

11-19-2008

Interview with Charlotte Rutherford

Monica Fields-Fears
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/blackunited_oralhist



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Fields-Fears, Monica, "Interview with Charlotte Rutherford" (2008). *Black United Front Oral History Project*. 6.

https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/blackunited_oralhist/6

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Black United Front Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

1 Oral History Interview, part 1
2 Narrator: Charlotte Rutherford (CH)
3 Interviewer: Monica Fields-Fears (MFF)
4 Interview Date: November 19, 2008

5
6 Transcribed by: Patricia Schechter and Kira Lesley (2015)
7 Audited by: Kira Lesley, Carolee Harrison (2015)
8 Footnoted by Kira Lesley and Kenneth Coleman

9
10 [Track 1 of 3 of recorded audio]

11 MFF: This an oral history interview with Charlotte Rutherford at her home in Portland Oregon.
12 The interviewer for the PSU Portland Civil Rights Project is Monica Fields-Fears and the date is
13 November 19, 2008. And this is interview number one.

14
15 Could you please give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth?

16
17 CH: Charlotte Bernadine Rutherford. Date of birth, April 10, 1947. Place of birth, Portland,
18 Oregon. Is there more?

19
20 MFF: First, I'd like to gather some family background from you. How far back can you trace
21 your family?

22
23 CH: Well, personally, I can't trace it back beyond my grandparents, but I have information from
24 my mother that allows me to go as far as my great-grandparents and I've actually heard my
25 brother is trying to do more research but I don't have access to what he's gathered.

26
27 MFF: Would you like to share some of that information with us?

28
29 CR: Okay. My father's name was Otto Rutherford. I'll deal with my parents and then go beyond
30 to their parents. He was born in Portland, Oregon in 1911. His father was William H. Rutherford,
31 who came to Portland in 1895. I'm not sure without referring to some documents when he was

32 born. I know that he died in 1955. That was my grandfather, that is. I'll get back to that. My dad
33 had three brothers and all of them were born here in Oregon, and in fact when my dad passed in
34 August of 2000 we believed he was the oldest African American born in the state of Oregon at
35 the time that he died. He was 88 then. And black people being born in Oregon in the early 1900s
36 was fairly rare. My mother was born January 1, 1913 in Oklahoma. Her parents came to Oregon
37 in that same year after a tornado had lifted up the house that my grandmother was living in
38 Oklahoma and turned it around. By the time my grandfather got back, my grandmother had
39 already packed and sold everything and was on her way as far away from Oklahoma as she could
40 get, which was Oregon, and told him either he could come along with her or there was somebody
41 waiting at the train station to buy the horse and buggy [laughter] that she had also sold!

42
43 So they came to Oregon and thought they were going to get farmland with the Homesteading
44 Act¹. They settled in Marshfield, Oregon, which is now called Coos Bay, and were promptly told
45 black people were not eligible for free land under the Homesteading Act. We believe that my
46 grandmother heard about the Homesteading Act because somebody mistook her for being white.
47 But when she showed up with her husband and children, they recognized that she wasn't and
48 therefore they didn't get any land.

49
50 They eventually moved on and settled in Yakima, Washington, but while they were in Oregon
51 they went to Bethel Church—Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church—and through
52 common friends my mom and dad met when they were four and six, or six and eight, years old at
53 Sunday school and twenty years later, married.

54
55 Let me tell you what my mother says my grandparents' parents—my great-grand parents—were
56 about. My mother's father's family name was Burdine, my mother's mother's family name

¹ The Homestead Act of 1862 granted ownership of 160 acres of unappropriated federal land to heads of households, with certain restrictions and requirements. In 1909, government amended the original act was expanded in the Enlarged Homestead Act, granting applicants 320 acres of land. The language of the act does not categorically exclude African Americans, but implementation likely varied greatly by location. In addition, the Black Exclusion Law of 1857 prohibited real estate ownership by African Americans in Oregon. Legally the law was voided by the 14th and 15th amendments but it would appear the law was still used against African American migrants to Oregon.

57 Boles. My mother says²: “History of the Boles and Burdine families from 1904 to 1990”—I’m
58 not going to read that far—“the Burdine family were farmers in the state of Kansas. The Boles
59 family, state of Arkansas. Great-great-grandfather Charles Burdine and wife Fanny Banks-
60 Burdine and family moved from Roxbury, Kansas in 1904 to homestead in the Oklahoma
61 territory. Maggie Boles, who is my grandmother—my mother's mother—was born in
62 Centerpoint, Arkansas, September 1, 1885, where she was raised and educated. She graduated
63 from State Normal School with a degree in education. In 1906 she moved with her brother
64 Nathaniel and sister Minnie to the Oklahoma territory. There she taught school until she met and
65 married Earl Burdine in 1907. Earl was born in Roxbury, Kansas on June 28, 1881.”

66

67 So those are my mother’s mother and father. She goes on to say: “In Muskogee, Oklahoma they
68 lived through terrible dust storms, high winds, and terrible droughts. Years,” she said,—she being
69 my grandma Maggie Burdine—“when could you look at a tree just standing there and just watch
70 leaves dry up. The last year that they were in Oklahoma, a cyclone picked up the house and
71 turned it completely around and reduced it to a heap of wood. That was enough. That was when
72 Maggie decided it was time to go west. She had been reading about Oregon territory where a
73 couple could get a homestead in Bend, Oregon; 320 acres of land, live on the land for three
74 years, make improvements, and own it after that, not knowing, at the time, that Oregonians voted
75 to accept and submit to the Congress of the United States in 1857 a statehood Constitution that
76 outlawed slavery, but the concept of total African American exclusion from residence in the
77 soon-to-be-created state was also adopted.³

78

79 “They moved to Oregon in 1913, spent seven happy and prosperous years in Marshfield⁴. In
80 1920 Earl Burdine decided it was time to move again so he rented a boxcar, shipped household
81 belongings, animals, etc. to Yakima Washington, where he had purchased ninety-six acres of
82 farmland adjoining the Yakima River, a small town called Union Gap about ten miles south of

² Here Charlotte reads from a document written by her mother, Verdell Burdine Rutherford, chronicling family history.

³ In 1857 Oregon inserted a third Black Exclusion Law into its constitution (the first two were passed in the 1840s provisional government). African Americans were prohibited from owning real estate or entering into contracts. The state constitution banned slavery but the exclusion law also aimed to discourage African American migration to the new state.

⁴ Now called Coos Bay.

83 Yakima. The spring of 1921, less than a year after their move to Yakima, the Yakima River went
84 on a rampage, flooded the property, washed out all the crops. Animals were marooned on an
85 island and nearly carried the house downriver. They moved from that place next year.

86
87 “After the flood, father Earl was very discouraged and depressed. He lost some of his fight.
88 Things seemed to go from bad to worse for the next three or four years. In the winter of 1928 he
89 caught the flu which went into pneumonia and he passed away at ten a.m. Monday morning,
90 December 31, 1928 at age forty-seven years, leaving seven children ranging in age from three to
91 eighteen years. Mom always felt he died of a broken heart.” That’s my mother calling her mother
92 “mom”. My grandmother went on to live to be a hundred years old—actually one hundred and
93 six months—in Yakima Washington.

94
95 My father’s family, on the other hand... This is the history of the William H. Rutherford family.
96 William H. Rutherford is my grandfather and my dad dictated this and my mother wrote it for me
97 to have in posterity. He says: “My great-grandfather was a slave owner in Macon, Georgia. He
98 educated and emancipated four of his children: three boys and one girl. One son became a doctor
99 and lived in Kingston, North Carolina. Second son became a doctor, a graduate of Howard
100 University. He moved to Oakland, California: first black doctor west of the Mississippi. One son
101 became a teacher--my dad's great-grandfather--and moved to Columbia, South Carolina where he
102 married my grandmother.” (He’s jumping around on generations here.) I believe my dad is trying
103 to say his “grandfather” not his “great-grandfather.” Anyway: “The daughter married
104 successfully and moved to Harrisburg, Mississippi.

105
106 “My grandmother Cornelia Hunt was born in slavery in 1851 in Columbia, South Carolina, of an
107 Indian mother. She was educated and emancipated by her mistress. Her grandmother married
108 Teacher Rutherford and to this union were born three sons: William, Edward, and Harry; one
109 daughter, Mamie. William, who was my grandfather and Edward, being barbers, were persuaded
110 in 1897 to move to Portland, Oregon to be house barbers in the newly constructed Portland
111 Hotel⁵. They decided to remain in Portland, so returned to Columbia and William Rutherford and

⁵ The Portland Hotel opened in 1890 and occupied the block of downtown Portland that is now Pioneer Courthouse Square.

112 Lottie White were united in marriage on December 31, 1902 and returned to Portland.
113
114 “My mother”—this is my dad speaking—“Charlotte Elizabeth Delcinia Shannon—had two
115 brothers. One's name was Campbell who dropped dead on a New Jersey street from heat
116 exhaustion and Jesse, a cavalry sergeant who was killed in the Spanish-American war. My
117 mother and her brothers were reared in a foster home and took the name of “White.” Mother had
118 a foster sister who married CC Spaulding, founder of a very successful insurance company.
119 Mother was a graduate of Scotia Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. My father was a
120 graduate of Allen Union, Columbia, South Carolina. To the union of Lottie and William
121 Rutherford were born four sons: William, Allen, Otto and Donald—my dad being Otto. To the
122 union of Edward and Octavia Rutherford were born for daughters and one son...” and so on. My
123 grandfather was licensed under the State of Oregon to be a barber February 23, 1899 and he died
124 on June 12, 1855.⁶ Lottie Rutherford died on October 30, 1835.⁷ All right. That’s enough of that.

