF: Thank you for the opportunity to share and I wish you well and thankful for being part of this project.
Abstract

In partnership with Sacramento’s Office of Historical Preservation, History students and Sacramento State University interviewed several African American elders in the community to understand their experiences. I was able to interview Anthony Francis, a 94-year-old New Orleans native, who has lived in California and Sacramento since the 1940s. Our conversation starts from when Anthony moved to Sacramento in 1947, and continuing to the volunteer services he participates in his retirement, like this oral history project. In this interview we discuss his work experience as a state employee, his experiences as the President of the Oak Park Neighborhood council, and changes to Oak Park that he saw throughout his life living there.

Interviewer Biography

Anthony Francis, age 84, was born in New Orleans Louisiana, and has been a California resident for most of his life. He has a storied career in Sacramento working as a state employee in many departments including the Department of Justice and Sacramento County Welfare department. He was and still is very involved in the community, helming the Oak Park Neighborhood council as its first president, working on boards for understanding the needs of aging Californians, and volunteering with Catholic Social Services. A significant portion of his life’s work was involved in assisting aging members of the Sacramento community. While some portions of the interview are edited for clarity, his words hold a breadth of information about his life and what changes to Sacramento he saw throughout. He now lives in Elk Grove, California.

Interviewee Biography

X Pasha is a history and sociology senior at California State University, Sacramento. He plans on graduating in the fall of 2022. Some historical topics that interest him are imperialism, the Interwar period of the 1920s and 30s. Thanks to this course, he has new historical interest is in
oral history, and intergenerational communication. After graduation he aspires to continue his education and gain a graduate degree in history.
Interviewee: Anthony Francis

Interviewer: X Pasha

Date of interview: November 26th, 2021,

Location of Interview: Anthony’s Son, Rene’s home

AF: Anthony Francis

XP: X Pasha

RF: Rene Francis

Interview:

XP: To start, let me go ahead and. so Today is November 26, it is 1:12pm. And so, I'm here with Anthony Francis Jr. My name is x, we are

RF: no Junior.

XP: oh, no Junior.

RF: No just Anthony R Francis

XP: Anthony R Francis I apologize. And we’re doing an oral history project interview for the Office of historical preservation here in Sacramento. And so, to start, could you please spell out your name?

AF: My name is Anthony Rene Francis,

XP: Alrighty Thank you. Could you please tell me where you were born?

AF: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana.
XP: Could you please tell me your parents’ names?

AF: My father's name is George Rene Francis; my mother's name is Josephine Johnson Francis.

XP: Alrighty and then can you please tell me how old you are?

AF: I am 94 years old.

XP: Okay, thank you. So, this project is just going to be discussing the experiences you've had in Sacramento. And so, to start. When did you first move to Sacramento?

AF: I moved to Sacramento, 1947.

XP: Why did you move to Sacramento?

AF: Well, I moved to Sacramento while awaiting an appointment to a job by the state of Californian at McClelland Airforce base\(^1\) at that time was buzzing with jobs. And so what I thought I would do was get a job at McClelland at least until my job came through the State of California. So that's really why I moved here, and I also had family here, in Sacramento.

XP: What kind of family was it like aunts or uncles?

AF: I had brother in laws, I had cousins, [he laughs] I had an uncle, least one as I recall it. None of them were actually blood line, but I don’t want to say bloodline. Those were basically the people who I had here living in Sacramento.

XP: Ok great. Where did you first move to? Where in Sacramento did you first live?

AF: In the state, I first lived in Vallejo, California. And I worked in San Francisco at that time at the Office of Price Administration. And sometime after that I worked at, in the California Department of Employment. And its with the Department of Employment that I got my career

\(^1\) A now former air force base just outside of Sacramento.
started with the State of California. I lived in the Sacramento area, I lived in Oak Park California and I think immediately I started living in Oak Park in 1947, living with the folks that I described to you and I remember Oak Park well because it was lined with trees and you know at that time Oak Park was considered one of the premiere areas in the city of Sacramento, and I enjoyed my time in Oak Park.

XP: That’s great. Considering family, in our initial interview you talked about how you worked to bring your family from New Orleans over to California. When did you first bring your family from New Orleans over to California?

AF: Okay. I wrote the first, the oldest sister in approximately 1948, early 1949. She is now 90 years old, no she’s now 91 so all of us [his siblings] are over 80, 90 or above I’ll put it that way. She was the first one.

XP: Great. When it comes to when it came to your work, what kinds of things you do at your job? What kinds of things did you do at your job? When you first moved to California.

AF: My jobs?

XP: Yes.

AF: Oh, I see, ok then, so like a lot of folks I started out [*he clears his throat*] excuse me. I started out as a clerk with the department, and I think at that time they called it a junior clerk, which is the lowest entry level, into the [inaudible] ladder and eventually to the analyst career ladder. And then after that I stayed there for about two years and the next position and I drafted by the United States Army, and upon being discharged from the army in 1952 I returned to the job as a clerk because I had absolute right of reinstatement. And so, I went to college out of Sacramento State and graduated in 1957, and then I had my first professional job was as a social worker in the Sacramento County welfare department and from there I went to the Sacramento County Probation department as a probation officer, and from there I went to the
California office of Corrections as a parole agent. [he laughs] From there I went to the State Personnel Board, on an arrangement on where departments were able to transfer employees for employee development as they called it, so that was my job at the State Personnel board for that purpose. From the [State Personnel] board I went to the California department of rehabilitation, and I was there for about 2 years. From there I went to the department of justice, working in the attorney general’s office. That’s pretty much it, the line up of my professional jobs that I had.

XP: You said that your, your first professional job was as a social worker. How did your work, connect you to Sacramento, as a social worker How did you get involved in Sacramento?

AF: My job as a social worker was one that required me to take applications from people 65 years and older…I mean that particular aspect of my job was very exciting because at that time a lot of people that came in didn’t realize how important it was to have proof of their birth and what I learned at that time, well I didn’t really learn it there- I found out that a lot of people kept important documents in the bible. And also, I found out that keeping documents in the bible was not an activity in our family alone, a lot of people had documents in the bible. More specifically: death certificates, marriage licenses, all kinds of stuff. So, under the laws that governed our operation we were allowed to accept the documents from the bible. And that job I also provided a range of services including taking care of special needs. when I say that I mean, when the elderly person came in and was qualified, they also were qualified for- at that time was Medicare, in any case, when they needed special items like wheelchairs [gestures to his wheelchair] or medication of any kind, anything that was outside the regular check they got every month, it was my job to provide that service to them. I had averaged 300 people as a case load, most of them were in the Old Town of Sac, what is now called Old Sacramento, Old Town. At that time, some of the hotels that you see down there were available to my clients, had to pay 50 cents a night. [laughing] 25 cents a night [laughs again], and some of them actually
slept under the bridge over there you know, Capital Bridge, they sleep under the bridge. One of the things I found out was that, even some children have given up a few bucks for their parents. And I’m saying that because at that time we had what was called responsible relatives, and responsible relatives where donations to the parents were decided by a chart of income, where you fall on that chart is what you donate. So, there’s a lot to that I don’t have time to say. But it was a good job, I enjoyed it.

XP: Great. You said earlier that when you returned from the army you went back to that clerk job right?

AF: Yeah

XP: How was life different for you when you came back from the army, how was it different?

AF: Well, it was, it was different in a number of ways. Number one: the family had changed. Let me tell you what I mean by that. My sisters had picked up a couple of years in age, and were dating at that time, before I left, they hardly dated. They had a lot of good activities in high school, which was Sacramento High, they were mature very mature. Matter of fact, there was talk about marriage, whereas when I leave, there wasn’t any talk about marriage. Came back talk about marriage [laughs]. So, the sisters were very different in those aspects, at least their activities were different. My parents had picked up a couple more years on me, my father, and my mother both stayed with us until they passed away. My mother died in 1963, the year after JFK’s [John F Kennedy’s] assassination and then my father passed away in 2008 at the time he had been declared to be the oldest man in the country. And family began to grow, everyone was having babies and that. [Gestures to his son off screen] Big guy and this and that.

XP: When did you first get married?

AF: I was married 1955, June 6th, 1955. It could be June 6th, 1953, I’m not sure this head is not as sharp as it used to be. It could be 1953, because the kids, the oldest son was born the
following year after we were married which was 1954, so yes 1953... Some of the stuff I link together by certain events.

XP: Where did your family first live after you got married, in Sacramento?

AF: We lived in Oak Park at 3430 San Jose way, I remember the address and that. A real quiet neat little community. It was a notable thing for my siblings and parents because it had electricity which we did not have in our house in New Orleans. It had enough bedrooms where everyone could sleep comfortably. It had a shower and a bathtub, which we didn’t have in New Orleans. Running water, we didn’t have much of that. It was a totally different life for them. The reason why I sent for them was because I wanted to see them out of that kind of situation, where they were living under each other’s noses. Louisiana, New Orleans used to have storms, I remember we used to sit in the house and have fun, we didn’t realize how serious it was. But that was another thing they got away from, for the most part. And yeah, San Jose first.

The next place was 4991 Warwick Avenue. I’m trying to think of what that section was called, Oak Ridge or something, I do not remember the name of it. I can’t identify it like I can do Oak Park, but it too was a good community with good schools. Oak Ridge school was where they went…My kids have had access to good schools.

XP: When you lived in Oak Park, you told me in our initial interview that you were a part of the Oak Park Neighborhood Council. Could you talk a bit about that? What was that like, what did you do, who else was involved?

AP: If I remember correctly, President Lyndon B. Johnson… at the nation level, signed a legislation to create what was called the council of- the bill was designed to help people organize themselves in order to improve their life. Mainly minorities, lets face it that was mainly what it was about. The Oak Park community council was on Broadway in Sacramento, Broadway not too far from 56th street which was the core of the business area of Sacramento. It
was a bank, a bank over there closed down. Someone, no it was one of my cousins, was able to influence the owners to let us have that building for our museum. The museum was established in the 60s, the Oak Park neighborhood council was established in the 60s as I recall it. We were able to provide support to people who required assistance in the education, people who were trying to develop organizations to create a better life in the city, organizations to increase and improve family life in Sacramento. I guess I could summarize that particular activity as aggressive organization for improvement of life, that’s the way I would put it. Because for the first time in our community we had this kind of organization, we didn’t have that before, so Sacramento got to know what it meant to organize. And it was through the Oak Park community Council that that community did in fact organize itself in better ways and towards progress. Which was made on a limited basis, I have to tell the absolute truth. It was not a complete success, but you cannot lay that on the feet of the organization itself, because the organization can only do so much, and the other thing is that the biggest problem we had was developing interest in the community. There was hardly anybody coming to the meetings. In fact, we had some people so against it they created problems for us. My wife said, “why do you stay there, you could get hurt.” I said “I stay there because I want to do what I can to improve life for folks and myself.” And I said “it’s important for us, some of us, to move ahead regardless of the risk.” And the risks were there, but it was people who were strongly against the concept for whatever reason.

XP: What kinds of support was the council able to provide. Was it food, or money, what kind of support did you all provide to the community?

AF: I think the main thing, our mission was, as I indicated was to organize the community and get it prepared for challenging. Challenging the city to do things, challenging business, challenging community leaders themselves. The core activity was to commit to create organizations for progress. We didn’t get involved in donating money to people for schools or
scholarships. That was not what were about, that was a concern for other organizations, ours was concerned for organizing the community. And coming from a governmental agency, that didn't help because of a mistrust of government, that was truly a problem which is a problem today, Mistrust of government. At that time, we realized that were not looked at like a helpful community, we were looked at like the devils, by a lot of people [laughs]. Our leader in Sacramento was a man by the name of Marian Woods. [inaudible] We had fairly good leadership over the councils, I was on Oak Park but there were many.

XP: You said earlier that you didn’t feel that the council was as successful, because there were outside forces that stopped you all from being successful. What was one or a few things that you can think of that you are really proud that you all did. Some successes?

AF: I was proud of the fact that we were able to get a few people that were dedicated. People who felt like how I did, that I would stick it out and work to get community organization. We were proud of that, in our office and in leadership were proud of that. We were proud of that in fact that despite that we had negatives, we had more people who felt exactly the opposite. We had more people who were dedicated to us. I wouldn’t want to leave you with the impression that it was all negative. I’m leaving what I hope is a balanced report. It was not all good and it wasn’t all bad either. So, on a scale or 1-10 our progress would have been about a 7. I think if we went back to Oak Park right now, and took a challenge from people still living, I think you’ll find that most of them or all of them remember the council. We had approximately 3 presidents of which I was one, and those presidents, I’m not blowing my own horn only, but the two guys where there after I was ran the organization too also. Very proud of that. I proud that were able to recruit good people for the mission that we had. Who themselves became organizers in their own area? People who had something to commit, to give, bring to the table to the organization. Those are the things that are proud of actually.
XP: One thing you mentioned as well was that the Oak Park Council and yours, through your cousin-by the way, what was your cousin's name? Who helped you all to get the old bank for the museum in the 1960s, what was your cousin's name?

AF: My cousin, oh yes who was able to get us the place. Her name was Eslin Parr, who worked for Senator John Moss, and I seem to remember well that Senator John Moss and his wife Sharon Moss were employers of my cousin Eslin [Parr]. And she prevailed upon them to use the building that we had, and they said sure go ahead and use it. And that time we were desperate and needed a place to start and the [Senator John and Sharon] Mosses were the ones who let us use that building on Broadway. It was a bank I believe I said to you [during our first meeting], it might have been two different companies. One Bank of America and other was Crocker Citizen. And that's how we got the building. I looked for some film to show what characters played a big role in the progress of Black people. On the wall there was a big painting, and we had a little tour and take people around and show them the history of who these people are. That's how it went for the museum. I can't tell you exactly how long it lasted, when I left it was still going, so I do not know how long it lasted really.

XP: When did you leave? When did you leave the Oak Park community?

AF: If I remember correctly, I think I was voted out, but I do not know for sure, and I do not remember what year that was. I think 1969 to 1970- I'm sorry I just don't remember the dates.

XP: That is ok.

AF: I think the 60s for sure.

XP: When you lived in Oak Park, other than your volunteer services, what did you all did for fun. What kinds of things did you do in Oak Park for fun? Back in the 40s, right when you moved from New Orleans to Sacramento what did you all do for fun, for leisure.
AF: Fun? Well, that’s a good question, it wasn't all serious. [laughs]

One thing we did was go to parties. We were new and being introduced to a lot of native born Sacramentan’s. One thing you'll find is that there are not a lot of native born Sacramentan’s at the time, they had some here and there you know. We got to know them well enough, they started to introduce us, we worked our way into their social system. We started to get invitations to parties, discrete boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. At the time there were drive-ins, pull up and get your milkshake and hamburgers, that was a big thing the drive-ins. In addition to that there were drive-in theaters, I do not see those anymore. The drive-in theaters were really used, especially for boyfriend/girlfriend, out in Del Paso Heights, one that was called. [To his son] Rene what was the name of the one in Del Paso Heights? I don't remember the name of it. Anyway.

Another thing that happened was television was a big part. We had the old black a white, those who didn’t have anything come over to look at specific programs, the *Ed Sullivan Program*, *Perry Mason*, *Milton Berle*. At the family get together, some had television and others didn’t. We attended sports too. And we all think we can make the best bar-b-q, so making bar-b-q, cooking in general so that was a big thing in activities, cooking. And of course, going to school, my sisters applied to school, and they were all smart enough to make the grades and subsequently were able to get out and get good employment.

XP: As you lived in Oak Park, what kinds of things changed the neighborhood, if you can remember?

AF: What kinds of change?

XP: Events that happened, what was the most memorable kinds of things in the neighborhood that you can remember.
AF: The demographics changed. In the sense that we had mostly Caucasians in our neighborhood, early in our lives. Then there was what we call white flight, and that occurred. The community got more minority and I’m not talking about just black. In general, we saw more Mexicans, more Asians, little by little bit and fewer whites. The other one was the landscape itself, Oak Park was known as the city of trees, loads of trees, trees all over the place, but we lost a lot of trees, you know? Time and neglect so a lot of those trees are no longer existing and that leads to the obvious, more sunshine. Where before you could walk down 5th avenue and were covered by lots of trees. Another thing I remember was that we used to have street cars in Oak Park. That was a fundamental thing. The street cars would run down Broadway to Alhambra boulevard, make a turn to the right and go downtown. But anyway, the street cars are all gone and there were busses there. I used to take the number 5 bus to get to my job, the one on Broadway all the way downtown. Those are some changes, there is a lot though. I can’t think of anything else.

XP: Other than you taking the bus to your work did you also drive or how else did you travel throughout Sacramento?

AF: To get some work involved as you just said that. The taking of the bus. I remember the number 5 bus. That was probably what I did most of all to get downtown. There was also shared riding, one week to drive someone else, they take a week to drive, we shared that way so it wouldn’t be a big hardship on anybody. That was another way I got to work. The shared rides often times involved people that worked in the same office. So, like, [gestures to me] you and I work in the same office, you say “ok you’re going to do it this week, I’m going to do it”. How is that different from the other shared rides? Well, you have an individual that you [inaudible] right at your disposal who can help you to get to work quite comfortably as I recall it. Now you can reciprocate, you give them a ride. That’s how we did it back in the time when it was necessary to get Downtown.
XP: You mentioned in our first meeting that the State Fair was the major kind of exciting-

AF: Oh yeah. The State Fair, boy. The State Fair was on Stockton Boulevard, Broadway, and to the back it was, B street, I guess. But it occupied a huge piece in Oak Park. Some people, well, I call it Oak Park. I think it was essentially a part of Oak Park. Yes, the State Fair was quite a place, every September, I guess. There were exhibits of various kinds like farming exhibits, they had cows out there, we’re milking the cows and so forth. You could check out machinery, there was a whole section there with machinery of various kinds like diggers. I remember John Deere, name of one of the brands John Deere, his machinery in a building. They had that and dancers and singers, they had some really good performers some of whom known nationwide. Most of all is what they had called Governors Day. Governors Day was a day where they had races, and these races were classified by name. It was called Governors Day, but I do not remember all of the days, just the ones I can put my hand on. They were given names and one of the events that was really attended was the races. Those races attracted all kinds of people. That’s what happened there. It’s one of those things about the State Fair, my cousin, myself, we used to look forward to the Fair because it allowed us to make some change² by parking people’s cars in one of the spots by my house for a dollar. We didn’t have enough space, [laughing] they ate up that little space we had. But it did give us a few bucks, and guess what? We didn’t realize years later after doing it that we were on public property [laughing again] parking cars on public property, that was really crazy. It was fun though, we enjoyed it.

XP: Alrighty. I have one more question before we can look at some of the documents that your son has put out. Actually, two more pardon me. In our initial interview you said that you knew some information about families that used to live in Sacramento. But some of them have left. What kinds of friends that you made or people that you’ve met that you still remember that kind

² Small amounts of money
of made the city for you? Did you make any friends and meet new people that you remember pretty well when it comes to living in Sacramento, living in Oak Park?

AF: You ask me if I made any friends?

XP: Yes, so the family became friends with over time, your neighbors, people that you met through work. Is there anyone that you remember that you want to talk about?

AF: What I understand you are saying, friends that have achieved in Sacramento?

XP: Yeah

AF: I would say, there are a number of them that I call them achievers. And there are a number that I have known through their notoriety and influence. And that notoriety was Nat Colley, who was a lawyer. Jim Lone, who just recently passed, who was a graduate of Howard University, and became a lawyer in Sacramento, passed away 2-3 years ago. Mervin Donnelly was a senator when he lived next door to me on Platinum way. He was quite an achiever too. He apparently made plenty of achievements. Then there was Bill Green who also was an Assemblyman not a senator. I was closer to Bill than the rest of those guys because my wife and his wife with to Xavier Preparatory school in New Orleans. And they were friends for many years. So, when they came to Sacramento it was easy to catch up with them, because they worked the legislature, at the time. They were good friends of ours. There were closer people like Verner Abrams, she was a nurse who knew the profession so well that she had jobs as a supervisor nurse, she was over other nurses. Just before her passing she worked in a Sacramento City Unified School district. Oh boy, so many people and now I can't think of any. Well let's let that one rest because I can't think of any.

XP: Sure. Ok one last question, you mentioned that you were pretty heavily involved with volunteer services. Like Catholic Social Services or anything like that. Why did you volunteer in Sacramento, and where else did you volunteer, while you were-
AF: Where else?

XP: Yes. So, in our previous meeting you mentioned that you were involved in Catholic Social Services, and you used to volunteer with them. Why did you start volunteering, and are there any other places that you did volunteer around Sacramento?

AF: Again, I am a person who believes in community participation. I believe also that wherever I can find a way to help improve the community, I am helping to improve my family too, and myself. So, I didn’t hesitate to accept the invitation to go to organizations when I was asked to do so. The Catholic Social services was one of those organizations, where we needed to have a mix of people, mix racial background. Black people, more than any other people I think, will feel more comfortable around people who are Black and people who can give them service of various kinds. So, I wasn’t able to accomplish it all by myself, but I was able to accomplish being able to refer to people to the agency, and the services that were needed. And I think that’s probably one of the reasons for why I joined these services.

I was also on the county commission on aging. I think, as I recall, I was the first Black person on the county commission on aging. And all my life, to date, I’ve been involved with a lot of groups who have to do with aging. Providing services to aging people, and that county commission on aging was one of the [inaudible] that encouraged diversity and reaching the agencies that are providing services to aging. So that was another aspect, aging services were very important.

XP: Okay, so we’ve been talking for about an hour. Do you want to take a quick break, get some water anything like that?

…

XP: Alrighty, um, so let me go ahead and start with your military picture. Let’s go ahead

I’m just going to essentially just like come around the side and show it like this
AF: Am I in your way?

XP: No, you’re fine. So, I show up for one second. [Holds up figure 4 but is reading the date/location for figure 1] And then you go and talk about it. Yep. Okay. When was that picture taken?

AF: In 19th of June 1952. In Verdun France. That was a hot place during the war.

XP: Here is this one [holds up figure 3]. When was this picture taken, and where?

AF: This picture [figure 3] was taken in 1957, best guess. And at that time, we were living on San Jose, 3430.

XP: Here you go [hands him figure 5]

AF: Yeah, my parents. Circa 1958 I would say.

XP: Here you are [hands him figure 2]. I believe you said that one was of another groups your wife was in, a volunteer group. In one of her social or volunteer groups.

AF: The group was called the Ladies auxiliary of the knights of Saint Peter’s Calver. Is that what you wanted to know?

XP: Yeah, you can talk about that picture if you’d like to.

AF: My wife was in this group, as I indicated this is the organization called Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of Saint Peter’s Calver. Which was organized back in the early ‘20s I think. At that time, Black people didn’t have any kind of organization and at that time they didn’t let us into the Knights of Columbus which was another Catholic organization. So, people got together and formed what was called the Knights of Saint Peter Calver, because they wouldn’t let us into Knights of Columbus. So ultimately the Knights of Saint Peter Calver did what the Knights of Columbus didn’t do which was a lady’s auxiliary, the Knights of Columbus did not, the Peter
Calver does. So that was for ladies to form to organize, and to promote what could be considered a subject that was not too popular. So anyway, my wife is right here [points to photo].

XP: Could you turn the picture around and show it to the camera? Where you wife is?

AF: I can’t remember the names of all these ladies but, [Turns photo around, points to his wife]. That would be Noella Francis. She was born in December, and she had a twin, Noelita.

XP: Could you repeat that please?

AF: My wife is shown in this photo of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of Saint Peter Calver, is shown here to my left. [Looks off screen to a note from his son, who leans over and points to the photo]

RF: Her sister is in there.

AF: [laughing] The reason I like to use circa, gives me a way to get out of it if anything is wrong. But any one of the two could be my wife. [Points to the photo] One over here, and the other over here. And I told you that she was a twin, Noelita and Nolleta. The reason I know is that they were born in December 7th, 1929. The second World War, that was when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and they were born on the same day the 7th of December. That’s it, what about the next one?

XP: Ok, let me go ahead a grab it then. I think we have one more left. [Hands him figure 6]

Could you hold this a little bit higher?

AF: [Pointing to the picture] To my left is my youngest sister her name is Sherly Wade, I believe she has 4 children. Her oldest son is now retired from the state of California, I do not remember what his title was, but he was in a high-level job. Her other son is a graduate of [University of California] Davis, and is an engineer currently employed at [University of California] Davis. [He
laughs] He works at Davis, graduated from Davis and they hired him. My next one in the middle is my oldest sister, Nelia. She had so many children for me to even start talking about. The one that is next to me, in age that is. She lives in San Bernadino County.

[Figure 5 is shown on screen]

XP: And so ultimately after this. Was there anything else that you can think of right now, you know, we can go back to our previous anything else that you can think of right now that you want to talk about when it comes to your experiences here in Sacramento?

AF: I think it’s important for me to make it known that my commitment is real one, to do things financially wise, and I’m not trying to be a big shot or braggadocio. I just sincerely believe that we all should help one another, when its possible. And that’s why I wanted to be sure that I told you about my experience with Kaiser and Davis and the program for 90+ And the fact that I believe so strongly that I’m giving a part of my body. I’d give them the whole thing if they would have it but, they don’t want it all. So, I’m talking about that in participation in community projects that will hopefully lead to the betterment of other people in the future. I don’t have a doubt in my mind that I will find things I forgot. I will wake up at 3 in the morning and be like “Oh I forgot to tell X this, Y, Z.” So, there will be things, but I’m kind of getting tired.

XP: OK

End of Interview

3 Someone who boasts frequently.
4 Referring to Anthony volunteering his brain for a project studying the 90+, through a partnership between Kaiser and UC Davis Medical.
Illustrations Appendix

Figure 1: Anthony Francis in Verdun France in 1952.
Figure 2: The Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of Saint Peter Calver. Anthony Francis’ wife Noella Francis is in the photo, as well as her twin sister Noelita.

Figure 3: Anthony Francis, his wife and two sons in Oak Park in 1957.
Figure 4: Anthony Francis, photo taken before he went to join the United States Army in Europe.
Figure 5: Anthony Francis' mother and father, Josephine Johnson Francis and George Rene Francis.

Figure 6: A modern photo of Anthony Francis' sisters, for which he named two: Sherly Wade and Nelia.
Oral Interview: Pat Canterbury

Pat Canterbury is a Sacramento native and has seen the city evolve since her birth in 1939. Pat lived an adventurous life. Growing up, Pat and her family spent their Summer’s traveling the United States during the 40s and 50s, learning first hand the structures of segregation throughout the nation. As an adult, Pat expanded her worldly knowledge by living in the heart of San Francisco during the 1960s, traveling Europe during the Cold War, and speaking at international conferences sponsored by the UN. Despite her wide-ranging travels, Pat settled back in her hometown, and served a career as a public servant working for the State of California.

Mrs. Canterbury provides a unique insight to the city’s development. Informed by her cosmopolitan upbringing, Pat’s observations of Sacramento reflect the political, social, and geographic changes that city underwent in the mid-20th century. Growing up as an African-American who spent much of her youth traveling the United States then the world, Pat saw Sacramento as a small, west-coast “cow town” that was at times was insulated from the national dialogue of race and civil rights, and others emblematic of the cultural changes of nation.

[Nov 24th 2021]

AS: Today is November 24th, my name is Andrew Shimizu I'm interviewing Pat Canterbury about the African American experience in Sacramento. We’re doing an oral history for the city of Sacramento, made possible by the African American Cultural Action Fund. Our conversation will be recorded and transcribed with the intent to add to the city’s historical record. Until you sign a release you will maintain full ownership of this interview and can elect to not have your interview be added to the collection. Do you consent to having our conversation recorded?

PC: I do.

AS: Great thank you. Would you mind stating and spelling your name for the record?


AS: What would you like to be referred to?

PC: Pat. [laughing]
Great. So Pat, thanks again for interviewing with us today. Starting off would you mind telling us where and what year you were born?

PC: 1939, in Sacramento.

AS: And what neighborhood in Sacramento were you born in?

PC: Well it wasn't a neighborhood. [laughing] I grew up on a farm, well it's now 47th avenue, or maybe it’s 49th avenue? Anyways, it's off of Stockton and Elder Creek where the farm was. I was born in the hospital of course, which is UC Davis, but it was the county hospital way back in the beginning of time [laughing].

AS: UC Davis Med Center?

PC: Well it is now in the 21st century, but in the 20th century it was the county hospital up until the 1950s or something like that.

AS: And the farm, how long did you live there for?

PC: I think 8 years? Because I went to St. Joseph Catholic school for the 3rd grade to 9th grade, and that was at 8th and H, where the county courthouse is. That was a catholic school, run by the strictest nuns on the planet [laughing].

AS: Oh boy [laughing]. And so you went there to school, did you move from the farm to somewhere else in Sacramento?

PC: Yes by McKinley Park, a little house on C and, 28th? Because I know I used to walk to McKinley Park to the library.

AS: Oh I love that library, I was just picking up a book there this morning. So you went to that library often?
PC: Oh yes in fact, I would go there and pick out books that I wanted to read, and I would tell my mother- because if you were under 12 you had to pick out kids’ books, and I went I already read all those [laughing] so I wanted some real books to read. So I’d say, “Mom I want this” and this and she’d say OK, and she’d bring it home. And if I was reading it and I’d say “What’s this word mean? What’s this word mean?” to my mom and she would say, “If you have to ask me more than 3 times what a word means then it’s too old for you, you’ll have to read it next year” [laughing]. But she’d never tell me I couldn’t read it just I had to read it next year. I’d always move on to something else. Though mom and dad never told me I couldn’t read anything and I was reading some things I shouldn’t be reading, [laughing]. I’d ask, “What is this?” and my mother would turn every shade of red. She’d turn to my dad and say, “Bob”, that’s my dad, and say, “What is she reading?” [laughing]

AS: [laughing] So there was some interesting text you would bring home lets just say.

PC: [laughing] Oh yes. I learned a lot from them. Oh course I had no idea what they meant, to me they were just words.

AS: So your mother and your father, what did they do for work?

PC: Mom was a bookkeeper, and Dad was an airline mechanic, at McClellan air force base. It was an air force base back then [laughing].

AS: Did they move to Sacramento from somewhere else?