125
126 So, that’s my parents and their parents’ and the little bit I know about my great-grandparents.
127 And I have to say that I’m reading information from a book compiled by my mother, where she
128 took all kinds of old family photos and mementos and labeled and explained who the people
129 were. It’s an invaluable treasure of family history that she put together during the last ten or
130 fifteen years of her life.

131
132 So that’s a long explanation. I have a lot more that I can say about my parents if you'd like me to.

133
134 MFF: Yes, please!

135
136 CF: All right. My mom and dad—okay—Let me phrase it this way. I was the last child born, so
137 I came along a little later in their development as adults. When I was born my mom was a full-
138 time housewife and my dad soon thereafter became a master knitter⁸ but in their earlier years
139 Oregon had incredibly racist practices when it came to employment and only allowed black

⁶ The narrator says 1855 but the transcribers and auditors believe the correct date is 1955.

⁷ The narrator says 1835 but the transcribers and auditors believe the correct date is 1935.

⁸ “Master knitter” is a certification awarded by The Knitting Guild Association. A master knitter has completed several levels of competence and been evaluated by a committee.

140 people to work in service industries such as being domestics and chauffeurs. So in their early
141 years, that's the kind of work both of my parents did. Then as the years wore on my dad worked
142 on the railroad and it wasn't until the very early '50s that jobs began to open up thanks to the
143 efforts of the NAACP and the Urban League. Fair employment laws were passed I believe in
144 1949 or 1950 although they were not enforced with any rigor⁹. But my dad did get a job as a
145 master knitter which he did for twenty years for Dehen Knitting Company which was a business
146 that made letterman sweaters and jackets for the high schools. He also helped organize the
147 workers into a union of the Amalgamated Clothing [and Textile Workers] Union and as a result
148 got squeezed out of his job. Literally. But at the same time he got squeezed out of his job the
149 OEO¹⁰ programs were opening up. So he was able to find desk work for the first time in his life.

150

151 In the '50s my mom and dad were the... My dad was the president and my mom was the
152 secretary of the NAACP at the time that public accommodations laws were passed in the state.
153 They were very active in the NAACP for a long time, but happened to be running it at the time
154 they were successful. A bill had been, as my dad put it, "in the hopper" thirty-three terms [of the
155 state legislature], from 1911 to 1953 before it was finally passed. And the significance of public
156 accommodation laws at the time...my dad would talk about remembering seeing signs that said
157 "We cater to white trade only." "No Black"—no *colored* I believe it was at the time—"no
158 colored, Jews or dogs" on white establishments. He would talk about Chinese restaurants would
159 allow Black people service, but that theaters wouldn't unless they had a balcony area for Blacks
160 only.

161

162 I can remember that. I can remember when I was eight or nine—and this is after the law should
163 have changed—that there was a theater called the Egyptian Theatre on Martin Luther King
164 [Blvd] it's now New Song Church, I believe, on Russell off of Martin Luther King. That building
165 has become a church, but it was a theater when I was a kid and you could only sit in the balcony.
166 I can also remember when I was a teenager, my early teens, twelve to fourteen, somewhere in
167 there, there was a skating rink called the Imperial Skating Rink and they set aside one day a

⁹ Oregon passed the Oregon Fair Employment Practices Act in 1953. It barred employers from discriminating in employment on the basis of race, religion, color, or national origin.

¹⁰ The Office of Economic Opportunity was the primary agency for administering War on Poverty programs during President Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency.

168 week for Black kids to skate. I didn't realize at the time that it was a concession to segregation.
169 One of the ministers went down and talked the guy into making one day available for us. Prior to
170 that we couldn't go at all. I just thought it was great that everybody got to go on the same day!
171 [chuckles] I didn't find myself oppressed by that at all!

172
173 At the same time, Jantzen Beach used to have a swimming pool and black kids couldn't go in the
174 pool. Oaks Park wouldn't let you ride on the rides. I remember my dad talking about hospitals
175 would not give black doctors, the couple of doctors we had—who came here as doctors—the
176 schools would not admit Blacks to the medical school—but getting hospital privileges was a
177 problem for doctors. And getting service was a problem for black folks. Those hospitals that
178 would admit you would not admit you for elective surgery. You had to have had an accident or
179 something serious to be done. And then they would segregate you within the hospital. Women
180 didn't go to the hospital to have babies, they would use midwives; he talked about that.

181
182 So the public accommodations law not only made going to social events and and restaurants
183 possible but it also made access to hospitals possible, and I think that's an area that people don't
184 really consider when you talk about public accommodations. You think of hotels and restaurants
185 you don't think of hospitals. So I grew up basically watching my folks have meetings in their
186 house because our house was the NAACP office. Our dining room table—which is actually the
187 same dining room table we're using here now—was constantly full of papers of some kind or
188 another. My mom took typing and shorthand in high school and thought she would be a secretary
189 of some sort, but then could not find anybody who would hire her as such. But her skills were
190 extremely beneficial to the NAACP. I can remember as a kid, my mom had a mimeograph
191 machine, which most people don't even know what they are nowadays. It's the old-style copier
192 or copy machines. You used a stencil and ink and a drum went around and you'd crank out one
193 page at a time. And my job would be to slip sheet between the pages so that the ink would get
194 soaked up on a slip sheet of paper rather than the back of the page that went before. And I can
195 remember as a kid, she would be cranking the thing and I would be slip-sheeting it and then we
196 would take them all upstairs and have the whole living room and dining room floor spread out,
197 where it was an assembly line of kids from the neighborhood--nearly all white kids from the
198 neighborhood—folding these mailings all around the state trying to get the public

199 accommodations law passed! And you had to label them with the address. You had to staple
200 them. You had put them in piles with zones—which is what we had before zip codes—before
201 they could be mailed. And we would do this stuff seemingly every weekend. It’s really just
202 emblazoned in my head all that printing and folding and stapling and carrying on. But they were
203 successful.

204

205 To attest to their success, Senator Avel Gordly¹¹ has installed the picture commemorating the
206 passage of the Public Accommodation Act¹² that has the six or eight NAACP members, my folks
207 included, with Mark Hatfield and the state senator, I think his name was Hitchcock, who
208 sponsored the legislation. The photograph has been enlarged and is now hanging outside the
209 entrance to the House of Representatives in the state capitol, which I think is just wonderful. I
210 just wish my folks had lived to see that.

211

212 Anyway so my childhood was filled with issues of race because of their activities with the
213 NAACP, and as a result issues of race have dominated a large part of my life, either in my
214 occupations, which include working as a civil rights investigator for the Bureau of Labor and
215 Industry Civil Rights Division or as a civil rights attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.
216 And then even in my own personal interests, the issues of race have always been paramount.
217 And I’m sure it has a lot to do with my formative years and seeing my folks as active as they
218 were during those years.

219

220 I think the only thing I haven’t mentioned that probably should be mentioned is World War II,
221 which made a significant difference in Portland's black population. Prior to World War II there
222 were just a couple of thousand black people in the city, but as a result of recruiting workers to
223 work the steel industry during World War II, a significant number of black people were recruited
224 to the area. They were isolated and placed in segregated housing in Vanport, which is the area
225 between the edge of Portland and Vancouver—Delta Park area—and kept there, kept out of the
226 city limits because the city fathers did not want that influx of new black people. But a flood

¹¹ State Senator Avel Gordly was the first African American woman elected to the Oregon State Senate, in 1996. She is also a community organizer and activist.

¹² The Oregon Civil Rights bill was passed in 1953 and included a prohibition on discriminating in public accommodations and facilities based on race, religion, color, or national origin.

227 forced them, those who were left after the war who didn't take the tickets they gave them
228 encouraging them to leave, into the city and over time forced the city to open up what had been
229 twenty-five square blocks designated for black people to increasingly allow blacks to live
230 throughout the city. It took years—I grew up on 9th and Shaver, Northeast, and my dad grew up
231 in that same house. When I was first born there were no black people in the neighborhood--and
232 that's the '40s. But by the mid-50s thanks to the building of Interstate 5, which ran through what
233 was the heart of the black community at the time, and then the building of the Memorial
234 Coliseum, which took out Bethel Church in what was left of the black community at that time,
235 the city began to open moving to the east housing for blacks.

236

237 But I can remember when the first few black families moved into the neighborhood where I live.
238 I can remember as a teenager nobody living beyond 15th [Avenue] that was black. I can
239 remember in my twenties people beginning to move beyond 15th, maybe as far as 33rd, but it was
240 few and far between. It's been interesting to see how this town has pushed the black community
241 around and is still moving it around. It hasn't stopped. It's pushed it farther and farther out as a
242 matter of fact, as whites have come back in and claimed what used to be the second heart of the
243 black community, since the first heart got wiped out with the Coliseum and I-5. Anything more?
244 I think I'm running out [small chuckle].

245

246 MFF: Can we go back to the house on 9th and Shaver?

247

248 CR: The house itself? Yeah I can tell you a lot about that house! First of all, at the time my
249 grandfather bought it which was I believe 1921—my dad talked about how they had lived quote
250 “the sticks” [unquote], which was North Portland; that's what my dad used to call it—at the time
251 my grandfather bought the house there were no housing laws and therefore black people got
252 housing wherever they could find friendly folks to either sell to them—which was rare—or find
253 somebody to act as an intervener who would buy a house and then sell to them. And I'm also told
254 that that there was a very fair-skinned black person passing for white who would buy houses for
255 black people. And so I believe that is how my grandfather acquired the house on 9th and Shaver
256 and my dad lived there from the age of eleven until 1987, when he was placed in a care facility.