PC: No, not Mom, well Dad moved from New York eventually, I don’t know how they met I don’t remember that. But mother is a second or third generation Sacramentian. Because my great-grandmother had 17 kids, and all but one who was a catholic priest, married and had kids. And when I was growing up, my aunts would say, “You know aunt Mildred has that box of letters from when we were fleeing the Indians when were going
from San Francisco to Sacramento", and we would go “uh-huh yeah right” [jokingly]. And so my older cousin, Edward, he has since passed away, he said to me when I was like 20-by then I had traveled all over the United States because Mom and Dad believed that the best way to learn about the States was to go there, so we would hop into the car with my sister and brothers, and we would drive to all of our various cousins, because we had cousins in every state [laughing]. And we would drive there and visit. So I grew up thinking everybody drove and visited their cousins on summer vacation [laughing]. So when I was 20 Edward said, “You know since you’re meeting all the cousins be sure and let them know aunt Mildred has this little box of all of our history” And I said, “Eddie I’m not telling people that.” And he says, “Oh no I’ve seen it. And when she passes I’m sure my mom will get it [Eddie's mom]." So anyways, Aunt Mildred did pass on, and she gave the box to my aunty, and she says, “I don’t want this thing, here I’ll give it to you Eddie” and Eddie said, “Oh ok, I'll share it with Pat, because she’s traveled everywhere and she’s seen everything and she’s the only one that’s really interested in it since she was a kid.” And he said, “Here’s all the information about escaping the Indians and everything” and I said, “Yeah right [jokingly]”. So I sat down and I read these letters, and here are these letters from my great-grand aunts and great-grand uncles, talking about living in San Francisco and coming to Sacramento because of the gold in the hills, and it’s like oh my gosh she’s got all this stuff written down! And now I’ve got it in this little tin box. So Eddie tells me,“You keep it in Sacramento”. So it must have been like 1985… that he gave me the information. …

I was one of these people who traveled everywhere, I mean I traveled all throughout America as a kid, and I just assumed everyone traveled everywhere. So when I graduated from high school I went to Fiji, and then Hawaii and saw the cousins there [laughing]. And then I can’t remember I actually took possession of the little box [of family heirlooms] but I had everything microfilmed…I have it in some kind of in-between flash drive and microfilm whatever that is, and I made copies for my sis, sister in law, cousin, so anyways I think I made 5 copies for my family.

AS: So this was family on your mom’s side?
PC: Yes.

AS: Wow, so your family can be considered, in the Gold Rush era sense of the word, some of the first original true Sacramentians? You have deep roots here.

PC: They were just ordinary folks you know. I mean grandma owned some kind of business, clothing or something I think.

AS: And going to Catholic school, I assume your family was Catholic as well?

PC: Yeah [laughing] that explains the priest in the family.

AS: And did you go to a Catholic high school?

PC: No I graduated from Sac High. When it was Sac high,

AS: What year did you graduate?


AS: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

PC: Just two brothers and a sister, not a big family for the time.

AS: Not 17 [laughing]. And were both your parents African-American?

PC: It depends on how you decide to define that word, but the answer is yes. Father was very dark, and African-American and Native-American. I don’t remember what tribe, I don’t think I ever knew what tribe. Mother was African-American, Native-American, Chinese and Italian.
AS: And so your parents moved to McKinley Park when you were about-

PC: Eight, nine or ten about.

AS: And that same house is where you lived throughout high school?

PC: Yep.

AS: And so you were used to traveling growing up, driving cross country with your folks and whatnot-

PC: Yep [laughing]. Every other year Mom and Dad would get a new 97 Oldsmobile, that’s the model… Every other year they’d get a new one. So every year we’d pile into the car, with the dog too! [laughing].

AS: Oh wow that’s a full car! [laughing]

PC: [laughing] You know those old cars, they had a lot of room back then.

AS: Did you have any particular places you liked to go and see?

PC: Well we went to see the cousins every year so we saw everything. We went to state parks before they were state parks, or if there were state parks we would visit them too. But we didn’t camp out, because-you know, savages camped out [laughing]. We stayed in hotels and motels and with family.

AS: Gotcha [laughing].

PC: When we were down South, we were always instructed to do exactly what your cousins did. Exactly [emphasis] what your cousins did. And I can remember, I was like,
9 or 10…I was a horrid little kid [laughing]. But anyways, I don’t know if I was in Louisiana or Alabama, but one of those gulf states. And I was going out to, you know the wide spot in the road that they call a town [laughing] because there was nothing out there but all my cousins lived on farms. Anyways we went into town and there was this water fountain, and it said, White and Colored. And my cousins went to the colored one, so I went to the colored one, and I came home to Mom and Dad and I said, “They have fountains here. And they’re white and they’re colored. And the white ones don’t have milk and the colored ones don’t have purple water. They all taste the exact same as ours at home” [laughing].

AS: Oh man [laughing].

PC. Oh my lord [laughing]. So there had to be a whole story you know with my folks, of course I had absolutely no idea what they were talking about [referring to segregated water fountains]. But I was horrified. If I’m going to a white water fountain I’m expecting to get milk out of it!

AS: I mean, that’s false advertising, right?

PC: I know! [laughing].

AS: So you’re 9 or 10, what would have been 48, or 49 about?

PC Uh huh, long before civil rights was talked about out loud and in mixed company and stuff.

AS: Coming back to Sacramento from the South, did you notice any segregated water fountains or anything like that?
PC: Not in Sacramento, but along the route I did, and by then I knew what they were. It was kind of like we were told “well we should go to the colored ones because they have the best water.”

AS: I can imagine traveling at that time, doing exactly what your cousins did had a heavier importance than you may have realized at 8 or 9.

PC: Yeah, because what else are you going to tell a kid? Scare them to death?

AS: And when you were still doing these family road trips when you were older, like in high school or something like that, were you more aware of the situation? [regarding segregated facilities in the South]

PC: Well I was aware, I just figured people just talked funny down here [laughing] it was more their language more than anything. I think maybe that’s why I’m a writer, I always listen to what people are saying and I pick up on little conversations and dialect like that.

AS: So by the time you graduated high school, Fiji was only the next logical place to go sense you had been everywhere? [laughing] Did you spend much time traveling after high school?

PC Well I went everywhere [laughing]. Not right then though [after high school] I actually started working for the state, which I was going to do for like six months [laughing], 30 years later I retired [laughing]. In between all of that I went, well maybe it’s better to say where I haven’t been because I can’t remember every place I have been…. I haven’t been to the North Pacific like Vietnam, Japan and Cambodia, I haven’t been to India, I haven’t been to Pakistan and the lower stans, I haven’t been to Australia or New Zealand, I’ve only been in South America to Chile. I’ve been to six countries in Africa, all of Europe, my boyfriend and I drove all through Europe and Russia, which was the Soviet Union then, we drove together in this little red Renault with these little funny tires…of course we still got a sore thumb because he was a white guy [her boyfriend].
But they would come up to us and point to the little funny tires on the car [which looked flat] and we had learned to say they were ok in various languages…

AS: You should make a travel book with all your dos and don’t for all the different countries! [laughing]…

[Talking about traveling through Europe in the 60s by car]

PC: When we left for our trip to Europe it was [19] 68, the world was falling apart in 68… We were in Madrid and heard that Luther King had died, we didn’t know who the hell Luther King was, and there weren’t any pictures. People would come up to us and say they were sorry, but it wasn’t till about two days later we learned [it was Martin Luther King Jr] who was killed and said, “Oh my god Martin Luther King has been killed”… …Then we were in Poland when Kennedy was killed. We had sent money ahead to the embassy so if we ran out of money we had money waiting for us the next place we were going. We went to the embassy and the Marine at the gate said, “You heard about Kennedy right?” And we said “No”. And he said, “Teddy Kennedy committed suicide because Bobby Kennedy lost the California election.”… And that’s what we thought all the way through Poland, because nobody knew anything, I mean we would just run in to get money and drive away. It wasn’t till we got to some place in Russia we learned it was Bobby Kennedy, and he’d been assassinated. Then we went, “holy moly what is happening to America”…

[Talking about driving in the USSR]

PC: We were going from somewhere to somewhere and were used to having these little roadblocks, but this place, they took all of our tires off, rotated the tires, looked through the trunk, did all this stuff and we thought, “Oh my goodness, good thing we’re not smuggling anything”. They couldn’t understand how as kids we were traveling by ourselves. Then they would say, “Oh Americans can just do whatever they want.” But it was like no, no we can’t, we have to follow the rules too [laughing]…
[Talking about the police state in USSR]

PC: ...we got lost driving [in USSR countryside] So I just said, “I’ll just go into the next hotel and ask directions...Well you go in [to a random hotel] and ask for directions, but you don’t expect them to pull out your entire itinerary, know your name, have a copy of your passport, and what your next destination is. Which is exactly what happened in this little wide spot in the road in Russia. And I went, “Oh my goodness” ...and we weren’t even supposed to stop there, we were lost! They had everything on us.... We even had our own roadblock...we were in one little place and thought we were going to continue on and there was this roadblock and they said, “Miss Johnson, Mr. Janosko, you are not supposed to be on this road”...and they said when crossed the bridge [back there] you should have turned instead of crossing...I mean this was a roadblock for us, we were the only ones on this road, there wasn’t even a farm truck! They knew we were coming and knew our names! It would be different if we were diplomats or something but no we were tourists!

AS: How long were you on this trip for as tourists?

PC: A year.

AS: So you would have been 28-29 then?

PC: Yep spent my 29th birthday in Paris [laughing].

AS: So in the period after graduating high school and then, did you work for the state yet?

PC: Yeah, well I went to city college and then college, Sac City then Sac State. Then I worked for the state and thought well I’ve lived in Sacramento long enough, lets live in San Francisco. So I lived in the Haight [district in San Francisco] [laughing].
AS: Oh wow the 60s in the Height?

PC: Yep [laughing] I lived down the street from Janis Joplin.

AS: Oh cool, was she a good neighbor?

PC: Oh yes she was very sweet [laughing].

[BREAK]

AS: Did you work out there [San Francisco] for the State?

PC: Yep I was just a regular old clerk at the time, I was an office assistant at the time, because I figured I wasn’t going to stay very long [laughing]. Then I thought maybe I should take some of these tests [state examinations] so if I work for the state I can actually earn more money. So when I left [working for the state] I was and administrator working for Jerry Brown. So I had a really good retirement by the time I did leave [laughing].

AS: When you studied at Sac State what did you study?

PC: Government, I figured well why not… you know it was the 60s so I was going to change the world along with all my friends…but I didn’t [laughing].

AS: That’s debatable but we can get to that later [laughing]. What was the government program like in the 60s? As far as professors and whatnot, was the experience like in the program back then?

PC: When I stop and think about it the professors were very kind…There was this one boy in my political science classes, I wish I had his mind. He was just a genius when it
came to solving political problems and whatnot. He never studied, and always looked like he woke up 5 minutes before the bell rang [laughing]…It was wonderful to watch him, he was just a nice kid but I have no idea if he went into politics or not.

AS: Were you living with your folks at this time?

PC: Yea, I didn’t actually leave home till I moved to San Francisco when I was in my 20s.

AS: I’m interested to hear about McKinley park at this time… you were growing up about the time the freeways were going in?

PC: No there weren’t any freeways! [laughing]. I mean I saw them come through…Sacramento when I was a kid was farm country [laughing] I mean Shelby Ranch was actually a ranch. And if you went to Fair Oaks boulevard you had to pack a lunch you know because you were going out in the country. And to get to where our farm was you had to take a greyhound bus [laughing]. Stockton boulevard was the closest.

AS: Did you ever go to the fairs off Stockton boulevard?

PC: Oh yes, THE fair [laughing]. That’s where I learned to drive in that parking lot there. Because every kid’s dad took them to the parking lot at the state fairgrounds because there were big- I mean to us it was enormous but really it was probably no bigger than this parking spot [pointing outside]. But to us it just seemed like it was forever. And so you would park and back up and do whatever it was you needed to learn.

AS: This was in the Oldsmobile?

PC: Yep! That was the car [laughing]…and I mean the fog-I mean Sacramento the tule fog would come in and you would learn to drive in the winter, you would roll your
windows down, and you would lean out a little bit so you could listen to the road so you would know whether or not you were still on cement or concrete or if you were actually going over a bit towards the levee so you could hear the rocks. If you heard rocks you knew you were getting too close to the river. So I grew up leaning out the window to drive [laughing]. It's a wonder I've gotten as old as I have [laughing]. And you know we didn't have seatbelts then. And everything was fast, well 40 miles an hour [laughing].

AS: So your folks continued to live in McKinley park while you were growing up?

PC: Yep, they eventually moved to the edge of Curtis Park, they were closer to Broadway, around the S and T area.

AS: And roughly do you remember when they moved there?

PC: 65 or something I would say.

AS: It sounded like you traveled a lot as a young adult and still decided to come back to Sacramento?

PC: Oh well I didn’t decide to come back [laughing]. My husband Richard who passed away this year … he decided he was going to run for assembly, I just blanked on his name, well one of our assembly members passed away…anyway he passed away and Vic Fazio (Victor Herbert Fazio Jr)-anybody with any brains knew he was going to get the job. Richard however said “oh there’s an opening for an assembly member, I’m going to run for the assembly” and I said “We live in San Francisco, and it’s [the job] is in Sacramento” [Richard] “we'll move there, your parents will get us a house and all that”. So anyways, yeah I’m here. [laughing]. And the more he got into it he said “you know, I really don’t like politics” and I said yea I know, and besides Vic has this thing sewn up. So we ended up working for his campaign.

AS: How did you two meet?
PC: Oh that’s a whole different kettle of fish [laughing].

AS: Well as much as you’d want to tell I’d love to hear it.

PC: Well … In San Francisco, I moved from the Haight to Noe Valley area, I lived in a little apartment on Church street … and I had a friend that said “Oh Pat, I’m going to see a psychic, would go with me?” And I said well you don’t believe in those things do you? … And I said I’d go with her. The psychic was all the way across town, she was in like this little bungalow thing. And we were going up the stairs to her place, and there was this presence that was like holding her back [her friend] and she said “Oh I’m not supposed to go in here.” And so she’s standing outside, and I said “well the whole reason we’re here is because of you” and she says “well you go inside” [laughing]. […] And the women [the psychic] comes out and says, “well are you two going to stand on the sidewalk?” And my friend says “No my friend here wants to talk to you” pointing to me. And the psychic points to her and says “beware of Eric the red”. And then she says to me, “well are you going to come in or not?” And I figured, well heck I’m here why not.

So I go in and she hands me this little recorder, which my mom misplaced, and remember this is 1970, or 69, either 69 or 70.

AS: After you got back from Europe.

PC: Yeah after I got back from Europe with Janosko, Richard Janosko. Ok, I’m sitting down and she says, “Oh I see you’re going to marry Richard.” And I laugh and say, “Oh I’m not lady” [laughing]. And she says, “Oh yes you are.” And she says, “Oh he’s not very tall is he?” No he is. And she says, “And he has green eyes.” And I say no they’re grey […] And she says, “And you have to spell his last name all the time right?” And I went well ya. So anyways, all this time the tape is running like yours is [pointing to the recorder] and she says, “You’ll be married this time next year”. And I thought oh lady
you are completely crazy [laughing]. And she says, “Tell you what, if you’re not married you don’t owe me anything” And I says, “Oh I’m supposed to be paying for this? [laughing], you’re crazy as a loon!” And she says, “Come back in a year.” And I said alright….

So this is in February. In August, girl next door to me [my neighbor] says, “Oh Pat I’m having a birthday party, do you want to come over?” I say sure, it’s only next door…. As I’m sitting in the living room, this guy comes in and I think Holy crap, that must be Richard. [laughing]. And I think Oh my gosh. So I get up and leave that room and go into another one…then later he comes into the room I’m in and I go into another one [laughing], we do this for about an hour. Then I'm sitting down and he comes over and says, “Why do you leave the room every time I come in?” And I said, “I don’t.” And he said, “Yeah I notice you leave the room every time I come in.” And I said, “I don’t.” And he said, “Well if you don’t can you make me some tea?” And the words coming out of my mouth are, “I only live next-door, why don’t you come next-door and I'll make you some tea?” So he follows me as we're walking and I said … “Let me get in the house first because I have cats and they don’t like people, let me make sure they are locked away.” So I go in and don’t see them, so I assume they’re under the bed, so I shut the door to the bedroom. As I’m putting on the water for the tea he says from the living room, “How many cats do you have?” And I said, ‘Two.’ “These two here?” And I flew into the living room because they would attack people. And there he is sitting with them with in his lap. And I said, “They don’t like people”, and he said, “Well they like me.” [laughing]. And I said, “Oh by the name, what’s your name?” And he said, “Richard”….

We were married 48 years. We were married December 27th the year following.

[BREAK]

AS: Getting back to Sacramento, by the time you moved back [to Sacramento] in [19]71, it must have been completely changed from when you were a kid?
PC: Well you were still seeing jackrabbits on Mack road, anything south of Florin road was wilderness. … There were still little farms where people were growing stuff. When Richard and I were first married we were living off 43rd or something and we had a little orchard with a few trees, and a little rooster [laughing]. …

AS: This was 43rd avenue or street?

PC: Avenue. We lived wayyy out there [laughing], at that time at least. We had olive trees…pomegranates, peaches, oh and avocados! And cherries.

AS: How did you live there for?

PC: Only about, [Robert] Matsui became congressman, let me see [laughing], the first one Doris' husband. So I’d say 6 years?

AS: And you were working for the state at this time?

PC: Oh ya, I was an analyst by then.

AS: What department were you working with?

PC: Employment development department or department of rehab, I can’t remember which. I know I started as an analyst EDD and went to [department] of rehab under Jerry [Governor Jerry Brown], because I worked the first disabled director of the department of rehab, he was in an iron lung.

AS: Do you remember his name?
PC: Ed. Well, let's see, I called him Ed. Anyway, you see Jerry put all these people in, like the first women head of the department of transportation, first disabled person head of rehab and others like that. 

AS: Do you remember where your building was?

PC: Ya, it was on 9th and K. On the second floor, I had a window that overlooked K street. And right down the hall from me we had people that could use computers [laughing] …

AS: And so you worked as a policy analyst working for the board of engineers -

PC: Yes, that's where I retired from.

AS: Where were you working for them when you went to the UN Policy conference? [The 1985 UN Conference on Women in Kenya.]

PC: I think... well it was 85 so it was then... I was talking to my friend about the upcoming conference and she said, “Oh I think my boss [Former Mayor of San Francisco and at this time assembly speaker Willie Brown Jr] would be interested in hearing you speak about women working on farms in California.” And I said, “Oh ok” And that’s what I did. …

We were part of a sorority, which I'm not a member of a sorority, but my friend was so we went together. There was about 35 of us …

[Talking about travel experience going to women’s conference]
We flew into this little country that South Africa surrounds, anyways, the King was like 4, his mom had gone to college in America and was friends with the women who was leading our delegation. So we were invited to this little wide spot in the road to sleep in the palace with the princesses [laughing].
Follow up Interview was conducted on Dec 6th, 2021

AS: Today is December 6th, my name is Andrew Shimizu, I’m doing a follow up interview with Pat Canterbury about the African American experience in Sacramento, we’re doing an oral history for the city of Sacramento, made possible by the African American Cultural action fund. …

So you talked about your parents and growing up in the more rural areas of Sacramento last time, what were your parent’s names?

PC: Robert and Elaine Johnson.

AS: And the farm you grew up on-

PC: It was a little tiny farm [laughing].

AS: Right, when did they move there?

PC: I guess in the 40s? Sometime in the 40s? I don’t remember anytime before that. I was maybe 6 months old when they moved there.

AS: And were they in Sacramento before that?

PC: Mom was. And as I said I don’t remember how they met, dad was the air force mechanic and she was a bookkeeper. Way out in the country I have no idea.

AS: And the farm, the tiny farm you grew up on, how long did you live there for?

PC: Until I was 8, I think, lets see, when I was 9 or 10 we were on 28th street we I was
going to Marshall, and that was when everybody in my class got everything. Meaning whooping cough, chicken pox, measles, mumps, no I had mumps on the farm. But I had everything else in the 3rd grade. But from the 3rd grade on I never missed a day of school [laughing].

AS: Got them all out of the way at once [laughing]. So that was 28th and C in McKinley Park area?

PC: Right and went to the movies at the Alhambra.

AS: Oh my goodness, lucky you.

PC: I couldn’t believe it, I wasn’t living in the area when they tore it down but, … I couldn’t believe that nobody was saving it when they tore it down. People were trying to but the fact they didn’t, and for a grocery store? People had to be out of their minds!

AS: Was it as good as they said it was?

PC: Oh, it was better. I mean it looked like a Moorish Castle, it was just gorgeous. It had carpets everywhere, I mean it was just beautiful, beautiful lamps and everything. And the seats were, you know what they’re trying to do now, but they were there already. Yeah I can remember going to the Alhambra, and if I was reallllly good and saved my money I could go all the way downtown to the Crest. Oh my goodness I saw the wizard of oz, four-hundred and fifty-million times [laughing].

AS: That has to be a record [laughing].

PC: I saw it so many times that the lady at the booth said, “Oh honey are you here to see the movie again?” I can probably recite the entire dialogue.

AS: Was that when it came out in theaters?
PC: Well no it came out when I was born, it was playing when I was like 9, 10? And I could go to the movies by myself then because I was double digits. That was the rule in our family. And it was nice back then because you didn’t worry about kidnapping and sexual predators, I’m sure they were out there but everybody in the world was oblivious to them.

AS: So when you were 10, 1949-

PC: Uh huh, after the war.

AS: Right, so it felt like a pretty nice, safe community? Like in McKinley park?

PC: Oh everywhere. I mean you went home because it was dark and you couldn’t see, [laughing] and we still took naps until we were 16 … All of us had to take naps, and we couldn’t fake it. And we would say we can hardly wait till we’re grown up and don’t have to take naps. [laughing].

AS: Now all I want to do is take naps [laughing].

PC: As I said, mom and dad allowed me to read anything growing up. And television was so sterile back then, so I could watch anything they were watching, and there wasn’t anything to watch really other than Lucy and stuff like that which was fun. But I was forming opinions that were very strong and mom and dad would say, “You know you have to learn not to voice your opinions so adamantly”. Because there was, you know where the Hayat [hotel] is? There’s the Senator Hotel. Well way back in the day it was segregated. I didn’t know what that meant, but I knew that quote colored folks only went in the backdoor because you couldn’t go in the front door, not even if you worked there. And the only people that worked there were the maids and the porters if they were black. I can’t think if they even had Mexican people working there, like all the Mexican people were working in the farms. And of course all the Japanese people were
just coming back and reclaiming their land from having been in camps and stuff. And they [the Japanese] grew all the greatest strawberries and such. You know how you picked strawberries back then? .... You pick a strawberry, lick off all the dirt and everything [laughing] ...and put it in the basket. And that's the way my friends and I learned how to pick strawberries. And I don't know if they used pesticides or anything. And we would fight to go pick strawberries at my friends house [laughing].

AS: Was that in McKinley park?

PC: No that was out wayyyyyy [jokingly] out, so far out, dad had to drive us out to like Florin road... That was just how you picked strawberries. I mean isn't that scary if you think about that now?

AS: Maybe...I don’t know...probably a good connection with the earth? You guys were built differently back then [laughing].

PC: Maybe [laughing].

AS: So, when you would go downtown as a 10 year old, how would you get around?

PC: Oh bicycles!

AS: Bicycles?

PC: Oh yeah. ... I never did learn to ride with no hands.

AS: Never too late [laughing].

PC: Yea no. Anyways, I rode a bicycle, and everybody rode a bicycle. And you went wherever you wanted to go, except you didn't want to go to skid row, that's where old town [Sacramento] is now.
AS: Yeah the West end?

PC: Yeah because that’s where all the bad people were. And of course we didn’t know who they were. But if we went till we saw three or four men huddling on a corner we’d say “oh we’re in the wrong part of town” and turn our bikes around [laughing].

AS: Oh my gosh, so you had an informal knowledge of the boundaries.

PC: Yep, but you know as far as [safety], you know I didn’t even have a key to the house, at all, you left your doors unlocked. And you went in and out of everybody’s house, all my friends would come in and say, “Hi Mrs. Johnson is Pat here?” And she would say no she’s across the street at so and so’s. That’s the way we all lived we never thought anything about ringing the bell and coming in. And besides if we rang the bell the parent inside would think we’re a salesman or something [laughing].

AS: That’s interesting to note that in your neighborhood everyone seemed like they were friends with each other?

PC: Well the whole city was like that, if you saw a little kid on a bicycle you know, and he fell over and skinned his knee, four moms would run out and make sure they were ok, it didn’t matter what color they were.

AS: And the McKinley Park area at that time, was that a newer development? Were you the first ones to own the house?

PC: No, it wasn’t brand new when we bought it, I think mom and dad bought it from somebody. But, you remember the old B street theater?

AS: I do!
PC: We lived close to there and would walk down to that park and play baseball.

[BREAK]

AS: I am interested in talking about the Senator Hotel and your feelings on the matter as a young child and not knowing what was going on [with segregation].

PC: Oh well I didn’t know because I was a kid, and by the time I was halfway an adult it was integrated by then. There was a group of folks that gave a huge ball, I think it was in December I don’t really remember. It was called the black and white ball I don’t really remember, and that’s what people were supposed to wear, men all wore tuxes and women wore white gowns. But anyway, I can remember saying to Mom, because I could say it to her… they said we’re going to go to the ball, and I said, “What do you mean you’re going to go there and spend money there?” And Mom said, “Well they opened it up to everyone to go there,” And I said, “But before you couldn’t go there, and I wouldn’t dignify that place by showing my face there” - I was like 12 or 13, I was not going to have my parents show their faces at that segregated hotel [laughing]. It was really an ugly little argument. …

Mom said, “Times have changed honey you have to change with the times.” And I said, “I’m never going to set foot in that hotel.”

AS: Pretty outspoken for a 12-year-old huh?

PC: Well that’s their fault they raised me that way! [Laughing]

AS: Were there other establishments that were segregated like the Senator?

PC: Well there were but that was the only one I remember, because they were right across the street from the capital, and how dare them! That’s kind of in my brain, it’s like in your face.
AS: As a 12-year-old you were already well traveled … and used to the stricter forms of segregation. Was segregation enforced on a city-wide basis?

PC: As a kid I don’t think it was city-wide though it might have been. I never ran into it, I mean I rode my bike all over, like if the street was paved I’d ride there. But I never ran into anything from folks calling me names in Sacramento. Sometimes out in the country like Rio Linda…they were just stupid folks. Mom and dad said, “Once you go over into Rio Linda you go into stupid folks area.” [laughing]

[Break]

AS: What was your middle school?

PC: Saint Josephs. And I went to Sac High. Mom and dad said you’re not going to live your whole life with Catholics so you’re going to a public school. With boys.

AS: Where was St. Josephs at?

PC: Like 8th and H? Where the county courthouse is? …

AS: Would you ride your bike to school?

PC: Yeah, a nice 20 blocks or something like that……The train would go by on the train tracks, in those days they’d have the steam engines.

AS: Oh by the railyards?

PC: Yeah, no one would go to the railyards. I mean you were little, and the train wouldn’t see you and you’d get killed. …
AS: What was your experience like at Sac High, as far as public-school vs private Catholic?

PC: Well, they were a little slower [laughing]. I was more advanced than some of my peers… I wanted to be as advanced as the advanced kids. I had this really ancient principal who was probably all of 35 [joking]… He was the principal, and it was kind of like oh my god he was older than mom and dad [laughing].

AS: So they were pretty young when they had you?

PC: Yeah [laughing].

AS: What place are you as far as your siblings?

PC: I’m the next oldest, I have a brother, sister, had a brother who passed away, and have a sister. …

AS: How old were your folks when they had your oldest sibling?

PC: Mom was 17, dad was 23…

AS: So yeah they were still young parents when you were in high school.

PC: Yeah and all my friends parents were the same age. God forbid they were in their 40s, those are grandparents [laughing].

AS: That must have been a nice youthful energy.

[Break]
AS: So as you’re growing up and the city is getting bigger, did you notice it changing much through the 50s?

PC: No it wasn’t until the freeway that I noticed a difference. My friend Pat lived on 30th street, and they had to move because the freeway was coming through… They used to live where a column is now.

AS: Did you know a lot of people who had to move because of the freeway?

PC: Well, she was a really close friend. Then there was Colleen, her dad was a police officer. Colleen and Diane, they lived on 29th. But they were just a little couple of folks. But that was it I never really thought of it that much it was just like Oh dust. Big machines making noise.

AS: Could you still get to downtown by bike?

PC: Oh yes. I rarely took the bus.

AS: Were the trollies running at the time?

PC: Yeah the downtown trollies, but you had to get there. They were running on J and K streets. I can’t remember how far they went… And all the kids rode their bikes. And drove at 14.

AS: 14?

PC: Yep, they learned to drive, because if you wanted to go places, like god forbid you wanted to go to Galt [laughing].

AS: What was in Galt?
PC: Well they had a little fair, Lodi had a little fair, and of course their football teams always beat Sac High. First game of the season back in the day was Galt vs Sac, and we always, always lost. The entire 4 years I was there we always lost. … We could go 10 and 1, but never 11 and 0 because of Galt. I mean those were little farm boys and they were monsters beating up on little city kids [laughing].

AS: Dainty city kids vs farm machinery, that’s quite the match up [laughing].

PC: But yea, everybody drove, you had to learn the clutch, only rich kids had automatics [laughing]. We all learned at the med center is now. There’s not a Sacramento native under the age of 65 that didn’t learn to drive at the old fairgrounds. That’s where parents took them because you had a huge parking lot and didn’t have to worry about hitting anyone! [laughing].

AS: Did you ever go to the state fair when it was in town?

PC: Oh yes, we’d be there all night. …

AS: So graduated in 1957?

PC: Yep before the beginning of time [laughing].

AS: And you went to Sac City after?

PC: Yes I went to Sac city because I graduated when I was 17, and mom said, “Oh, 17, wait wait you’re going to go to Jr college.” Of course it was way out in the weeds. Down freeport across from Land Park. How did I get there? Did I drive? I think I drove. …

[Speaking of a professor at Sac City]
PC: Jay Deck was his name. He was a young guy, like 26 or 27, he taught theater and made you speak up, boy you needed to pronounce your words poetically. … I was already a confident speaker at 17 though, just like I am now [laughing].

AS: As so you did 2 years at Sac City and then went to Sac State?

PC: Yeah … I mean I studied government because if you live in Sacramento you work for the military or you work for the state. And I studied government and said I am not going to be a clerk my entire life. Because if you were 16 you could go and work for the franchise tax board, needless to say it was not up to date. Everything came in on paper, and they had IBM punch cards, and everything was alphabetized by human beings. The 18 year olds opened the mail because they had checks in them, and then given to the 16 year olds who could put them in order to check off that John Smith got his taxes in.

And I was in this room with all these ladies… all wearing skirts because you couldn’t wear trousers, and they were all at wooden desks, and the summer I was 17… an announcement came through that the next year that all of the desks would be replaced with brand new metal desks. And you would have thought it was the end of the world. People were crying and holding on to their desks saying “I’ve had this desk for 20 years and no one is taking this desk from me!”… And I thought I have to get out, oh man, I have to make sure that whatever exam I take for the state it is not this. Because I have to get out of this, whatever this is.

So I took whatever exam was analytical, anything I could because I said please god get me out of here, I don’t want to be here for 20 years sobbing over a wooden desk [laughing].

AS: That’s good motivation to move up though? [laughing].

PC: I mean they were the sweetest things and they were all lucky to be working, they were all making no money. Half of them were married and half were single. They were
all like little robots, in fact they were little robots because 6 years later robots were all taking over. So I took government and I went all the way up in state government.

AS: So you did 2 years after transferring at Sac State?