257

258 I now own the house. As well as, the house has been designated a state landmark because of the
259 involvement of the people who have lived in the house. There is an organization called the Bosco
260 Milligan Architectural Foundation and they are all about preserving older architecture. In
261 addition to that a woman who runs the organization was doing a history of the black community
262 through housing, locating where things had been and what was left of old Portland. And she
263 wrote a book called *Cornerstones: History of The African American Community* in Portland. My
264 mom and dad were very helpful to her during her writing this book because as one of the oldest
265 local black folk my dad remembered a lot of who was where and who did what and what-not. So
266 over the years of her writing this book and dealing with my parents, she developed a very strong
267 I think appreciation and respect for them and took it upon herself to apply to turn the house into a
268 historic landmark. There are two ways you can do it. I was familiar with the architecture; who
269 built the house, how the house looks, being a reason to designate it an historic landmark. But
270 there is also as another provision under the legislation that allows for historic landmarks for the
271 occupants and she believed--and it turned out to be true because the state and the city granted
272 historic landmark status to the house--that the occupants of the house and especially my parents'
273 contribution through those years that they worked with the NAACP—and I also need to mention
274 and give credit to my mom, she was one of the founders of the NAACP credit union, which no
275 longer exists, unfortunately, but did exist for probably twenty-five or thirty years, if not longer.
276 Again, all that was in our dining room also. The organization didn't have an office until much
277 later in time. So because of so much going on in the house and because of the occupants of the
278 house having worked hard to make this state a better place, Cathy Galbraith decided to apply for
279 the historic status and got it. My mom was aware that it had been granted before she passed. My
280 dad knew that Cathy had applied. He didn't know it had been granted. So the house is historic in
281 its own formal sense as well as the same people having owned it for eighty-five years. I now own
282 it. We've kept it in the family. And I intend to try to keep it in the family.

283

284 My grandmother on my mom's side was a big supporter of “Buy land! Buy land!” [chuckle]. So
285 I'm trying to keep the tradition alive. It's much harder nowadays. Is there more about the house I
286 can tell you?

287

288 MFF: [pause] I think that's adequate. Unless you have anything else to say about the house?

289

290 CR: No. Not other than I need a tenant! [laughter] I was raised in that house! That house has
291 certainly undergone a lot of changes with the neighborhood. There were periods of up and
292 down. The neighborhood really took a nosedive in the '80s¹³, when drugs became prevalent in
293 the community and there were a number of houses just boarded up. And a number of houses that
294 were obviously drug sale houses. You could look at the doors... I could stand in my mother's
295 living room and look out the front room window and across the street there was this house where
296 people would walk up to the back door, knock, and stand there. And then they would do
297 something through the mail slot in the door. And then the people inside would do something
298 through mail slot in the door. And then the people who had stood outside would walk away.
299 Well, I'm not DEA agent but it was pretty obvious to me they were passing drugs and money
300 back and forth. Why else would you be standing at the door? Yet the police could never seem to
301 find them.

302

303 But in the '90s¹⁴, for some reason or another I guess they moved to another neighborhood. I'm
304 sure they are not gone. They are gone from my mom's neighborhood. What had been an all
305 white neighborhood when I was a child turned into an all black neighborhood in my early
306 adulthood and now in my moving toward old age it's pretty much back to being an all white
307 neighborhood again, which is truly amazing. I mean it's just really hard to believe.

308

309 MFF: How have you dealt with the racial dynamics going back and forth?

310

311 CF: Well, I obviously don't... Obviously? That's not so obvious. I don't have any animosity
312 toward white people in general. But I do develop antagonism when new white people come into
313 a neighborhood and try to change it. They've changed the traffic pattern. Dogs are very much
314 more prevalent and not always on a leash and I don't appreciate that. I remember when the leash
315 law came into effect. I had a dog that wouldn't stay home and kept getting picked up. My dad got
316 fined twice and that was the end of that dog! So I don't understand how these people have two or
317 three dogs and quite often not a leash and nobody notices. I don't understand that.

¹³ 1980s

¹⁴ 1990s

318

319 I appreciate the fact that the neighborhood has money so that the property looks better but it
320 would be nice to have black neighbors who could have money and make their property look nice
321 too. I'm sure money has a lot more to do with it than interest and wanting your property to look
322 nice. So that makes resentment, it makes resentment that the prior neighbors who lived there
323 couldn't afford to do the work that needed to be done to make the places look better. I do
324 appreciate having neighbors of any color keep up their property. I also get the feeling sometimes
325 though that the neighbors that moved in are scared of the neighborhood they've moved into, and
326 that's probably why they have dogs to begin with. I don't think that makes me feel very
327 welcomed in my own neighborhood.

328

329 But Portland is predominately white; it always has been predominantly white and the black
330 community, when it was the twenty-five square blocks, was truly black but it has never been
331 predominantly black, when you talk about Northeast. It has just become increasingly *less* black
332 as black people have been forced out to the 'burbs. Because Portland's black community has
333 always been so small and isolated--and when I say isolated, I mean it's isolated within the state--
334 you're in Portland and that's about it. You got 175 miles to Seattle; you got 500 miles to San
335 Francisco; and I don't know how far you need to go to east—Chicago? So it doesn't allow... for
336 those black people who don't leave Oregon, it doesn't allow them to believe we really belong.
337 We are *truly* a minority in the state, but the fact that we are not a minority in the world doesn't
338 occur to people. Certainly some major cities we are the majority in, and until you've been in an
339 environment where there are a majority of black people running things—not just being on the
340 street—there's a different attitude among whites.

341

342 In my opinion white people in Oregon--to white people in Oregon—black people are still fairly
343 the Invisible Man or Invisible Woman. We really still don't have a presence. When you have a
344 black mayor, a black chief of police, a well-integrated workforce, black superintendent of
345 schools—white people do start looking at you like you're a real person. But the black people
346 who've come into Oregon have not stayed typically. They've come and gone. The presence has
347 always been minimal and it's usually been compromised either by not associating with the black
348 community or living in the black community or identifying particularly as black. You may be

349 black but you may also think of yourself as a person *who happens* to be black, and in my opinion
350 that's different. When you think of yourself as a person who *happens* to be black rather than a
351 person who *is* black, I believe you have a different view of yourself and your community. Who
352 you identify as your community. And I think that a lot of the black people who are recruited to
353 come here who stay are the ones who *happen* to be black. The ones who are recruited to come
354 here and *leave* are the ones who *are* black. [chuckle]

355
356 MFF: Well put. Can we go back to Vanport? Not specifically the Vanport flood¹⁵ but Vanport in
357 general and your knowledge of it?

358
359 CR: OK. I don't know that much about it because it was before my time. I know primarily what
360 I've heard and what I used to hear my dad say. He thought it was criminal that Vanport was
361 allowed to be segregated. That the housing in Vanport was segregated; the school was integrated
362 but they had the area for black people and the area for white people [residentially]. And from
363 what I'm told the quality of the housing was different. It may have looked the same but the
364 quality of what was inside the places were different. Black people had inferior, compared to
365 white people, housing. It wasn't inferior housing in general but in comparison to whites they
366 didn't have the same quality of build inside the house. Because during World War II the numbers
367 were so big, Portland was a party town! There were a lot of entertainers that came through here,
368 big name entertainers. Big band stuff, dance bands, Duke Ellington, Count Basie kind of stuff.
369 And for the first time in the history of black folks in Oregon there was a mass of black people to
370 support black activities.

371
372 I've heard people who came here from other places say that black people who were here were
373 complacent and not agitating enough. I disagree with that. I think that the agitation had been
374 consistent, it's just that it was limited because of the numbers. There weren't enough black
375 people here to make that much of a difference. [They] could not have by themselves done

¹⁵ Vanport was a war industry housing complex built by Henry Kaiser, shipyard magnate. It was located outside the Portland city limits, in between Portland and Vancouver, Washington (hence the name) and was intended to house the influx of shipyard workers Portland received during WWII. Of the 40,000 residents, 6,000 were African American, and when the complex flooded in 1948, African Americans were disproportionately displaced.

376 anything without white support. When Vanport flooded, the story was that white businesses gave
377 workers--and I don't mean just black workers because they brought thousands of people black
378 and white—a lot of them from the south—tickets to go, wherever they wanted to go. But they
379 needed to keep going. I believe the number was half took the tickets and left, and the other half
380 stayed in the housing. And had it not been for the flood—which my dad considered to be a
381 blessing—he believed they would have stayed out of the city and segregated in the housing they
382 were in. But by the flood coming they were forced to come into the city and the city of Portland
383 was forced to deal with the numbers.

384
385 The story was that the Business League and whatnot sent for the Urban League to come. Let me,
386 before I say this, let me explain the difference between the Urban League and the NAACP. The
387 NAACP was, and still is, a volunteer organization. If you have staff people who are getting paid,
388 it's because the local people have developed some method of paying. Only the national staff—
389 Julian Bond and those folks—get paid. And actually Julian's on the board; I'm not sure he does
390 get paid! But they do have a staff of attorneys and whatnot in Baltimore and they get paid. But
391 local chapters are volunteer efforts, which is why Portland's having such a hard time. Everybody
392 thinks the NAACP should be available for every issue, but they don't recognize that people who
393 man the NAACP most times are volunteers. Volunteerism when it comes to race issues is a hard
394 row to hoe because they are *long term* activities, *intransigent* problems that have gone on
395 decades, and a volunteer who's going to work a regular job somewhere else and have a family to
396 take care of when they get home is only going to have a limited amount of time to devote to
397 something that needs a cadre of lawyers and many years' work.