PC: Yeah, and then I got a masters degree at sac state.

AS: What was your masters in?

PC: In government. Then I decided let’s get out of here, so I moved to San Francisco and lived the bohemian life [laughing].

AS: You were doing the state work out there?

PC: Yea you know, because it was easy to transfer out there and stuff. Then I went to Europe [laughing].

[Break]

AS: What was your time like working for the state?

PC: Well I got interesting jobs. I was able to work for Jerry Brown at the department of rehab, and the director was Ed Roberts who was in an iron lung and I thought that well that's interesting, and the two deputy directors were in wheelchairs, and I thought it was completely natural. Meanwhile the rest of the world was coming completely unglued about it.

AS: What year did you start working with them?

PC: ....When was Carter President? Because I was in charge of finding someone to translate his speech at Blessed Sacrament.
AS: He was, 77 to 81.

PC: Yeah so, 76 to 79 I was at rehab. I got a call that the president was going to be in Sacramento and wanted someone to interpret his speech… and they said, “Pat can you find someone to interpret and I said, “Yeah the president of what?” [laughing]. You’re not expecting the president of the United States. [laughing]. …

I went from there to BTNH, Business Transportation and Housing, that’s an agency over the department of transportation … that whole section of state government. When [California Governor] Deukmejian came in, all of us who reported to Jerry were quote demoted, so I went as an assistant deputy to DMV… I retired from the Engineers Commission, my last position in 2004.

[Break]

AS: And your husband worked in-

PC: He worked in real estate.

AS: That’s right.

PC: And he played tennis at McKinley. He was one of those people who would be out there in 103 degrees, and channel 3 was out there with this poor reporter dripping wet talking to the fools out there playing tennis, and Richard would be one of the fools out there playing [laughing]. …

AS: Just closing up, just in general, how did you feel about Sacramento growing up?

PC: I thought it was a quiet little cow town, and growing up I wanted to see the rest of the world.
AS: But you came back?

PC: Yeah, because it was a quiet little cow town [laughing].

AS: Do you feel that as the city has changed since your time growing up it still has the same feeling?

PC: Well, I think it’s meaner. Which is strange, but, I expect more, I expect more from people. For instance Anne Rudin just passed away, she was one of the first women mayors. And her obituary was on the 3rd page of the bee, should have been on the first page you know? I just thought she got short changed… there’s just this sense of me me me, which I didn’t experience growing up. I’m surprised when people aren’t as friendly as they were. And they’ll say things about people who don’t look like them … and everybody lumps them together, like all these different people. Who cares, they’re here now. But I could go on.

AS: I get that of course.

PC: When I was a kid, if you rode your bike down any street and fell off and hurt your knees, moms would come out and take care of you, period. Now you’re tripping over homeless folks. What happened? We should be taking care of those homeless folks.

[End of Conversation]
Oral History Project: Federick K. Foote
Abstract
The city of Sacramento conducted a project focusing on recording the African American experience in Sacramento, mainly focused on Oak Park. Our class, History 282C Oral History, conducted the oral interviews with members of the Sacramento community. The interviews consisted of two informal meetings to introduce ourselves and the aim of the project. We followed these informal meetings with a recorded meeting, which is transcribed below. In the beginning of the interview, I reference our previous meeting; he discussed his trip to Miami, where he was held by authorities due to returning from a trip to Haiti. The interviewee also recommended some of his personal short stories for me to read which I discuss in the beginning and end of the interview. During our interview we discuss the interviewee’s role in the Civil Rights movement of Sacramento throughout his life. Due to COVID, we met over zoom, as the interviewee’s request, to conduct the meeting.

Interviewee biography: The interviewee is Frederick K. Foote. Mr. Foote was born September 7th, 1943, in Sacramento. Mr. Foote spent a period of his childhood in Virginia before returning to Sacramento. Mr. Foote graduated High School in Sacramento and attended Sacramento City College before enlisting in the Air Force. Once out of the armed services, Mr. Foote returned to Sacramento City College where he became active in the Civil Rights movement. Mr. Foote contributed to the Civil Rights movement as he transferred to UC Davis and continued his career afterwards. He worked for the city of Sacramento before becoming a teacher and writer. Since Mr. Foote’s time in the armed services, he lived in Sacramento for the rest of his life.

Interviewer biography: My name is Dane Nicolas. I graduated from UC Davis with a bachelor’s in History and English. During this interview I attended California State University, Sacramento in the Public History program. I grew up in Southern California until transferring to UC Davis. I was very happy to be a part of this program and interview Mr. Foote.

Interview

DN: Today is November 29, and my name is Dane Nicolas and I'm interviewing Frederick Foote. The project is [capturing] the African American experience in Sacramento. And I'm currently at home in Davis, and let's go ahead and get started. So, I had a chance to read those two stories and they were really, really interesting and inspiring. I was interested in where you find your inspiration for your writing.

FF: Well, lots of places, sometimes just the news, and sometimes things people tell me. But most of it is my history. I can go back and look at history, my own history and I see a lot of things that I want to write about, and it's a way of giving out a history that probably is fiction, but it is has as much truth in it as any story.

DN: I'm sorry I forgot one thing and I will be recording this. Is that all right with you?
FF: Yes, that's fine.

DN: Perfect. I was really moved by “the game”. You have such a descriptive way of writing I felt like it was really relatable to the character but at the same time you're talking about such an interesting conflict like just what it feels like to be a parent and what that feels like within the context of race with other people's perception of what that looks like. Yeah, I was just really, really impressed.

FF: Thank you.

DN: Um, so I think last time we talked we finished with your story with your visit to Miami.

FF: Yeah, unforgettable visit to Miami.

DN: Yeah, did you want to continue from there or.

FF: Sure, I just was thinking in between our sessions here, about the feeling I had when I came out of the service and went back to Sacramento City College, and all of the things that had gone on in the 40s and 50s and it just seemed to be this movement and this consensus in the black community, in the black communities, across the United States that we had to do something to establish our freedom to gain our freedom and freedom was really was simply defined as the end of racial discrimination in all areas of civil life or in the employment or housing, recreation, or travel. It had to end, and I think most black people agreed with that. We didn't necessarily have a really solid consensus on that we had to integrate, because I think a lot of the small businesses and schools, said if you integrate it will be the end of us, we won't have a school that we control anymore. We will have little businesses that are ours because will be wiped out. So, but there was this general feeling, especially I think it started intensifying afterwards World War Two, even though it was evident before then. Where we just weren't going to take it anymore, and it especially flourished when the GIs came back and they had a wider view of the world, they had seen other places and other perspectives and saw how they were treated and different communities. And I think they bought that wider awareness back and I think many of the people in this country who want to enforce the racial rules, saw that and they attack these GIs when they came back for no other reason than they came back, and they were standing tall. And I think that that just increased our intense desire to end discrimination and all of its forms, all this racial discrimination. And it was, it was like a fever across the country especially with the young people, or the younger people in my age group. We really wanted to be part of this movement, and we applaud it everything that King was trying to do. A lot of people didn't agree with him. But everybody understood his bravery, his courage, and his tenacity, and that he thought beyond the normal scheme of things where we want this, we want that. He connected the whole world of injustices and how we were part of and how we could not separate ourselves from the injustice of the war in Vietnam and the injustice in Alabama. And I think that that really moved me in, and it, it motivated me to be part of something so broad and so clear. And I think there were millions of us on the campuses and in the
jobs and it was just a feeling that we’re not necessarily going to win, but just by struggling, really, we define our humanity in our struggles. So better than going to churches to fight for the rights to be who you are and fight for the freedoms as necessary to be a human being in this country and I think that was just a tremendous feeling that connected a lot of black people in it. And it was a true movement because it motivated people in every sphere of life, and at every age to be part of this great project of freedom.

DN: Wow. That's incredible. When you mentioned that some people didn't agree with Martin Luther King. Do you know any examples or what were they not agreeing with?

FF: Oh well, Malcolm X for one, he didn't know, he clearly said, you turn the other cheek all you're going to do is break the other cheek with the other fist and it's not going to work. You really have to stand up and you have to show him that you are willing to fight. And of course, kings retort was. They see we're willing to fight when we're in the street, they see the children in the street in the old people in the street. They understand that we will not be defeated. But we cannot win a battle with guns, who will not win there, and it will just reinforce the kind of situation that power makes right. So, it was a wonderful dialogue going on it was going on at all levels of the community, the Black Panther Party in the Black Student Union and all the other organizations the NAACP, they had to take a position on this perspective, and they had to be somewhere on that on that line about, how do we challenge effectively. And do we actually draw down on our military experience grab our guns take to the streets. And so, and then there were a lot of people, young students who didn't agree with King, because they thought he wasn't aggressive enough they didn't want him taken out taking up arms. But they wanted him to be more aggressive, and more assertive and bring more of the churches into it. And there were people who disagree because they said that King was, and this black people, said King was disrupting, that our path to progress depended on the willingness of white people to give us things, and that we were offending white people with these activities, and therefore they weren't going to give us things, they're going to take things away from us. So, even within our community, even with our movement, was everybody believing that we want to end a racial discrimination, there are still these divisions about, how do we get there.

DN: Wow. And I know that you are an active participant in this How did. What was your exact understanding and feel about this?

FF: I was always in the process of trying to figure out what we do on a particular situation. I was less into the theoretical aspects of it, then I was into the practical applications of it, like we were trying to get things done in Sacramento City College, and we had numerous demonstrations and we did civil disobedience. Now we took over the hallways of the administration building. And I thought that was right smack dab in the middle of what King had talked about, about demonstrating with our bodies, other commitments of our minds and doing it in such a fashion that it could not be ignored. But we weren't harming people we weren't beating people we weren't burning things we weren't breaking windows. We were committing our bodies, and we were doing it in
such a fashion that they could not be ignored. People could not ignore us and say, well, we don't see them, or we don't hear them. So, every time we came to a situation about what we should do, the debate was those people who wanted to do more and be fiercer, and those people who wanted to do less, and those people who said no we have to do more than we've done in the past, we've got to, what we've done in the past hasn't been effective. So now we have to do more, we have to be more militant, and militant was the word that the media came up with for black people. So, if there were white, they were extremely stuff they were We were black we will militants, that was term they came up with extremists had the connotation of it had some kind of philosophy behind it and militant was just you were mad. So, it was another version of the Mad black people is black man mad black woman, now the Mad black students. So, yeah, it was and still is a struggle about how do you carry on this fight in a way that doesn't get you destroyed in the process, and that reaffirms the ideas that you're trying to create.

DN: I'm not sure how to ask this question but did you guys see any immediate results through your protesting or active activities at Sac State.

FF: Well, at Sac City we did. Yeah, we saw that we got Oak Park School of Afro American thought which we want it. And we own that, we appointed the administrator who was a fellow student to that, we chose the classes that we're going to be taught we chose the teachers that we're going to teach them. We bought in our own classes. So, we saw, immediate results we saw, we had our first black ethnic studies course, and we have Professor Fisher, they hired him to teach it. And so, we saw the results we thought we were changing the world, and we would we were unstoppable force. And because we were a coalition evolving blacks and browns and white radicals and Asians and Latinos. We felt that there was an unstoppable wave, and that we would succeed because we saw success in a relatively short period of time. They have promised us an Oak Park School of Afro American thought, and what they gave us was a janitorial closet over at American Legion. That's how big the room was they gave us, they said, well you can go with American Legion. You won't be on the campus but you go who there, because that's an Oak Park, and we went we saw that we came back, we held a rally had the press there, and we showed them so this is the pictures of what they gave us, and it is completely unacceptable. And before the rally was over the administration had sent over somebody to tell us that they had ordered us trailers from another school district down in the Bay Area, and the trailers were on the way and they were going to be set up at where Stanford junior high school was, and that was our first version of the before we got a permanent building. And so, we saw immediate results. And it taught us that no matter how large bureaucracy is and how powerful it seems. It can be moved. And we moved it, and we were we were patting ourselves on the back we were really impressed with ourselves.

DN: That's awesome. I must have felt really empowering to see that kind of results taking place. I was curious. Was there a particular reason it was an Oak Park or what was the significance of the location?
FF: Oh well because Sacramento City College is really close to park. Its Curtis Park is between it and Oak Park, but it's walking distance from Oak Park to City College, and we felt that City College because it was located in that community, owned that community a lot more. The Los Rios Community College District, which. It runs the school was stretching out, it had outreach places in Davis, and it was, it was moving to downtown. They had classes downtown for people who are getting out of work, so they didn't even have to go to school I could just leave the jobs and go, and we wanted the similar kind of treatment for our community and we felt Oak Park was the logical community because of its proximity to the campus and because it had so many people from the campus going there, that it should do something in our community something special. So, that's why we picked it was proximity and because we had a population that we thought could be served by having where they could walk literally any place in Oak Park and walk to that site.

DN: That's awesome, I remember reading that you continued like these kinds of activities at UC Davis, and you received a reprimand, do you mind explaining that.

FF: Yeah. When I got to UC Davis, they had Black Student Union, and just kind of said come on in and be an officer in the Black Student Union, and we will do whatever we can do down here to make things like they were in city in some sense to get more of the kinds of programs that we wanted. And before we could really get started, I mean they were already doing it but before right as I got there, an issue came up with the Aggie, which is the school paper down there and Asian students were really furious with the Aggie for series, a series of missteps they had made about Asians, and Asian students. And so, as a coalition again, we all went to the University and said out, we're going to have this this is like crap. We don't want an apology or an explanation. What we want is you, to give us a page in the Aggie, so we can have our own editorials, our own reporting. And that's what we want, and then he of course said no, no, we're not giving up a page. Are you kidding? We will not do that. So, we have a protest, and we say, well, you're right, it would be a really bad fit. We want our own paper, and the school said no paper, we said yeah, we want to paper, we're going to have this paper and it was going to be Third World News, and it's going to be every month, a different racial, ethnic origin group will take it so blacks will be editors and Asians then foreign students than Latinos, then women, so every, every month, there's going to be a different editorial board and different editor and that's how we're going to work this paper. And we protested and protested and damn if the Aggie didn't come up. Well, I mean the university didn't came up with the money for a paper for us. And the third World News ran for at least thirty years that I was aware of. And every time I went down, I'd say, is there a third world news around here. So, we created our own newspaper, and I wrote in the newspaper about the Oak Park Four who were four kids, four young black man accused of killing police officer in Sacramento. And I covered the trial for the paper. And I also wrote about the differences between drug enforcement and in Lotus land, which I called Davis, and Oak Park, where I live, and I said you know I come to this campus I can walk around this campus go cross quad see some young white person smoking a joint, and I can say can I get ahead of that and they will give me a hit of that and the cops would walk right by and ain't nobody saying nothing to nobody. If I go back to Oak
Park, they will pull me over for no reason. Take the seats out of the back of my car search my car, disassemble it take the car, take the spare tire off and take the spare tire off the rim to check for drugs and if they find just some butts or some seed, an ashtray. I am going to be arrested. And I wrote about that and I wrote about Aggie land, or Lotus land was really the whole purpose of the University of California was to provide services to farmers and other industries without regard to the impact on people like farm workers and that it was a hideous kind of an institution because they kept saying we represent the people of California, you do not you represents a specific industrial interest, and that's who you work for irregardless of the impact of your work on other people. And so, administrator, called me and said, That's uncalled for. And it's unjust and it's unfair. And I said, well, I could be, but you can write an editorial and we'll publish it will put it in the world. And should point out where I'm mistaken, and we'll absolutely publish it and he said, well, if you continue in this vein. You will be subject to discipline. And I said, Yeah, good, good luck on that. Good luck. Yeah, I've already been subject to discipline, and I'm survive so it's okay with me. So, that that was our little adventure down there that I remember and I was really proud of third world news because it worked and it worked for decades and, and we got it is one of those another one of those things where the institution says no we're not going to do it, and you put the pressure on the institutional, they find the money, I mean it's not a lot of money to run a student newspaper, like, Oh, we need a million dollars a year. No, we just need office space, and we need to cover supplies, that's what we need. And you need to give students credit for working for us that was the other thing, because students got credit for working for the Aggie, so you need to give us English credit for working for this paper too.