398
399 So the NAACP is a volunteer organization, while the Urban League has always been a funded
400 organization with paid staff. Their goal was to find money to provide training and education or
401 whatever, but their whole focus was different. There used to be and may still be some rivalry
402 between the two organizations because NAACPers felt they were on higher moral ground
403 because what they were doing was volunteer and didn't have anything to do with being paid,
404 while Urban Leaguers got paid. It was a job. It wasn't this moral calling. Which wasn't true.
405 They could afford to do it full-time because they were getting paid while the NAACP people
406 were working double time trying to pay for their very existence on some kind of job as well as

407 volunteer their time. So the Urban League was called in for job training and job placement and
408 all that and I'm told that Bill Berry¹⁶ came to town.

409

410 I remember Bill Berry from my childhood vaguely—and these businessmen that brought him
411 asked him how could they go about getting the folks to leave. And he was like, “That’s not why
412 I came. If you want to talk about integrating them into your community and finding jobs for
413 them, then sure I'll help you out. If you want to talk about how do you get them to leave, I'm
414 leaving.” So he recast the thinking of the business community that brought him in and there was
415 a serious effort to try to integrate jobs and open up housing. The housing was limited. It was
416 opened up within one specific area. If black folks had decided they wanted to live northwest or
417 southwest, I'm sure they would have been run out of town. But northeast and contiguous to what
418 had already been designated pretty much as the black community did begin to open up to allow
419 the people who had been in Vanport into the community. And eventually jobs opened up too, but
420 limited, limited jobs. Now we’re talking the fifties. It wasn’t until well into the sixties with
421 Lyndon Johnson's OEO programs and brand-new money that numbers of jobs for black folks
422 began to open up. Some of the jobs were absorbed into government, but they were paid for with
423 federal money. So you might have been working for the city or the State or the County but your
424 job is really being paid for with federal money, in addition to programs, in addition to training
425 programs. It was the best employment opportunity time in the late sixties of any I've seen in this
426 state, because there was program money available.

427

428 I can remember in '68¹⁷—yes, '68, that summer—they had a lot of different money for kids.
429 Some friends of mine were able to leverage some of that money and opened up what we called
430 the Black Summerhouse and put on activities for children. Educational activities and art
431 activities. I think art and music has really just not been given the credit it deserves when it comes
432 to being a way in to the interest with kids. I don’t know why the school system would jettison art
433 and music programs first, when for a lot of kids it's the only reason they go to school. It gets
434 them there and then you can put the academics in with it, but if you can’t get them to come and

¹⁶ Edwin C. “Bill” Berry (1910-1987) was a Civil Rights activist, associated with the NAACP for 30 years. He served as Executive Directory of the Chicago Urban League from 1956-1970.

¹⁷ 1968

435 stay, it doesn't matter what you're offering. So the summer program that we had was really an
436 opportunity for kids to learn something, be guided by young adults who were trying to do
437 something for the community, and to have some role models that everybody nowadays talks
438 about—above and beyond drug dealers.

439
440 Some solutions to some of the problems we have seem so simple that it's amazing to me that we
441 just keep going around in circles. If you don't offer alternatives for kids—alternatives in
442 employment, alternatives in activities, alternatives in interests—what else is there but the streets?
443 It doesn't take a scientist to figure that out. If they have nothing to do well then, they'll do
444 nothing. You know? And it makes it a lot easier for criminal elements to have influence when
445 there's nothing to compete. If you don't have a job and you can stand on a corner and sell
446 drugs... well, OK, stand on a corner and sell drugs. You now have a job. If you don't have
447 anything else to do with your time why *not* just hang out? We need, we need a lot more for our
448 kids.

449
450 I went from Vanport to the sixties on you there; sorry about that. I'm trying to think is there
451 anything more I can tell you about Vanport. Having never lived in Vanport, probably not. I think
452 that's about it.

453
454 MFF: What can you tell me about how the displacement affected your family specifically?

455
456 CF: The Vanport displacement? Well, my dad used to say it buoyed up our numbers. He liked
457 the fact that black folk were now a part of Portland as opposed to their own little city that they
458 created on their own. I think that what I said earlier about black folks moving in to my
459 neighborhood and then beyond to 15th and stuff was a direct response, because those are the
460 people who were moving into the neighborhood, the ones who had been in Vanport. I don't know
461 what else I can tell you about the displacement.

462
463 I mean, I'm glad that the people... we've never had enough numbers. So however we can get
464 more black folks into Portland works for me! [chuckles]

465

466 MFF: Speaking of black folks. Do you have any siblings?

467

468 CF: Yes, I have one brother who is living. I had a second brother who died. He drowned in the
469 Columbia at the age of 32 in 1974. As I said earlier, I'm the youngest. There was five years
470 between each of us. Bill is still here in Portland. I don't know if its age or experiences or what
471 but he and I have kind of had a strained relationship all of our lives.

472

473 My mother used to say when I was little girl—mind you, he's ten years older than I am—he
474 would complain about me and she would say, "Well, Bill, she's just a little girl." And he would
475 say, "Well, make her act like one then." So I guess I wasn't deferential enough to his ten years
476 even when I was three. [chuckles] And it didn't change. But he is a respected artist. He painted
477 that picture of my grandmother. He painted this and there's more in there that he's done. He
478 [pause]... he married a white woman in 1961.

479

480 MFF: And when was his birthday?

481

482 CF: January 3, 1937. And my comment about him marrying a white woman is related to
483 Oregon's history. It was against the law for blacks and whites to marry until 1951¹⁸, I believe,
484 and then nationally '61. I believe was *Loving v. Virginia*¹⁹. My dad used to talk about being
485 called a nigger everyday when he was kid. And he fought to and from school. I think my
486 brother's marrying a white woman—even though my mom and dad had white friend and
487 certainly white neighbors—was a [pause] turning point, or wedge. It created conflict in the
488 family. And I think that conflict lasted right up to this moment we're speaking, on some levels. I
489 think for my dad the issues of race were so personal to him that he just had a hard time. And the
490 woman that my brother married [pause] had an attitude that didn't help. She could have been a
491 black woman and I think my dad would have had a problem with her.

492

¹⁸ Oregon's anti-miscegenation laws, which had been on the books since colonial times, were repealed in 1951.

¹⁹ *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) was a landmark Supreme Court case in which the court unanimously upheld the right of couples to marry without regard to race. It reversed *Pace v. Alabama* (1883) and invalidated any remaining anti-miscegenation laws.

493 WFF: What was her name?

494

495 CR: It still is. Martha. [laughs] Ah, yeah! OK. So they have two kids and then they've had more
496 kids. The two kids are daughters, who married white. And then they've had five children
497 between them, who you would never know had black ancestry if you saw them. So that's Bill.

498

499 Earl, who was the one who drowned, and whose widow lives next door to my parents' house that
500 I now own, Earl married a black woman who actually lived around the corner. She was one of
501 the first black families that moved into the neighborhood. And they have two sons, who...okay.
502 [pause] My brother's death when they were five and eight years old... they were all out on a
503 Sunday outing with my sister-in-law's sister and her two year old. And they were at Sauvie's
504 Island, which is on the Columbia. And my brother was standing in waist-high water one minute
505 and gone the next. And they found his body five days later thirteen miles downstream. And I
506 have a cousin who's a big hunting and fishing guy and he knows the Columbia, and he swore up
507 and down that he thought my brother stepped into a sinkhole and the undertow swept him out.
508 My brother could swim, but if you go down unexpectedly I guess you can swallow water
509 unintentionally.

510

511 And his death really changed many lives. I said he lived next door to my folks, okay? So he's the
512 one who never left home. He literally stayed home until he got married when he was 24. He
513 moved 10 blocks away for one year and then they bought the house next door to my folks. He
514 worked at the post office and would come home in the morning—he worked nights. And he
515 would come over to my mom's house in the morning before my dad went to work or just in the
516 morning after he retired and he spent more time with my folks than either my oldest brother who
517 had—I don't know if it was the first son issue with my dad or the woman (I think they had issues
518 before the woman, to tell you the truth)...So my brother's two sons didn't do as much as I think
519 they could have and would have if my brother had lived. They're both here, Earl and Todd. My
520 brother's birthday was May 11, 1942, and he died August 4th, 1974.

521

522 The boys are Rutherfords²⁰, while my [other] brother's daughters²¹ have taken their husbands'
523 names. They are not Rutherfords. And one son, has a son, Todd Rutherford has a son, Todd
524 Junior. Todd Jr. is, what, sixteen now maybe? Two years ago he was shot in the stomach standing
525 outside the library over here by Jefferson High School in a drive-by that took him a year to
526 recover from, really. And I had hoped that being shot would wise him up, but he seems to have
527 only gotten more stupid with being shot. Although I'm hearing in recent months that he's turning
528 around, so I'm hoping that will last. I don't know, it's depressing actually, because they are all
529 bright young men who could have done more, I think, with their life and time than they did.

530

531 I truly do believe that witnessing their father die at such a young age--and they were both really
532 close. I said my brother worked nights, so he was at home in the daytime and he did a lot of
533 caring for his kids while his wife worked in the daytime. So for the time, he was much more
534 family-oriented and kid-oriented than a lot of men. That's becoming more common nowadays,
535 but my brother was homebody kind of guy. And one child is named after him, Earl, so it was
536 pretty dramatic and traumatic for them and I don't know that they've really recovered yet, to tell
537 you the truth.

538

539 Okay so that's Earl. And I came along last and being the only girl and the baby, I could walk on
540 water. [laughter] Which I think was part of Bill's problem, but that's another story, because he
541 was the only child and the only grandchild on both sides of the family for the first five years until
542 Earl came along. And then I knocked both of them out of the park by being the only girl. But I
543 kept leaving town. I left town literally two days after graduation from high school.

544

545 MFF: Can we go back a little bit?

546

547 CR: We can go wherever you like!

548

549 MFF: Can we begin with your grade school?

550

²⁰ Earl's sons.

²¹ Billy's daughters.

551 CR: Oh, sure! Ooh, grade school experience! I went to Highland Grade School. My dad went to
552 Highland Grade School, living in the same house; we're in the same school district. Except now
553 it's called Martin Luther King Elementary School. It was an integrated school. I had black kids in
554 my class and even had a couple of black teachers by then. That was another thing. Teachers
555 would come here fully accredited from other places and the school system wouldn't hire them.
556 Didn't start hiring black teachers until the early 1950s. Mid-fifties, for sure.

557

558 I don't know what to tell you about grade school [chuckling]. I don't remember anything
559 exceptional. I was a fairly good student. I remember that.

560

561 MFF: How would you rate the quality of your school, as far as resources, books, equipment, and
562 then the education you got?

563

564 CF: Well, what did I know to compare it to? It was adequate. I graduated from Jefferson High
565 School and managed to get several other advanced degrees, so my basic education certainly was
566 adequate.

567

568 I remember that when I was a kid we used to have last remnants of the blue-haired ladies. We
569 had a lot of older white women teachers who literally had blue hair. They would dye it with
570 bluing or something. It was white but it would turn blue. They were serious about learning. At
571 the time I grew up, parents supported the teachers more, I believe, than they are doing today.
572 They didn't automatically assume the child was right and the teacher was wrong. You were
573 expected to perform in certain kinds of ways. And when I was growing up not only were you
574 expected because of your family—you didn't want to embarrass your parents—but the race was
575 an issue too. What you did reflected not only on you and your family but the entire race, so you
576 were expected to hold yourself and present yourself in a positive, respectful "credit to the race"
577 kind of way.

578

579 And that was not meant in a negative kind of way at all. It was how basically black people
580 survived in very hostile times. So the school, from what I knew was adequate for our needs. It
581 certainly gave me everything I needed to continue my education. Well—I think it gave me what I

582 took. I never was very good at math and I'm still not, but I don't know that I can blame the
583 school for that, you know? [chuckling]

584

585 MFF: What grade were you in when you first had an African American teacher or staff at your
586 school?

587

588 CF: I didn't have the black teachers that we had. I wasn't assigned to Miss Hill's room... or did
589 I... Mr. Brown? There were two black teachers in my grade school, and I think I did have Mr.
590 Brown. I didn't have Miss Hill. I can't remember: sixth or seventh grade? And just having black
591 teachers in the school was a positive thing. And it's interesting, black kids tended to respond to
592 black teachers differently. We were all, I think, more [pause] malleable or willing to do what we
593 were told generally than kids nowadays seems to be. We were not as argumentative or
594 disrespectful, I think in general, as kids can be these days. But just knowing that there were
595 black teachers in the school, who you would run into in the hallway, who expected a certain kind
596 of decorum, a certain kind of behavior and would speak to you about it, knew you parents—
597 which was another thing. Everybody *knew* everybody in those days. My mom and dad would
598 know the parents of my friends, either from church or from some social organization because
599 they belonged to everything. And in the early years of numbers were so small you talk to
600 somebody long enough, you'd figure out who you knew in common. Or who your family was.

601

602 And church meant a lot. Church meant a lot for me as a social gathering place more so than as a
603 spiritual teacher. The young people's groups, the choir, traveling for conferences or camp or
604 whatever, it allowed me to meet other AME²² kids from Seattle, Idaho, Tacoma, Yakima. We
605 would go to camp once a year. Those were fun. There would be kids from the Northwest region
606 who would go to camp together. There would be like a hundred or hundred and fifty kids from
607 Oregon and Washington and Idaho. And we would spend four or five days at a religious retreat. I
608 don't know how much religion was going on. We did a lot of retreating, I can tell you that!
609 [chuckle] But it allowed us to meet kids that you would have never had an opportunity to meet

²² African Methodist Episcopal. Charlotte's family belonged to Bethel AME Church in Portland, which began downtown and spent several decades on N Larabee St, before building of the Memorial Coliseum pushed the church out of that location. The church moved to its current location on NE 8th Avenue in 1959.

610 otherwise and I still have friends among some of those people that I met back in those days.

611 Some women out of Seattle and I are still close.

612

613 So that's grade school. Shall I go to high school?

614

615 MFF: Middle school?

616

617 CR: There was no middle school. It was kindergarten through eighth, nine through twelve. So I
618 came out of Highland in the eighth grade. Then went to Jeff in the ninth grade. Jeff had good and
619 bad teachers. I remember there was this terrible science teacher and everybody knew to take him
620 because you didn't have to do any work at all! [chuckle] Everybody knew he was a bad teacher,
621 but that was encouraging because then you didn't have to do any work, so you'd try to take the
622 bad teacher rather than the good ones, right? I think I was in advanced classes; I know I was in
623 advanced classes. I don't think they called it tracking in those days but they did have A, B and C
624 level classes or something like that. It *was* tracking but I don't know what words they used.

625

626 You had classes for kids who were going to college and you had classes for kids who probably
627 weren't going to college. And then you had classes for kids who clearly *weren't* going to college,
628 of any kind. I tended to be in the classes for kids who were going to college. I don't have any
629 traumatic stories about a teacher telling me as a black kid I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I
630 was fortunate enough to either come along at a time when teachers had learned better or I just
631 didn't run up on those kinds of teachers. Although I have heard stories out of Portland Public
632 School where there have been teachers who have discouraged kids from trying to get higher
633 education trying, to steer them into the industrial arts, as they used to call it I believe, a trade
634 rather than education.

635

636 And I actually even got on the honor roll in my junior year, and the National Honor Society. I
637 was always able to keep up, especially if it had to do with reading and writing. Math? Eh.
638 Probably that was because I really wasn't interested in math. If I had been more interested in
639 math maybe I would have tried harder. But anything that had to do with reading and writing I
640 could hang with fairly well. And talking! I could talk fairly well, too. So Jefferson High School!

641 It's a shame to see the kind of reputation it's got. Although I'll admit when I was there I
642 graduated in '65, it was considered the thug school then, too, so that hasn't changed any, even
643 though it was predominantly white.

644
645 It had the majority of black students of any school, even though we were not the majority at the
646 school, so it had begun to gain a reputation of, you know, not having much in the way of
647 academics, having a bunch of rowdy kids, fighting after the games and all that stuff. When other
648 schools would come, if anything happened, the newspapers would always focus on the Jeff kids,
649 and it was always the Jeff kids' fault. You know, same old story. Hasn't changed a bit. We are at
650 the same place, only we've only done it for so long, that kids don't want to go to Jeff anymore.
651 Which is really a shame. It was a good school when I went.

652
653 It had a range of offerings. It had a mixture of faculty nowhere near like it does now. It's
654 incredibly better in terms of people of color in leadership positions. It's just a shame that the
655 school isn't supported more by the community. It's a great resource. The facility itself is a great
656 resource and I hear—I'm not involved with it and although they are getting ready to have their
657 hundredth anniversary so I should be over there doing something—I hear the turnover in teachers
658 is part of the problem. You get a lot of young teachers in who can't wait to get out. And like
659 anywhere else you need seasoned people who know what they're doing to try to work with the
660 kids. But the public school system did me fine. I don't have a complaint about the way the public
661 school system operated in the '60s. '50s and '60s. Like I said, I came out in '65.

662
663 The cohorts that I had, most of them went on to school and eventually finished an undergraduate
664 degree. And when I came out of school the Upward Bound program came into existence and it
665 got a bunch of kids into college. A bunch of my friends. Personally, I left town. I moved to Los
666 Angeles. But a bunch of kids went to the University of Oregon on the Upward Bound program,
667 and I actually think that was the first class of the Upward Bound program sending significant
668 numbers to the University of Oregon. You also have to remember that the war was going on and
669 drafts still occurred. So there were a number of young brothers who got sent to Vietnam.

670
671 Couple of them came back and never were right. Never were right. The trauma of what they went

672 through and access to drugs; they just spent the next thirty years lost. Seriously. I don't think we
673 can ever really measure the impact on the black community of war and drugs, especially on our
674 men. Actual loss where they lose their lives, or die, or get locked up losing their life, or are
675 walking wounded. They are affected in emotional ways that just reverberate through the
676 community when it comes to the families they are involved with.

677

678 MFF: How drastic was the draft, percentage-wise, in the black community?

679

680 CR: You mean how many of them went? I have no idea, but most of the young men went
681 because they weren't going to college. And that was the out: to go to college. And you didn't
682 have a choice. You went for two years. And if you went in, you went to war, pretty much. The
683 white folks had figured out by then after all those years of keeping us out, either out of the
684 service altogether or off the front lines. During World War II and before World War II, when they
685 would let us in the service it was in service *jobs*. We were cooking and cleaning and building
686 roads and hauling stuff and whatever. But by the time Vietnam came along, they were like, "You
687 know? We can send those black folk out there first and let them get killed." As opposed to, you
688 know, killing all the white people.