DN: Wow, that's awesome. Yeah, that's incredible I'll have to look into it and see if it's still publishing.

FF: Please do and let me know if it is, but it was, it was a great effort, and it was really fun to work with those different editorial boards and to see people growing and developing skills and as just was wonderful because people who would have never been in an English class voluntarily were now enrolled in this English class and they were working on this newspaper and it was, it was a it was a great thing to do and again it taught people, all of us, that we have the power to change the system. If we can be organized, and if we can be persistent. And use the press for our advantage.

DN So, did you live in Oak Park? How long did you live in Oak Park actually?

FF: Couple of years, you know, Park, and then we move to Hollywood Park, which is right across from City College, literally about five blocks from City College. We stayed there for about 28 years.

DN: Oh wow. Awesome. With your conclusion and Davis. What did you do afterwards and were you able to continue your participation in the civil rights movement?

FF: Well, that's the grand thing about the civil rights movement back then and still to some extent today. I think one of the things historians have not adequately covered
from the period of the 50’s through the 70’s, in businesses and private businesses and IBM big corporations, black people were forming their own groups inside there to represent their interests, and the organizations were recognizing them as legitimate groups. And the same thing was going on the state government, when I got through a Davis, I went to work for state government and in state government they had something called BASS, black advocates and State service, and it was a group that was like a union for black people. Except you didn’t have to pay dues. I mean, you did pay dues, but you got represented even if you didn’t pay dues. And the whole point of the organization was to go to the various departments and state government and saying, this is what you’re doing is wrong, this is what’s discriminatory. This is what you need to change. This is how you need to implement affirmative action, and I had the job for a long time, for about a decade, of representing employees who were facing adverse personnel actions, who were being dismissed or demoted, so I would go represent them in hearings I represent them. I’d go talk to their supervisors, I talked to the director of the department. And so, wherever I went that’s where the revolution was so if I was on campus, there were the black student organizations and the coalitions. And when I worked in state government. There were coalitions again, same kinds of Coalition's we had on the campus, and every group every ethnic group Asian Pacific Islanders Latino black had their own organization, and we represented people and we protested, and we didn’t make demands. It was like we grew up, but we didn’t grow out of what we’re doing. And I talked to other people who lived in that era other people who work for private industry, and they said oh yeah, we had a black group and we used to go to the management the corporation, the CEO and say this this is what's wrong. So, these kinds of organizations sprouted up in the 60s and 70s, almost everywhere. And I don’t think the historians have paid enough attention to them, and they still live on, and they had an influence in organizations because people could see that there are black people here oh my god, we do have some and they are unhappy. And here’s why. And so, at that point the administration or the CEO could say, well, that's so much garbage man, we don’t want to listen to it, or they could say well how can we make this work better and more often the response was, how can we make this work better.

DN: Wow, that's so awesome. Do you mind specifying what you meant by the dismissals?

FF: Oh yeah, a lot of time people would be on one case I had was a friend of mine who had known since Junior High School, and he was being dropped on probation, because he was ineffective and doing his work. And they said they have whole stack of documents, and this is what he screwed up and this is what he didn't do right. And I said, when did you serve this notice on? And they said oh we serve this notice it's all here it's all here I said no, no, no you don't understand what I'm asking you. I'm asking you what was the date you served in with us notice. And they said, we served him on this date. And I said, well, if you served him on this day his probation was over. You served him too late. And if you want to dismiss him, dismissal and probation is different from dismissing a permanent employee, and what you have here today will not suffice to dismiss a permanent employee. And the judge said. I think he's right. So, what do you want to do? And this is the AG, this is the attorney general for the state of
California, and they said, well I think we should proceed, and the Judge says you can proceed but what do you think's going to happen. You can go on a record. I'm just going to dismiss it because you served late. So, then the AG takes me outside says well let's make a deal here. Why don't he just voluntarily me. He is not voluntary leaving you don't have any cause of action against him, you talking about he failed to perform up to your expectations, you fail to perform up to your expectations, you late, then you still move forward with the late process, if there's somebody here who's not doing their job was inefficient ineffective. It's you. And so, later, my friend. He's he transferred later of his own free will, but later he became a deputy US Marshal. And he was a US Marshal for 40 years and he never had any problems. We had lots, I have a woman who I was friends with who was not a member of BASS so she was Latina, and she was telling me one day about the problems she had about, she wanted to transfer from one classification to another, and they said she couldn't transfer because she had failed this test. And I said, nah, nah they are just jiving you around that test has so much adverse impact. So, she said, well would you represent me in a hearing, and I said yeah, it'll be quick and easy. Yeah, no big deal. So, we went to the hearing I said, well yeah, yeah, she didn't do very well on that test that's true, but that test has a lot of adverse impact in it and you shouldn't be using that test. Well, at that time I was working for the state personnel board, and the state personnel board were the people who enforce these rules. So, when I got back to my job, the guy who's in charge said I want to see you. He said, you can't be working for the board and working against the board, you can't do that. And I said when I came over here, I told you that I had cases that I had to finish representing this is one of those cases, and you agree that I could do that. And he said, well, we didn't understand the implications. And I said, well, here's the implications for this case, we can go get EEOC, and they will look at it and they will determine as anybody could determine those adverse impact in this examination. Or you can find some alternatives, and they found an alternative, they snuck in some other way to get her to where she wanted to go without facing the issue of adverse impact in this statewide exam. 

DN: What do you mean by adverse impact?

FF: Well, it disproportionately affects blacks. So, the exam, 10% of white people fail the exam, 50% of black people fail the exam. You got to go back and look at the exam and see what it's really testing for and see why that impact exists and is it necessary to have this kind of an exam that has such a terrible impact on one group and such a light impact on another, and maybe it's something in there that you need to redesign or rethink that examination. The exam was a staff service analyst exam which is a huge exam, it's the entry level analyst exam for the entire state of California. And they did not want to have to go face of federal inquiry into the impact of that exam. So, they found a way to get this woman to where she was supposed to go and she was, she was very happy, and the board was very happy to see me leave their employment.

DN: What did you major in again?

FF: I majored in sociology.
DN: How were you able to transition to this role? I feel like it has so many legal aspects, and with representing and interacting with these boards.

FF: I don't know the, yeah, it was a lot of legal stuff and I leaned kind of toward looking at those reading the rules and stuff and kind of figured trying to figure out, because most of the time people set up rules, and then they do. They pass the law they do the regulations and then they have all these little rules, implementing the regulations, and most of the time when they're set up, people don't give them a lot of thought. And it's pretty easy to point out contradictions. How sometimes they're too vague, and sometimes they wander so far away from the law that they're illegal. So, it was easy to kind of point out those things sometimes, but mostly it was like doing to somebody who was a manager administrator or even a department head and say hey, this guy is struggling is true, do not want to dismiss him on probation. Let's see, give me 30 days, and I will see if I can get a transfer for him to another position, or he might be a better fit. And most of the department heads will be live. Yeah, yeah, it makes sense, those negotiations, and it worked. We got people out of really tight jams, and it worked to my benefit. It worked to my benefit. When I, I went to law school I was working for the state up to the leave of absence to go to law school minute to leave absence from law school to go back to work so I could have some money to fund the next year at law school. I did that. And when I, when I got my law degree, and I could not find a job. I mean, all the jobs I want wanted in the state government were like, you got to have a lot of experience and I didn't have any experience. And the guy who ran BASS. He went to the Department of Social Services, and he says you got a job open and my friend, he just applied for that job. And I want you to give him a really close look, and the director said, well that's up to legal I mean they hire their own people, and they really want to experience, and I understand that, but I guarantee you will not be sorry if you hire this guy. So, I want you to take a close look, which translated now on the line to the person who was doing hiring hire this guy, and then we can fire him real quick because he does have experience. And they hired me and well they wouldn't have hired me without me having done this work before, and the, the guy who was the head of BASS using his connections. Just like I used BASS to help other people, he used his connections to help me, and I got the job, and I kept the job, and it was fine. I enjoyed the job; it was great work. So, all the things that I have done in my life or tried to do. Inevitably, they seem to help me as much as anybody else. And it's not like I set out to do that, but they do. And I found that a lot of the people who I went to school with and who were active, they have they have benefited from their activity, and not profoundly and such as they got rich or something. But the fact that people respect to them and saw them in certain roles, has benefited them in the long term.

DN: Wow, that's so amazing. So, from your experience you can see the direct results of your guy’s actions will also kind of helping your careers move forward.

FF: Yeah, long term we didn't expect this. I didn't anticipate this one of the guys, I don't know if I mentioned him before, Akinsanya Kambon. He was a member of Black Panther Party, first his number Black Student Union, and then he was a member of the Black Panther Party, and he was returning vet, he came back from Vietnam he was a
marine and Akinsanya Kambon, was an artist, and he drew what became infamous was the Black Panther coloring book. And you probably don't remember this, but it was a coloring book for the Black Panther Party, and it showed kids, killing police officers who are known as pigs. And it got it got this got the attention of the Congress of the United States and they held hearings about the Black Panther Party, and they had the book up and then was showing the book is what the Black Panther Party was about. And my friend drew that, and he said he drew that book, he showed it to the party members, and they said, Yeah, that's great but you got to make it more aggressive man. And so, he did the whole thing and then, when the Congress got hold of the book they said, That's not us. That's some Renegade party member who did that. It is not us. It is not us at all we did not do that they disavowed him. He went on to keep making art and to be a sculptor and a painter, and he's had two exhibits at the Crocker. It is amazing because I remember Akinsanya, and I was out there in the demonstrations in Oak Park and everything. I remember we use a member of the party, and he was like, well, you know, the party is doing this and I'm like, man, the party's full shit, you are a person here in this community, you don't have to be in a party you just be who you are. And we had discussions and stuff. And I am so proud of the things that he has done, he persisted. He taught art down at Long Beach State College for decades, he retired from there. He has over 4000 pieces that he has done, and he's trying to figure out what to do with this wonderful legacy. So, people like that. We went through a whole lot together we were committed to our beliefs that we could make change in the change would be effective and what helped everybody not just black people that would help everybody. And here he is a famous artist man did you think this was ever going to happen, completely unimaginable. But if it hadn't been for the movement and his involvement in the movement and his and everything that he gave him. I think we got more from the movement than we gave. I think we got more than we gave. It blessed us with opportunities to understand and to see and to do. And to think about the reality of politics and how things actually work and what is important to teach our children. Is it important to teach our children about the branches of government? Absolutely. Is it important to teach our children about political change and how you make it today, yourself, yes, it's essential do we do that no, should we do that? Kids have to seize that they have to see is that the schools are not going to do that. You have to seize it, you have to take it, you have to say there's something wrong in the school, we need to organize a protest and make it better, or make it right or do something, because we define our humanity in the things we protest and protect. And I think that's what the movement gave us was this insight that you are what you do and what you do is you try the best you can. You don't have to win, but you have to struggle, and you have to be true to what you believe in.

DN: With that being said, do you have any thoughts on the current Black Lives Matter movement or movements similar to that happening now.

FF: Yeah, I love Black Lives Matter. It reinvigorated the whole civil rights movement, the NAACP top-down kind of stuff die in the 60s in the 70s people just stop believing in the NAACP seem never able to get itself together at least in my local area here for any long period of time. And they just seem to be out of step with everything. But when Black
Lives Matter came along. It reinvigorated everything and Kaepernick, those two events, his kneeling and the black lives matter. Just brought more young people into the movement, it brought more attention to the movement, it got everybody’s saying well what is he kneeling about. Some people were honest and said okay so he's against the police abuses in the black community, and other people said no, he's against the flag and he's against the government, he's against the soldiers, which is just the kind of thing they wanted to say they didn't want to see what he was saying and they didn't want to listen to what he was saying, and Black Lives Matter, put people in the street again. And, and Kaepernick just bought everybody’s awareness to the situation. And I think, again, it is so wonderful that the movement moves from politics to athletes, because athletes have an enormous influence, and that he was able to do that, and sacrifice his career, it kind of echoes what Muhammad Ali did. When Muhammad Ali said I don’t have nothing against those yellow over there, then calling me know no nigger. So, I’m not going over there killing them for you. And so, here's another athlete picking up that same banner, again, and saying hey, the movement, the fight. The struggle is everywhere. It's not just in Congress's in the court rooms, it's in whatever you do, whether you work for a corporation, or whether you're an athlete, you've got to take a stand, and if you take a stand that defines your humanity. And if you just say well it's bad shit out there, I don't want to get involved, that defines your humanity. And so yeah, I understand that there are problems in Black Lives Matter but there's problems in every organization, understand the Kaepernick may have gotten something's wrong, but he made the essential things really clear. And so, in history, nothing is as clear as it should be, because it would take a volume to define any action because there's so many permutations do so many viewpoints and it all changes as we get a different perspective with time, but to look at what they have done, to me, I applaud it, I support it, I contribute to it. It is wonderful to see young people, again, in the streets and again protesting. I'm so glad that that legacy is alive. And I salute those guys and gals, young people know the women who started Black Lives Matter and the way they decentralized that I think it was amazing. I think it was genius. So, yeah, I feel like they have picked up the flag that picked up the guide on and they are moving forward with it.

DN: Awesome. Yeah, well, do you see it in as part of the greater movement or do you consider it like a separate new wave or how can you see I guess the, do you see the movement of civil rights continuing throughout the 80s and 90s early 2000s or do you see like kind of its breaking in New Wave starting?

FF: I see a new wave starting, but also see the continuity in it to see how it builds on the history of what people have done before, but I certainly think this is a new wave. Because it, it brought a lot of people into it that weren't traditionally involved in civil rights and civil rights, kind of got bogged down it because we started to get this deal where some people were benefiting from affirmative action, and other government policies, and others were not, then we started to get this vision I think in the community between the haves and have nots. And the haves we're saying well this is good, this program is working we need to keep moving it's getting us jobs and shit. But it wasn't doing that much, I can tell you, it wasn't but it was the idea that it was there, and the government had an interest in the system being fair that that promoted it, but other
people were like am this is no form of action out here for me, what I'm doing. So, I think we got a division between those people those aspirations were rising and those people who couldn't see themselves being lifted up by this, this social movement, and I think it divided people into people who said I'm not going to play anymore I'm not going to participate. This is not good for me. And people who are getting jobs and benefits and who were saying, Oh yeah. So yeah, it got kind of institutionalized people had affirmative action offices and I added from interaction officers, and they had programs and they had all this. I was an affirmative action officer, and a civil rights coordinator, so I know that these kinds of things. They tried to bring into the bureaucracies some more fairness and justice, and to a great deal they succeeded but to a great deal they institutionalize and justified, things that they should have been attacking.

DN: Do you have any thoughts how that how that can be addressed, or?

FF: Well, I let me give you an example. In the state of California, they have this hiring system before from interaction, that was pretty much the buddy system, and it created a lot of nepotism, if you had a job, you would tell your employees here I've got a job, you guys know anybody who might want to take this analyst job, and they would tell their friends, brothers and sisters, lovers and everything, and pretty soon you had this little group of people who all knew each other because they were all referrals and they will all hire you had other people who never even heard about the job. They didn't know the job existed. So, when affirmative action came along, one of the first things they said, is you have to advertise every vacancy. And you have to give an advertisement for a specific amount of time, and you have to interview people who apply for this job now you can set up your own criteria, but you cannot just hire people without advertise. Now that was, that was absolutely genius. It was absolutely made everybody all managers pissed off well I need to fill a job right away. I don't want to go through a whole bunch of bureaucrats, I'm not going to hire any of these people anyway. This is absurd. This is making the bureaucracy, more red tape. They really complained. It worked to their advantage. They got better employees, they got better selection of employees, they got a method that they could defend and loan the whole black people heard about jobs, women heard about jobs, they've never heard about the job until after it was filled. Now you got a chance to go and interview for the job that makes so much sense. And once it got up and running, people began to accept it like suddenly something we should have always done. And so, it that fundamental change. You cannot just give jobs to people who have some insight or knowledge that's like insider trading. Nope. Everybody who qualifies gets a chance to apply fundamental beautiful stuff, benefited everybody benefited white people benefited women, Latino, everybody benefited by that change. It doesn't get enough recognition that that change was phenomenal. It was incredible. It didn't make white managers because that's who they were mostly white male managers, hire people of color. It did make them have to interview some of them, which was astonishing because we actually got to go to the. How did you know you guys existed? Glad to be here. And what happened in the Department of Health, when I worked there. We had a doctor who was appointed to head the Department of Health Services, and God, I can't remember his name but he was a tremendous, tremendous
guy, and he went around to the department that I was in, I wanted to transfer out of where I was, but he went to the place that I eventually went to, and he actually walked through the offices downtown on the Twin Towers, and he went and told the manager and he says, Listen, this is Medicare program Medicare program serves poor people black people brown people. I don't see any of those people in your office. But listen to me. Listen really close. I'm going to be back here in three months. And if I don't see some change in the complexion of your office, I will change you. I promise you that. And so, during that three months, that unit hired this Latino guy. This Asian guy hired me and hired this white female as an analyst in that three-month period, they hire more people of color then had ever been hired in existence of the program. And I remember the manager who hired me said, you may have heard that we hired you because of affirmative action but Fred you gave really good answers, we would have had you anyway. And I just like of course you would, of course you. And then I went in, and I talked to my friends who hired before me. And they told me the story about the director department coming through and telling him no mistake about it, you change the complexity of this workforce, or I will change you. I will find somebody that can do it. And in that three months they hired all of us. So, it is not just that you have the rules, but you have to have the commitment from the top. So, you've got the rules in place well we got to advertise, we got an interview, we're going to do that. We got to have an interview panel, and we got to record our decision. So, if somebody comes back later challenges that's said, oh, this is what he said an answer to question one and that's why it was not so good. And then we can defend ourselves, and we got a much cleaner system. But it wasn't until I'm till the director walked through the door and was really clear, no mistake about it, this will change, or I will change you. I will find somebody that can do it.

DN: Wow, yeah with the with the proper motivation.

FF: The proper motivation, and the structure to make it easy for you to do. So now you don't have to go around saying I can't find anybody people because you advertise it and everybody that's interested wants to apply…

DN: So, is there anything particular you want to share with this project?

FF: Only the idea that this idea of history that we have, that we can actually go back and grab our memories which, you know, the psychologist tells us that's not how it works. We don't go back and grab our memories we grab selected memories that we have retained, and we have discarded others, so we don't give a full an accurate representation of what went on. And even if you had a camera to record it doesn't record what people were thinking with her intentions were. So it's very hard to get a grasp on history and I know that everything that I have said, and reflected on is subject to those conditions of this is what I remember and this is what I recall, so it's always good to me to see if we want to do a little history that you go back and if you can find somebody that can say, Were you there when Fred was there what really happened. And things happen that you don't know about. And you, you square that you're telling everything you know but things happen that you want us to have aware of. And, you didn't know so you can be held responsibility but of course you don't have the whole
picture there even though you think you do think I've got the whole picture here, but you
don't. So, this gathering of history is really an arduous task and of itself and I think it's
always limited, and it should always be really clear that this is the history reconstructed
from events and documents, but it's not the whole thing. And it may be wrong. It's not
the whole thing, and nobody will ever get the whole thing, but it's our best effort at trying
to give you what we think went on. And I think its history is always a bit tentative in that
sense that it's, here's what we think today and here's what we know today but we may
know more tomorrow may have different perspective so it's not as if you wrote the
history and it stayed on a page, and it never changed and it was always there and so
that's the history, because nobody is going to write a history that said, well, Fred was
wrong. It wasn't from affirmative action; it was just brute authority that made things
change and it wasn't as peaceful as he said it was. People weren't as well organized or
working together. So, just that there's a tentative nature history and I'm subject to it, and
I think all historians are and every history is, and that it's good to get other people to go
back and cover some of the same territory that that you've covered. See, and I think
one of the great things about today is, we've got so many ways to retain people's
histories and to store them so that we can actually go back and look at them. There's a
veterans project that the Library of Congress is doing, and any veteran can participate
in it, and you can tell your experiences and they're recorded, and they go in the Library
of Congress, and it's like wow that is a wonderful project I worked on that project for a
while, and it is a wonderful project because you get people to sit down and tell their
stories and they, they're not coerced, they don't have to tell the truth or tell a lie but
people are really frank and they sit down and they tell us stories, and then everybody
can be a historian because you can go to the Library of Congress said well what
happened in the Air Force and this province in Vietnam, and you can try to find people
who were there, and you can you can listen to their stories and the stories are not
always about what you expect them to be about. And so, because we can collect a lot of
histories and we can put them away. And we can, we can go back we can do a little
cross checking we can see what people. Some people say I saw this and other people
say I saw that, and it helps us get a sense of history, and it helps us get a sense of how
those events impacted people.
DN: Yeah, I think that's something that I've noticed is just with the idea of history it
seems like a grand scheme like it seems. We do more of a top down, so you lose that
perception of people who are actually participating in it. And that's why I'm really glad
you were able to participate in this project because I've been learning a lot of things, I
wouldn't normally go in a textbook but are just as crucial like one of the most powerful
was when you talked about the Cuban missile crisis and how normal people perceived
it, they only talked about political leaders so to see that kind of impact. And then to see
your participation in civil rights. And what that meant to you and how you were able to
organize it, those are all things that just, I had only been exposed previously on the
grand scale so to see local movements and stuff like that it's just really powerful.

FF: Yeah, I think you guys should be commended for doing this project because, and I
hope you get a variety of people to do it, because it is history really is, how it affects
people, individuals in the grand schemes are really great and the politics is of course
the real meat of it but I think the actual history is made by people who are responding to
the difficulties and opportunities of life. And that and so when people say well what was it like back in the Cuban Missile Crisis, frankly, we were terrified. A lot of us were terrified. And when the whole school was in the cafeteria, and that everybody’s listening, you can see the tension as they listen to the news to see whether the ships have turned back on the embargo is a dramatic and powerful scene. And you don't see that very much in the history books.

DN: The other one was, um, when you mentioned segregation versus integration, and you're transferred to Sacramento and seeing what people are calling integration. I thought that was so powerful because on paper you would you perceive it as something but in reality, this was something pretty different.

FF: Yeah, and I think that's, that's what happens with policies, and that's what happens with ideologies. We say, well, it's not a segregated school because you've got black kids and brown kids and Asian kids and so we've met that we've met the call of the law, it's not segregated, but they're not white kids there's very few white kids and then all the other schools where white kids are the very few people of color so they're 90% of the kids in the white school, and in the colored school, 10% of the kids are white. And so how is that not segregation? Well, no, because they've got some, but it is it is, and I think it gets to the point of. The bad thing about some aspects of integration has been that they have bussed, black kids to the schools where they are minorities. But, away from schools, where the majority. So, if you're the majority of the school. Then if there's a school paper, then some black to call it person is going to be the editor. If they're going to be giving merit award scholarships and some black people are going to get them. They're going to have those students. King and Queen for the annual dance then some colored people are going to do that. But if you go, and you're 10% of that school that white school, you're not going to be in most of those things. And most of those things are not for you. They're not directed to your interest. So, one sense of moving from one sense of moving in integration really is isolation of black populations, and white majorities. The other one is that you can get most white parents to send their kids to a majority-colored school. They're not going to do it. they don't want to risk, the trauma of being in this kind of environment, or the fact that their kids won't get a really good education there, and then they will be cheated out of opportunities for the rest of their lives because I didn't get enough AP courses, and I didn't get into Harvard, and I had to settle for Sac State. So, parents are really sensitive to this, and I understand. Parents should be sensitive to how their kids get educated. But it leaves us in the same dilemma. Oh yeah, we're integrated all the colored kids over here, and all of white kids are over here, but we're integrated there's no law saying that they can't go. But it's a false hood, and it's a historical misrepresentation to say that that's integration. And so, historians will say, well now here's the numbers they prove it. It doesn't prove it; it proves that there's still segregation, but it depends on your viewpoint. So, if you're a conservative you're going to say well look there's integration. Every school got at least, all the white schools got at least eight or 9% people color. But it isn't it isn't its isolation for a lot of those people, and it's no more integrated than it was. And if you look at the history today if they talk about school integration history. Most of the reviewers there's a consensus that we're still deeply segregated society in our education system.
FF: That's a perfect segue into our next question I was actually wondering; do you see a point when that segregation ended or. Do you still think it's prevalent today?

FF: Oh, it's prevalent today, I think there is as much school segregation by race, as it was in 1954. I think it may even perhaps be worse. And I think part of the problem is it's obscured because people say, oh no, there's a lot of kids over here they're all going to school together there's no law against it, but we draw school districts we set up our neighborhoods to confirm that we're going to have this wealthy neighborhood with this wealthy school. And we're going to have, and by the way we'd rather Borderlands we're going to have this poor school with this poor support. And that's, that's purposeful. That's not an accident that those borders came out like that all those rules came out like that. So, we're intentionally segregating our kids by race, as we were back then. But we, say Well no, no, no. If they can make enough money, they can live here they can go here, but if they do, they're again, isolated there again, one or two black families that are here or one or two Asian families that are here. And it's not integration in any sense of the word that we meant it to be where they could be populations, interacting with each other with some degree of equity, so that everybody had a little political and social force in the community. You weren't just the only black kid there.

DN: Yeah, that's such an interesting thought because I haven't ever thought about the trauma that can arise from that kind of tokenism or abilities kind of break that break over, over those lines, because I couldn't imagine that being very traumatic. Especially when I'm sure they're meeting resistance and sense of rejection because people don't want to see that that change happening.

FF: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. And it's hard on black parents because my parents are like white parents, they want their kids to be successful so they work hard, you have both parents working to make enough money as a single white parent makes, and they move into this really good neighborhood with this good school, but they're only like five or 6% of the population and the, the weight of those five and six students, 5%, or 6% students is not enough to have a huge social impact and most schools, and those kids are. Excuse me, sometimes angry at their parents, for having isolated them in that situation. And having said, well, we've got a lot of AP courses we worked really hard to get you here to put you in this community and the kids say, well, they don't want us here. They don't want us in the school, we would have done better back in the old school with the drugs that you say exists because these kids, they don't like us they want us. We don't participate on equal level. It's hateful here. I'd rather be in a school where, you know, I'm at least accepted people they say well he belongs here. So, it gets really hard for parents to try to do that, and the kids go there and then they end up and they say, well, you at least you got a good education I said, nah, I got the education is, I need to keep my mouth shut. I need to be quiet I need to be as wide as I can to get by. That's what You have taught me.

DN: Wow. Did you have any children?
FF: Yeah, I have to two girls.

DN: Is this something that you guys have experienced or struggled with?

FF: Yeah, oh definitely, definitely something we struggled with. We lived in Hollywood Park when we had kids, and the schools right next door to us. There was a junior high and then next door was the elementary school, so they had to walk through one school yard to get to the school yard. And they encountered some hostility, but we did not make a big deal out of the because we said it's the hostility that kids, you have to learn to live with some people don't like you. Some people do and sometimes it's race and sometimes it's ethnicity and sometimes it's the kind of hair you have with the color eyes. So, you gotta live with it, and it's part of growing up, and then they went to, where they go to? They want to one went to a majority white junior high, and the other one went to I don't know where she went to. Oh, the school next door. So, yeah, trying to raise them in a neighborhood with at least some people of color, we had that we had that, but the neighbors around were White. They were all white. It is really difficult to find that balance where you kids can get a sense of community with other black kids and being part of a school system that respects all the different cultures and nobody's kind of like the out people. So, yeah, it is difficult to do that. I don't know if we succeeded in doing that. I don't know if many people succeed in doing that because our system is so out of balance.

DN: Yeah, I mean at least looking back in my experience I feel like the idea of projecting whiteness and just kind of like hiding in plain sight, I can see that now, or encouraging this acceptance of whiteness as a person of color, at least, because of the schools I went to where majority of white people, so I feel like at least from my perspective, I can see that happening throughout my education.

FF: Yeah. And the thing is, in California. It gets it gets a little ridiculous because black people are only 6% of population. We look like a lot more than 6% but was about 6% six and a half percent of the population. So how do you get immigration when you're only 6% of the population. Well, the answer is, we're 6% of the population but we're in the cities, so we might be 15% of like Sacramento Yeah. The city of Sacramento, but we only 6% of the, of the nation so how do you get us into a balance school, it's kind of this numbers game. How do you do that. How do you balance it, and if Hispanics are 40% and whites, 30%, and Asians, 10%, what kind of balance, can you create what can you do to make this thing, a wholesome environment for all the students that go there? It's not an easy, easy question to answer. And how do you do it. So those are difficult questions, but I don't see our current systems struggling with it, they maintain the same kind of neighborhood school system and they maintain the same kinds of standards for their colleges, and it becomes really difficult so once you get to the community college now. In California, that's where the diversity is. That's where the diversity is as much diversity as you're going to see, it's going to be at the community call it is not at the University of California. Never has been, and it is not at the state colleges. It is the
community colleges maybe 2 million students. That's where we, people of color, come at any numbers and get our higher education aspirations started are completed. So, when you look at the school systems in California. You say, well, there's always segregated white elementary schools, that feed the white junior high schools that feed into white High School, that feed into the white university system. So how do you talk about. We have an integrated system, you do not have an integrated system, you do not, and you're not inspiring for one either. So, I went to, I went to UC Davis, and I was like, whoa, this is freaky. There are more Africans at UC Davis than there were African Americans.

DN: Wow, how, how was that for you? How did you how did you process that?

FF: Well, the first thing first thing I did was, of course, I got involved with the Black Student Union, because they have a black base and I have people I can talk to, and I have my own little community that I have there. And the second thing was, I still have my community based in Sacramento. I didn't move to Davis, so I still lived up here. I wasn't going to take this not doing that. And I think the other thing is, I grew up as I was telling you what with these various black communities in the projects and in Virginia and I still felt like I was a member of the black community. And I had some community resources. But, you know, by the time you've gone through the, the elementary school and high school system, you pretty much used to being one of the few. Pretty much used to name one of the few or in a segregated school, whether none of them. So, if you grew up black in this country you grow up. You grew up being a minority in the sense that every place you go you're going to be a minority. You're not going to be the majority in your company you got being a majority in your state government job. You're going to be a minority. In fact, I have a friend who worked for the post office, and you got to be to the level, a high-level post-office employee. And they had this high-level job postmaster job that they wanted to interview for, and it was during the time of affirmative action, so they said, well, you're the only high level, black person we have here, but we're going to get some more high level, black people from some other jurisdiction, and they bought them in. So, there were three interviewers, and all three of them were black males. And they said, the first day they set up this interview the first guy comes in, he walks in, he chokes. His eyes get big and starts to choke. And then, my friend said, well Hey, take it easy. Go back outside, get yourself some more calm down, we'll take the next person, and we'll pick you up we'll put you in today, when I'm out here, but you need to get, calm down and get a chance so you can give us your best interest. Again later. And he says, I am so sorry. He said I am so sorry, but he said in my whole life. I have never been to an interview where the board was black. He said it just shocked me said I'm sorry, but I've never seen that in my life, and I, and they really cracked up, I mean they were like, you know what, neither have we. So, it was so funny he told me that story, but he said the guy was honest he said it just, it just shook in because it never, never had a board where everybody was black, and I said yeah like let that kid get on the school bus gone to the black school. He will have a heart attack. So, when the situation is reversed, some white people feel it emphatically when I go into the room of the job, and everybody's black, and I only want to do white people in like this 30-40 black people, some white people feel it like *gasp* starts breathing harder. I mean, it is,
it is what it is. And it happens when white people drive through black neighborhoods, and they need gas is it. They say Oh shit, is it safe? Stay in the car, keep the car lock now. Keep an eye out, keep your phone out because the role is reversed, and people can't comprehend. So that's what we live with a lot of us live with for our whole lives is, we're always going to be a minority.