689

690 So things changed drastically and a lot of young and went to war to fight, and I don't know that
691 we'll ever really be able to measure how that has taken a toll. With WWII they talk about the
692 brothers coming home from war expecting things to be better and they weren't. But they had
693 been trained in warfare and they we were ready to stand up for their communities leading
694 directly into a lot of the Civil Rights stuff that eventually began to happen in the '50s.

695

696 Some of the brothers coming home from the war ended up in the Black Panther Party. Geronimo
697 Pratt²³, I think, is the first person that comes to mind as a leader of the Black Panther Party who
698 had military experience that he used to try to help organize folks. I don't know, I just think that
699 that's an area where we need more study as to its effect, and more importantly how you counter

²³ Geronimo Pratt (1947-2011) was a high-ranking member of the Black Panther Party. He was convicted for the murder of Caroline Olsen in 1972 and had his vacated in 1997. He went on to work for justice for people he believed to be wrongfully imprisoned.

700 those effects, because it's getting ready to happen all over again with the folks who've been in
701 Afghanistan and Iraq. The services were never there and they still aren't, that the men need,
702 although I do believe that the men coming back now—I'd like to believe—would be more
703 willing to accept services than the men coming back 30 years ago. Because mental health was
704 just not something that black folk wanted to talk about or have anything to do with. You prayed
705 on it and that was about it.

706

707 I think we are more enlightened now to recognize that mental health professionals are valuable
708 and bring services that black people need and I would *like* to believe if the services were
709 available, which they're not, the soldiers coming back will be more likely to use them than those
710 who returned from Vietnam. Next? [chuckle]

711

712 MFF: Going back to you. Can you tell us about your further education?

713

714 CR: Sure. I can bring you up to date if you like. Would you like me to do that?

715

716 MFF: Yes please.

717

718 CR: OK. So high school in '65. Like I said, two days after graduating from high school I got an
719 opportunity to go to Los Angeles. Somebody offered me a ride [chuckles] which has always been
720 a problem for me. It's about transportation—how do you get from one place to another and then
721 where you stay when you get there. So! The Akers, who used to be the minister at Bethel AME
722 Church, Parley Akers—and my mom was the secretary for them, too. My mom was a secretary
723 for everybody at one time or another. Anyway, I had gotten to be really close with their daughter,
724 and we were like sisters. Since I didn't have a sister and she only had one in later years. And
725 they moved. They left and they went to Kansas. And then they settled in LA. So another Bethel
726 AME member had come to town and was living in Santa Barbara. She asked me if I wanted to
727 ride down and see the Akers, see Deirdre. And I said, "Sure!" I had never been to LA. Couldn't
728 wait. They were living on 35th in Bromley, which was heart of black folk then in Los Angeles. I
729 had never seen that many black people in one place in my life. I was so happy! And what was
730 funny is the Akers were really, really light-skinned people. At a glance you might think they were

731 white. Once they opened their mouth, you knew they weren't. But [laughs] if you weren't
732 looking very closely, you might mistake them.

733

734 So I stayed with them for a few weeks and I had aunt [who lived there] and I decided that I liked
735 it. I had actually been awarded a scholarship to George Fox College. And I went and saw the
736 campus. [chuckling, pause] And I was like: "This is worse than being in Portland!" And Portland
737 is killing me. So, when I got to LA and decided I liked it, they had a junior college that was like
738 seven dollars a semester if you were a resident. So somehow or another with my aunt who lived
739 there and I ended up staying with, I became a resident and went to LA City College. And I had
740 big fun. I didn't learn very much academically.

741

742 But I had big fun in Los Angeles because my parents were so prominent, anytime I went
743 anywhere or said my name [in Portland], they'd say "Oh! Are you Otto and Verdell's daughter?"
744 And I'm like, "Yeah..." So going to Los Angeles and not anybody knowing me or knowing them
745 I thought that was wonderful. I really enjoyed being anonymous because I didn't get to be
746 anonymous in my hometown. I can be now, because years have gone by and I left three or four
747 times but, in my early years, ooh! It was tough.

748

749 And so. I stayed in LA for a couple of years. My grades went to hell so I decided that probably
750 was enough of that. And I came back home and I was the second black person to work at First
751 National Bank in the Lloyd Center²⁴. And *that* was an experience because the first black person
752 to work there was an older woman—very nice lady, but older and different from me. And she
753 knew all the little ladies that came in there with their retirement checks and she knew all the
754 operations they had and how many grandchildren and where they were from and whatever. And I
755 didn't know any of that and didn't really care. I'm what, 20? I'm just working a job. I'd actually
756 worked for Bank of America in Los Angeles. That was one of my first jobs.

757

758 MFF: What was your actual first job?

²⁴ The Lloyd Center is a shopping mall in Northeast Portland. It is located in the Lloyd District, a primarily commercial area of Northeast and North Portland named after developer Ralph Lloyd. Ralph Lloyd died in 1953, but his descendants carried on his vision of development and opened the district's anchor, the Lloyd Center shopping mall, in 1960.

759

760 CR: [laughing] Well... my actual first job was to be a part time, inexperienced receptionist for
761 these brothers who had started some sort of educational video something or another. I wasn't
762 there long enough to actually figure out what they were really doing but it was a business. And
763 they hired me. I was going to City College and it was a referral from our placement office. And
764 they hired me with the understanding that I had never worked a job before but I could type. And I
765 could answer the phone and I was going to work part time after I got out of school.

766

767 I was supposed to work like Monday, Wednesday and Friday. So I got hired on Monday. I went
768 back on Wednesday for my first full day—which was a half a day—and they had another woman
769 sitting in the chair and told me that I was being fired because they decided they wanted a full-
770 time experienced person rather than a part-time inexperienced person. I was crushed. I was fired
771 off of my first job before I could even do anything wrong. [laughs] And I got fired by black
772 people. Which really just crushed me. So that was my first job. And they referred me to Bank
773 of America.

774

775 And actually you know the job I had for Bank of America was typing, because I could type,
776 right? I think it was the beginning of credit cards because this was 1965 and the job I had was to
777 type up all of these mailing labels to customers of the bank that they were sending a Bank of
778 America credit card to, unsolicited. And I sat in this little room and typed names and addresses
779 for days. And then the bank manager's administrative assistant was pregnant and going to go
780 have a baby. And they decided I should do her job. So I went from typing in the back room to the
781 front office of the bank, not knowing too much of anything about banking.

782

783 But I knew enough, evidently, to fake it until she came back from having a baby. By the time I
784 came back to Oregon, I was experienced, honey. I had banking *experience*. So instead of paying
785 me \$300 a month as a teller, they paid me \$315 a month as an experienced teller! [laughing]

786

787 MFF: Nice upgrade. [lightly sarcastic]

788

789 CR: Yeah! Fifteen whole dollars. But the real deal about the bank for me was getting a natural²⁵.
790 It was 1967, ‘cause I came back in ‘67. And the whole time that I was in LA, people were
791 starting, you know—or maybe you don’t know—Cicely Tyson²⁶ was the first black woman to
792 have nappy hair on TV! And it was just mind-boggling! 1965! *Eastside-Westside*²⁷. I even
793 actually have managed to get some copies of the show. George C. Scott and Cicely Tyson were
794 social workers in New York. And the series was built around incidents with their clients. So there
795 were a lot of Black and Hispanic people in this show. And Cicely Tyson had a little short ‘fro
796 and it was the first time I had seen any black woman with nappy hair. Period. Because if your
797 hair was nappy, it was because you were on your way to get it straightened. It wasn’t because
798 you intended to wear it nappy, let alone cut down to the nub, right? You had to have hair!
799
800 And I was just amazed! I loved it! I thought it was great. Because I always hated my hair. I
801 always thought I had too much hair and it was always an ordeal and it was always taking up my
802 time. It just got on my nerves. So I moved to LA and I had a perm. So I move to LA and I’m
803 going and getting my hair permed and I’m saying: “I want a natural.” And the beauticians are
804 telling me, “You can’t wear one.” I’m like: “Well, you putting chemicals in my hair, so how
805 come I can’t wear one?” “Well, your hair’s is too straight.” “Well, it ain’t that straight if you’re
806 putting chemicals in it!” So I could never get anybody who cut my hair to let me wear a ‘fro.
807
808 So I come back to Portland. And I got these friends in Seattle. And there’s a barber now in
809 Seattle who is Chinese or whatever, who had now learned to cut ‘fros. So these two sisters that
810 I’m friends with—the same AME Church people that I mentioned earlier—they invited me up.
811 Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the two brothers who did the fist at the Olympics?²⁸ Think it

²⁵ A type of hairstyle, also known as a ‘fro or afro, that became popular in the United States in the late 1960s, particularly among African Americans.

²⁶ Cicely Tyson is an American model and critically-acclaimed actress.

²⁷ *Eastside/Westside* was an American drama that explored issues of urban life. It was both controversial and critically-acclaimed. The show ran for only one season, 1963-1964.

²⁸ At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, American sprinters Tommie Smith (who won gold) and John Carlos (who won bronze) supported a human rights group, called the Olympics Human Rights Project, they had formed the previous year. The group called for desegregation throughout the world and less racism in sports. During the medal ceremony’s playing of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” Smith and Carlos both raised a black-gloved fist and kept it raised until the song’s finish. Many saw this gesture as a salute to the Black Power movement, although Smith wrote in

812 was Tommie Smith was in town. And they were having a party for him. So they were like,
813 “Come up to the party and you can go see Johnnie and get your hair cut.” And I’m like:
814 “Alright, I’m down for that.”

815
816 So I go to Seattle. And I get my hair cut off in the daytime. And I go to the party in the night
817 time. And I come back the next day, and at that time students could fly at half price on a student
818 ticket. And I flew back from Seattle and my folks picked me up at the airport. And I’m wearing a
819 green flak jacket and boots and my hair is cut to the nub. And my dad, says: “You look like a Fiji
820 Islander.” I didn’t even know what a Fiji Islander looked *like*. He never said another word about
821 my hair. And my mother didn’t say a word at all. They just drove home. [laughs]

822
823 So I go to work at the bank with my new natural and it seemed like within a week—but who
824 knows how long it was—I had a complaint about my attitude. And my attitude had always been
825 the same. I said, “Hello.” I said, “Thank you.” And I said, “Good bye.” Unless they had
826 something else to say. I didn’t have a whole lot of conversation for the people. What did I have to
827 talk about? I’m 20. They’re 75. [scoffs] I don’t know you, you don’t know me. I’m working my
828 first job for real, you know?

829
830 MFF: Were they predominantly white?

831
832 CR: *All* white! All white. Maybe one or two black people a week, if I saw that. And there was a
833 retirement place nearby, so they were mostly *old* white. Real old. So one day, somebody called
834 my manager and said I was rude. And I’m like, “I’m not rude! What do you mean, ‘I’m rude?’ I
835 always say ‘Hello’ and I always say ‘Goodbye.’ I always say ‘Thank you.’”
836 And he said, “Well, you didn’t have any conversation.” And I said, “Well, that’s not being rude.
837 Did *they* have some conversation?” Next thing I know, I’m saying “So, what do you want me to
838 do? Shuffle and dance at my window?” Oh man, I was really upset with that man. Of course, he
839 was like, well, no. And I said, “Well, OK.” So then I left. I quit the job, eventually, not very long

his memoir it was meant as a gesture of support of universal human rights. All three medalists, including silver medalist, Australian Peter Norman, wore OHRP badges during the ceremony. Norman did not, however, raise his fist.

840 after that.

841

842 And I started working for a newspaper. Black newspaper. *Oregon Advance Times*. And I was just
843 writing everything I could think of. Now you gotta remember this is 1968. Martin Luther King
844 has been killed. Malcolm X, whom I haven't mentioned, Malcolm X; I didn't get hip to
845 Malcolm X until about that time. Maybe a little earlier. The autobiography came out '64-'65²⁹,
846 but I don't think I read it until 66 or 67, something like that. When Malcolm died, the newspaper
847 here was so poor, and you know, Oregon is at the end of the earth. It's not like we're right up
848 there next to Chicago or New York. The image that we had of him was so distorted through the
849 white press that I remember reading the article in the paper when he died, and I was in high
850 school and I remember thinking, well that's really too bad. I didn't realize *how* bad it really was
851 until I started reading his stuff.

852

853 And it's funny because after I moved back here in the '90s, I had purchased a CD of some of his
854 speeches. And I took it over for my folks to listen to, just to see what they would think. And
855 when I came back and asked them what did they think, they were very impressed and liked
856 everything he had to say, which was kind of a surprise for *them*. Because the image they had
857 was different than what he really stood for.

858

859 So back to my newspaper job. So I'm writing on the *Oregon Advance Times*, and I'm writing a
860 history column and a news column. And one day I came into work and the advertising man told
861 me I was fired because some of the copy I had been writing was making it difficult for him to
862 sell ads to the white people. Second time I was fired. And those were the only two times I've
863 been fired and both times it was black people who fired me.

864

865 When I had quit my bank job to go work for the *Oregon Advance Times*, though, I had made the
866 editor promise me that they wouldn't fire me without notice. Because that's what they had just
867 done to the prior woman who had had the job. They came in one day and just fired her. And I'm
868 like, "I'm quitting a job to come work for you, so you can't just fire me. You've got to give me
869 some notice." So after the ad man fired me, I decided I wanted to be fired and all he had to do

²⁹ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was published in 1965.

870 was pay me for a couple of weeks so that I had some money actually because I decided to go to
871 California and get married anyway. So that's what I did. I took my couple of weeks' pay and
872 Kenneth and I went to San Francisco—actually, I went to LA first and was in Deirdre's wedding
873 and then coming back, Kenneth and I got married in San Francisco. So that was 1968.

874

875 So, trying to get an education was kind of hard when first I get married and then I have a child
876 and then I get divorced. And then I move and then I get married and then I have another child.
877 But in there, I went to the University of Washington in 1971, for a couple of quarters, and got
878 pregnant again. And moved back to Portland. And had my son. And got divorced again. No,
879 before I got divorced I went back to school a third time.

880

881 Actually, the same summer my brother drowned was the summer I had started back to school.
882 And to be truthful, when I went back to school the third time, I had a mission. The first time I
883 went to schools was because—what do you do? You're out of high school? You go to school. So
884 I went to school and I didn't do anything in school. Second time I went to school I'd been home
885 for two years taking care of my daughter and I was on, I was on welfare.

886

887 And then—Richard Nixon was the president at the time—and he had this guaranteed annual
888 income program that he was doing, a study to see if you gave poor people a certain amount of
889 money if their life would improve, and it was different than welfare because you could move
890 with it.³⁰ And I happened to be home one day when a person came to the door. I'm living in
891 Seattle. And to make a long story short, I ended up getting off of welfare and going on to this
892 other guaranteed annual income program, which worked out quite nicely because it allowed me,
893 even though it probably didn't intend to, to move back down here, have my second child, and not
894 have to work for a couple of years. And then I went back to school and eventually finished
895 school and became a taxpaying citizen.

896

³⁰ In 1969, Nixon introduced the Family Assistance Program, which gave direct cash payouts to those who qualified. The FAP program would have covered more participants than existing welfare programs. It would have required everyone except mothers of preschool age children to work or take job training. It was an unpopular program for many interest groups and was never passed into national law.

897 I graduated from Portland State in '76 with a BS in Administration of Justice and a certificate or
898 minor in Black Studies. When I enrolled at Portland State, I said, "Okay. This is what I have and
899 this is what I've taken. What can I get a degree in and not have to take statistics?" [laughs]

900
901 Seriously. Administration of Justice is what it turned out to be. And you had the enforcement and
902 parole sides; enforcement certainly was never a part of my thinking. I thought I could handle
903 parole and probations but I really wasn't sure. As it turned out I didn't need to; I ended up as a
904 civil rights investigator and then a compliance officer with the civil rights division for the state of
905 Oregon.

906
907 And while I was doing that job, especially as compliance officer, I had to interact with attorney
908 generals for the state of Oregon who allegedly were handling our cases that we couldn't settle—
909 although they really weren't doing jack, but that's another story. And I would talk to these
910 lawyers, and after dealing with two or three of them, it became clear to me that *I* could be a
911 lawyer, because I knew more than they knew, and they were supposed to be the lawyer, and I was
912 just the staff person. So, I wanted to leave town, and I decided that with two kids, and two
913 divorces, leaving town—Oh, I'm sorry, there's a step I forgot. While I was working for the civil
914 rights division EEOC, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, had some training money
915 and they brought in people from various places to DC to learn whatever, and I got to go to DC,
916 Man! Was I in seventh heaven there! I thought LA was ok, but the east coast was really what I
917 liked. I liked everything about DC, I don't care how grimy and dirty and ugly it was in the '70s
918 and '80s. I was immediately taken with the city. I still think DC is my favorite place; I like to do
919 things in New York, [but] living in New York is too hard. I can live in DC, DC's alright. So I
920 really liked DC, and I made a second trip for some reason that I can't even remember now, but
921 I've visited the place twice and after the second trip it was like okay, somehow I have to get back
922 here and stay here, and I spent a year trying to figure out how could I afford to get there. I tried
923 to get a job but with an undergraduate degree; I mean come on, they don't need to bring me all
924 the way from Oregon to DC. So then I started thinking about school, and by this time my AME
925 friend from Seattle has gotten a job in DC. Actually there'd been this evening where a bunch of
926 women were sitting around talking about what would we like to be doing in two years, and I had
927 said I want to move to DC. Kathy didn't know what she wanted to do, and next thing I know

928 Kathy's moving to DC. I'm like, *you're taking my dream; what are you doing?* Anyway, so
929 Kathy is now in DC, which always makes it easier when you got somebody there. So I started
930 applying to schools and decided, well if nothing else I can live on loans and grants long enough
931 to get me to DC, and then I'll find a job. If I'm local I can find a job, right? So I apply to law
932 schools and I only applied to law schools either in DC or the University of Maryland in
933 Baltimore. That was as far away as I'd go, fifty miles. I didn't apply to anything local [in
934 Portland]. And at the same time, I now have two children and my son had decided he wanted to
935 live with his dad, so he was six, I think [pause], five—he was five when he went. And during that
936 year he's living with his dad, I'm applying to schools and my daughter gets mad at me one
937 evening and decides *I want to go live with dad and Damoni*. And I'm like, "I bet, but if you do,
938 you're staying for the school year. You're not coming back just 'cause you feel like it, so start
939 talking to your dad about next school year." Now this is like mid-year, Christmas, middle of the
940 year. So, the kids work out this plan where they're to live with their dad, and I mention to my
941 ex-husband that I was applying to law schools and he just ignored me; I'm like, ok. Then I
942 mention later that I was beginning to get positive responses. I never mentioned what schools I
943 had applied to, I just said I was applying. So by spring, first I thought I was going to [pausing]—
944 the name of the school won't come to me—it's a liberal Quaker school in mid-Ohio, and they
945 had a law school in DC that isn't even there anymore now. Anyway, I didn't end up going there, I
946 ended up going to Howard, but that's another story.