DN: Wow, that's pretty powerful and such a concise way to explain that. I had never really thought about it like that.

FF: Yeah, I guess the thing is, when you want to talk about this, you want to talk about race relations and you want to talk about segregation and integration, and in the United States of America. One way to do it is to get everybody in a room and have great diversity in the room. And let people speak. The other way to do it is to take the white people, and put them in a room on a team, where they're the minority so if you if you pick up a team and you said it's going to be five people on each team. And as for black people, and one white person. You haven't done an exercise could be anything. And then you ask them, how did they feel about being part of that team. And you can see the reactions. Will someone want to talk about. But they are shocked that they're in the minority and the black people are running it, they're like, well, I'm going to pick Ned. Ned is going to be the leader of this team, like I should be picking Ned doesn't know shit, I know everything. It's funny because people start to see what it's like to be a minority and start to see their own prejudices and their own privileges. When they put in that position. You're not the boss you're not the largest numbers, you're not the leader. You're not the smartest one you're not the Savior and you're not the hero. You're just one. Damn, white person. That's how you are. You are minority. No, they don't like it, they don't like most of them, most of them do not like that.

DN: And, and a lot of political movements happening now is that reaction. At least with things like Trumpism, there is a fear of white people becoming a minority and that this violent rejection of that. So, it's really interesting to hear, because uh I've noticed that trend, but I didn't. You just put it to words really well.

FF: I think the Trumpsters. All the people with those conservative views. When I look at the Democratic Party right now. And the Democratic Party has the left part of the party, and then they have the moderates which are really conservative and then they have the conservatives and liberals say Well, listen, black people. You gotta selected. We control the house, we have the presidency, but we can't give you voting rights laws, because we have a number of Democrats who won't support these kinds of changes. And what you have to do is go back to the polls like you did last time in large numbers and wait for many hours, and these new election rules that the republicans have put together that are going to challenge your vote, every time and try to keep you from voting and vote for us so we can get control and once we get control man we will fix you up, we will help you out. We will take care of everything, but you got to move for us again. And I think many black people are saying that's bullshit man. You had the Dixiecrat, when you have all the Southern Democrats in the Democratic Party, and you could not even get anti lynching laws. And now you got the same kind of situation you said there's only one or
two really conservative democrats that are holding us up. But we put a lot of faith in you put a lot of money and risk in you. And here you are offering us, what we're going to get to you next time. No, no, so I think a lot of black people might be disenfranchised, but a lot more just going to stay home because historically that's what it's been it's been this white party. This is your party, but we don't want to alienate our fellow white constituents, so we can't do too much for you, but we love you, we love you to death. We appreciate you coming out to vote man. We love that, we're going to put you on a whole bunch of committees and have you in the cabinet. But we can't fundamentally change things because that will offend other white people and then we won't be elected.

DN: So okay so that's the, that's their inability to act in the stagnation that's they were experiencing now.

FF: I think it is, but I think Trump's people they have been around long time they have been the heart of the, of the Democratic Party for a long time. When they were the dixiecrats when they were Joe Biden's good friends. And the, the Trumpsters really tapped into what a lot of people in the United States feel it's not just that people are colored taken over. It's not just that they're going to be numerically scary and we're going to be a minority, because we just talked about the minority and how it feels to be a white minority, and how it feels to white people suddenly find themselves minority. But it's more than that, it's more than just that it is. Somebody might call us to accounting, somebody might say hey we want an accounting want to talk about what happened in this country, and what is owed and who is guilty of crimes, and we'll talk about that really seriously. And people don't want to have that conversation. White people do not want to have that conversation. I don't care if they're Trumpsters, or not they did not want to have that conversation about what is owed to who, by whom they don't have that, and they feel it, it may people may come to the power to say, let us go back and look, long time ago there was a Cobell I think it was a Native American woman who sued the government department of Indian Bureau of Indian Affairs, because she said you cannot give us an accounting of what happened to all funds that you collected for us from those trust accounts. You can't. I'm not saying give us money I'm saying just give us an accounting, show us what happened to that money you cannot do that. And the government could not do that the government cannot show for the hundreds of years, they have been collecting this and what happened to it. They did not have the records to show what happened to that money. And I'm really cool well because I was following that case I was like, wow, They Katie Lynn account for it. And the tribes were asking for like trillions of dollars, Said. Shit, man. That's only fair. I don't think you can get the money, maybe you can get, Montana or something, I don't know. The government could never meet its burden approved the government lied, the government forestall the government kept saying we've got the records, we're going to bring them Cobell one, but it was like, they won. I don't know, not much money. They didn't come close to getting what they should have gotten. But it was absolutely clear that they had called for a reckoning. They call for an accounting and the government could not, could not even have their best effort say hey this is what happened to the money this where it. So, for black people will say, hey, you took a lot of slave labor from people. And then you discriminated against black people. Ever since. Ever since from day one of
reconstruction of the Civil War you have systematically discriminated against us, and there's a reckoning and somebody's gonna have to put up a bill somebody's gonna have to pay the bill here, and somebody's gonna have to do some kinds of admissions, guilt, and I don't think people want to want to deal with that. I know a lot of black people don't want to deal with that they say no, no let bygones be bygones. Let's move on. But you can't really move on in this country without addressing the history of this country and what it means to black and white people. And who did what to whom, and the one that always gets me is 911. 911 of 3000 some people get killed by these crazies who come in because they believe that somehow, this attack will change the balance of power and awakened the eastern people, Middle Eastern people now there'll be a tremendous revolt and things will change. Of course, none of that happens. What they did was audacious and absolutely incredible. But there's 3000 people, and the government says, oh no, let's put up a fund. Let's have money for the survivors of those victims. And let's build a memorial for them. Well 4000 people have been lynched in this country, that we have records Oh, that's not counting the people the police killed, which didn't count as lynching, what will kill anyone lynchings themselves. Nobody has said, hey, you know, a lot of those lynchings we know who did there's pictures. there are pictures. Is it was the police, it was the sheriff, we know who did it? We know the victims are, we need to have a fund for the survivors of the victims of lynching, we need to have a national memorial for them. That's the least we could do. Maybe we could still prosecute some people, but that's the least we could do. So that's a reckoning. And I don't see anybody, any white politician saying, Well yeah, we need to have a reckoning on that, there are still people who are direct survivors and lynching victims and we need to have a fund for that we need to have a big Memorial down in Washington DC across from the Lincoln Memorial about lynching victims, and the lack of prosecution of those people by the governments of the state and the nation. We need to have that down there, we need to have those individual stories, we need to have a living history of lynching. And we need to give compensation to those people who suffered because their loved ones lynched. But I don't see that, and I am not going to see that. The Democratic Party is not going to propose that. It is the kind of things that makes Trump people because they can say. That was before my time, we should forgive and forget. That was before my time, we should forgive and forget. But we can't forgive them forgive because we don't recognize what we've done, and we don't recognize what our responsibilities are. And we don't recognize that we're continuing to do that with police departments and they're still ongoing authorized legal lynching taking the lives of people armed and unarmed for no reason at all, no legal reason or no moral reason. So, I think that's what people are afraid of free people are afraid that's why there's a whole lot of talk about. We don't want to teach too much history to young people because it might adversely influence young white minds. But until we have a reckoning with it, we're not going to live well with each other, and we need to do that, and it's essential that we do that. And every episode every step we take to avoid it just makes problem or difficult. We're not going to have a national reconciliation; we're not going to integrate our schools. We're not going to deal with our history. We're going to avoid it all. And in the in the end, it will probably corrupt us beyond redemption. We just, we just can't come to terms of who we are, what we did. And what we owe to each other.
DN: That's really powerful. Yeah. As a history major, I feel like that's exactly how I felt. Is this idea that we need to understand our past, to understand our present and the way that you explain that is so perfect. I think people are afraid to study the past because they're going to see that connection to the present. Things will have to change and people just choose to would rather choose to ignore it and have these institutions continue to be divided and racialized and yeah that's incredible.

FF: Yeah, well, the only other thing I think I can say about it is, a while back. I did this DNA thing, and I was talking to a friend. She was saying, I did DNA thing too. She said, I add my 20% European heritage. And I was saying yeah, I had about 17% European heritage. And she said, Listen, I was looking at this, this paper the other day, and it said the based on the DNA knowledge that we have today, African Americans, not Africans who came here after slavery but African Americans, on average have 20% European blood. And she said you know what that means no. I said yeah, that means there had to be massive rape on an enormous scale to produce that distribution in this country, and it was not black man raping white women guarantee that. I mean this is this is a massive indictment of a nation. And what happened to black woman and a lesser degree what happened to like black men to. They were not immune from being raped. But this is a massive indictment of this society, and our history. There is no other reasonable explanation for what happened. But you do not see this taught in school. And if you want to hold up a picture of rapists, in America, it will be a white male. And it is incredible. And it's evidence irrefutable. It is immensely powerful numbers, but the historians are not taking those numbers and say, hey, look at this. This is a story here. This is a great story this is a national story. This is a historical story. This is impossible. This is incredible, even while we criticize other nations, for using rape for a tool of war, here is our history. And I don't see that. I don't see the historians doing that. I think historians are not going to do that. why because history is like anything else. It's a profession you make money at it you get job good recognition. This will not bring you a lot of recognition favorably universities and I want to be saying, hey get that guy and he wrote about rape and people are going to be saying let's give the guy some more money so he can talk about the rape, the enormous history of rape and sexual perversion and exploitation, that is at the heart of this nation, and that makes us look like we do. We write about it now, nah, and it's true, it's true, but it's not something we want to write about.

DN: That's incredible. Yeah, I'm interested if there's a conversation and all taking place about this and not.

FF: Yeah, I would think that would be like big head headline news on the New York Times DNA shows history of rape I think I'd be like, international story, hey, here's what happened in the United States. That's why these guys have 20% European blood. War crimes, well here is war crimes that went on for hundreds of years. So, if we can't get recognition for facts like that. This, it's hard to see how we're going to have a reconciliation and my, my wife is from Mississippi, and she told me. When we first got married, you know, Thomas Jefferson had all these black children. And I said, Yeah, I heard that, but she said is true, he had all these black children, and other black people
had told me that, but the historians have uniformly said that's not true. He's a man of
great integrity. He was way above that kind of licentious behavior. He was remarkable
human being he was a genius. He was not fucking this black woman and having babies
by here in this beautiful mansion he had, no. So, it was knowledge to people from south,
that this is this is true, but historians again historians did not say, hey, this some
credibility to this story, most historians for the entire history of this country have ignored,
which and back in the day, it wasn't the papers. I mean, it wasn't the papers when he
was running for office people were saying, they were writing that he had this this
mistress and had these kids. It was my historians good find reference to.

DN; I mean, with people barely wanting to talk about slavery in the US at all. You can
see how it's not being this aspect of it isn't being reached.

FF: Yeah, yeah. So, we live with this why I'm glad to get this opportunity to say a little bit
about the limitations on history in a racist society, it's going to reaffirm the racial
traditions and truths, and it's not going to very often challenge them. It is only when we
get DNA that that tentatively historians and yeah well, maybe it was the brother, which
is a great one was, it wasn't Thomas, it was his brother. And then when things get really
tight, they're like well, let us move on to other subjects he was a great man he did many
great things. But we don't, we're not going to revise our vision of him, based on what he
did, even though we all said that he didn't do it because he's too great of a person to
have done it. So, we get these historical limitations, and we get this history that waxes
in the dirt. And says yeah it wasn't true so when I see those kinds of stories when I see
the New York Times talk about the 20% European bloodlines in African Americans. And
what this means for the United States of America, then I will start to say, yeah, we may
be on the road to reconciliation, but we are not. We are not.

DN: I'm definitely going to be reading more into this and saying if there's any research
being conducted or anything like that. It's very interesting. I wasn't sure how much
longer did you want to conduct the interview.

FF: Well, I'm about through if you have any more specific questions for me, try to
answer them but I am really thankful for the opportunity to be part of this project. I like
the individual history projects, I think, recording the madnesses of all of us is really a
good thing and hopefully younger people will see it and other people will see it, and they
will take a different attitude toward the histories that they are taught or that they are
neglected. That nobody ever teaches them. And I remember when I was teaching at
City College and the first classes I taught over there were black history. And I remember
when I was teaching the first class, saying, Listen, while you people just don't know it.
White people did not free the slaves. Lincoln did not free the slaves. White people did
not win a civil war. It was in the last days of civil war when Lincoln allowed black troops
and over 200,000 of them came in to fight on the union side, that it was a decisive
victory that we knew that we were going to win and black people liberated black people.
And if you don't understand that you have been misreading history, or people have been
lying to you. And this black woman started crying and she just started crying tears just
died when she said, I want to believe you. I want to believe, but nobody ever told me.
Nobody ever told me, I said listen, tell you another thing. This is beyond the scope of this course, but when we had the Revolutionary War, we have 5000 black troops and they're fighting for the freedom of this country. When we had the Revolutionary War, we probably had more troops fighting against this country for the British because they were promised the freedom. So don't get the idea that all of the stuff was white people's business. It was not. It was not. We had a role in our freedom that nobody announces and when I went to high school and college nobody told me that, nobody, I never heard anybody mention that, but maybe I did I forgot, but I would find it hard to forget that. So, the point is we missed direct people, we lie. And we hide stuff. And so sometimes personal histories can bring those things out, where traditional histories do not.

DN: With that being said, I want to thank you again for being a participating in this program. I know, at least for me, this has been an incredible experience talking to you and hearing your perspective and experiences. and I know that this project planning to, I think, add this to a library collection, so it can be used for research or references for future projects, so I think that's just going to be a really incredible. I think you've added so much information in context that I hope will be found very useful.

FF: Thank you, and I would appreciate if you send me a copy of the interviews. And keep in touch. Let me know what you find how about the 20% thing and any of the other things we've talked about if you stumble across anything I would love to hear from you. And thank you guys again, that you and everybody behind it. And I will tell my friends. When it is ever available and hopefully people will check it out.

DN: Yeah. I have one last question do you have for your writings; do you have any a collection of works or where can people access your writing.

FF: I have three books out there. For the sake of soul, and it's on Amazon, and we're room, the maroon fables and revelations, it was published last year, and Crossroads encounters. There's published a couple of years ago. And for the sake of soul, and they're all, they're all on Amazon. And they're all connected collections of short stories.

DN: The two that you shared with me were incredible so I'm planning to take a look at some of these collections and read, read more about it.

FF: Well, I thank you again and I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about my shared madness and the history that we get and the history we deserve.