947

948 Anyway, I told my ex that I was going to go to law school in DC, and he didn't take very kindly
949 to that, but so what? He and the kids had worked out that they were going to be living together,
950 and so I left and I went to, well first I went to CLEO,³¹ which if anybody cares I would highly
951 recommend before you go to law school. Although I think they've changed the focus of CLEO,
952 CLEO used to be for Black and Hispanic pre-law students, and it would give you six weeks of
953 training before law school after you've already been admitted, to gear you to the rigors of law
954 school so it wasn't quite so traumatic and it helped me a lot, I mean it helped a whole lot to know
955 what to expect. They give you the basics of how to study and whatever. So I went to LA for the

³¹ The Council on Legal Education Opportunity runs a six-week preparation course for students from racially diverse and economically disadvantaged backgrounds who wish to attend law school.

956 CLEO then came back and the kids went to Seattle and I went on to DC and I got a JD at
957 Howard University School of Law. And Georgetown had a graduate program where you could
958 work as a fellow for two years in a clinical program. They had four five different clinics and they
959 would pay you like staff. You had second and third year law students who worked in the clinic
960 for a semester for grades and you did, we did workshops so there was some academic stuff but it
961 was mostly straight up legal work. I did civil rights stuff with employment discrimination law.
962 There was a lawsuit that had been going on—everything lasts a hundred years—a lawsuit against
963 the Government printing office that some brothers had filed ten years before I got a hold to it.
964 And they were in the monitoring stages of the consent decree and there was always something
965 that somebody wasn't doing right and so I did that. We had a citizens' communication
966 commission—something like that—that was dealing with the Communication Act, and at the
967 time Ronald Reagan had just been sworn in and was rapidly rewriting all the regulations to
968 everything. There used to be set asides in radio and television media for black purchasers trying
969 to diversify the ownership of the media. There used to be restrictions on how many newspapers
970 or magazines, or radio or television stations an owner could have in one market. He did away
971 with all that. There used to be a political time that candidates had to get from television. He did
972 away with that. I mean he did away with so much stuff it was scary and part of what we did was
973 try to fight off his changes. The legislature adopts a statute, the statute is given to an agency to
974 implement and enforce. To implement and enforce the statute they write rules. You can rewrite
975 the rules as many times as you want without ever changing the legislation, but as you rewrite the
976 rules, how the legislation is implemented and enforced gets changed. You take language from
977 the statute and you interpret that language, well you reinterpret that language, and you reinterpret
978 it again and then all of a sudden the language doesn't mean what it meant for twenty years. And
979 that's what Reagan did and that's what Bush is continuing to do. He's doing it now with the
980 environmental laws that they complain about he's trying to change things—he has changed
981 things—he's made public lands available for private parties to rape and pillage and carry on.

982

983 So anyway, Reagan was the master of that, or who ever the people really were running Reagan
984 were master of that. And so we spent a lot of time trying to fight back the changes that occurred;
985 I have to admit that working in DC in one of the most hostile times, I mean the whole time I was
986 in the East—I started law school in 1980, I graduated in '83. I went to Georgetown's Institute for

987 Public Representation was the name of the graduate program, post graduate program. I worked
988 there for two years as a fellow and as a result, got a Masters in Law, the LLM degree from
989 Georgetown in '85. Then I started working for the Legal Defense Fund; I actually had worked
990 for them during the summers. Partially because Howard gave me a full scholarship and the
991 brother who ran the scholarship program, when he and I talked, and I was coming out of the civil
992 rights division at the time, and I told him about my parents' stuff. You have to write all that
993 biographical stuff to apply. He hooked me up with the Legal Defense Fund, and I worked for
994 them two or three summers while I was in law school. I also worked for Westinghouse; that
995 didn't last long, I asked all the wrong questions with them. At the time nuclear stuff was big and
996 they were also cutting food programs and Reagan was just squeezing poor people like crazy. I
997 remember going to some cocktail party and asking some of these Westinghouse executives about
998 what was the justification for asking for a bunch of money they wanted at the same time that
999 food programs were being cut, and the man looked at me like I was completely crazy and said
1000 something like he didn't understand what one had to do with the other and that they had been
1001 promised this money and whatever. I had told the guy who got me the job, just don't give me
1002 anything that has to do with nuclear power. I don't want to work on it, and of course that's what
1003 they gave. I understand the private sector was not for me; that's not where I should be focusing
1004 my attention. I couldn't even last out the summer. [chuckles]

1005
1006 Okay, so back to the Legal Defense Fund. After I finished Georgetown I worked in DC for the
1007 Legal Defense Fund, and then they moved me up to their headquarter office in New York and
1008 that was the first time in my life that somebody else moved me somewhere. All the other moves
1009 that I made, it was my idea to make those moves, and it was one of the hardest moves I've ever
1010 made. I think it was a combination of my daughter graduated high school and started Brown
1011 University in Rhode Island, or left for Brown in July because she went early. She left in July,
1012 Damoni left in August, and I left in September. We were living in Maryland, and my daughter
1013 went to Brown in July, my son decided he wanted to go back and live with his dad in Seattle, and
1014 he left in August; and then I moved to New York by myself in September—and all of a sudden I
1015 don't have kids which I've had for seventeen years. My daughter was seventeen when she went to
1016 college and now I'm living in a town—I lived in Jersey City, New Jersey. I didn't live in New
1017 York City. I couldn't find anything in New York City that I could afford that I would be scared to

1018 death day and night trying to go home to. So I settled on Jersey City which is right across the
1019 Hudson River from lower Manhattan, and it was a short commute. It was a shorter commute
1020 from Jersey to my job then it would've been if I lived in Brooklyn. Certainly closer than Long
1021 Island or Queens, or any of that.

1022

1023 So I worked for the Legal Defense Fund for almost 7 years and then moved back to Oregon,
1024 primarily because of my folks, in the end of 1992. The Legal Defense Fund experience was
1025 really something. Working at the national level is altogether different than at the state and local.
1026 But at the time I was doing it, it was so depressing. I mean we spent, and I would imagine it's
1027 continued; I haven't stayed in touch that much with the folks from the Legal Defense Fund since
1028 I left, but from what I've read and seen and what they've mailed to me, they spend as much time
1029 trying to keep things *out* of the Supreme Court as they did in the earlier years arguing things *in*
1030 the Supreme Court. I mean Elaine Jones, who was the woman I worked with in the DC office
1031 and became the executive director, she called it as far as Clarence Thomas was concerned. She
1032 said that she thought he'd be the person that the president would pick to replace Thurgood
1033 Marshall—which is such an insult, such an insult! Thurgood Marshall had all kinds of experience
1034 and Clarence Thomas had little to none. In the experience he had when he ran the EEOC, he lost
1035 a whole bunch of rights for some age claims that he sat on and let get old. I mean his reputation
1036 was horrible, even before Anita Hill talked about his sexual harassment. But Elaine said he'd be
1037 the one she was right, he toast the water for the white folk, no doubt about that.

1038

1039 Okay, so, but it was interesting seeing a lot of our national leaders up close and personal at real
1040 stressful times. Kind of left me not that hopeful about the law. In fact, it left me very unhelpful
1041 about the law. I mean it became real clear that *stare decisis*, which is you know, settled law, if
1042 you follow settled law, has nothing to do with anything. It's all in the political will, it's all in the
1043 who's in control, who's in power. And when it comes to the Supreme Court, it's how you label
1044 something that determines everything else, and if you just change the label on it you've changed
1045 the balance of how you analyze something. It's all gamesmanship. It's the will of the people that
1046 are in that decide how it's going. It doesn't have anything to do with just and right and fair and
1047 any of that. And I was really—I didn't expect a lot, but I expected more than what I got from the
1048 law. I don't know, with Obama now I don't even know how to view what to expect, I mean this

1049 is truly a new day and if in fact change is what he's bringing, it's certain time—past time. I mean
1050 Clinton's little piece was not all that, he got more credit than he deserves as far as I'm concerned
1051 as far as poor people go, as far as black people go, as far as advancing the cause, is concerned. I
1052 got to my education.

1053

1054 MFF: Actually you've told us about your children; do you want to go back?

1055

1056 CR: Yeah! Let me go back

1057

1058 MFF: Their names, date of births.

1059

1060 CR: Sure, I'd be happy to!

1061

1062 CR: I have a daughter who is Al-Yasha Ilhaam Williams; I should say *Doctor* Al-Yasha Ilhaam
1063 Williams. She was born April 3rd, 1969. She has her undergraduate degree from Brown in
1064 biomedical ethics. She has a Ph.D. from Stanford in Philosophy and she is a tenured professor at
1065 Spelman College in Atlanta. At the moment she is a Fulbright fellow in Cameroon, Africa, where
1066 she is teaching at the University of Buea, Cameroon, and will be back in the states in December.
1067 She left in March with a four-year-old daughter, Zarah Chinosole, and a ten-week-old son,
1068 Asadel Douglas.

1069

1070 MFF: May I have the spelling back?

1071

1072 CR: Which one? [Chuckles]

1073

1074 MFF: Both

1075

1076 CR: Ok, Zarah is Z-A-R-A-H, I think, Chinosole, they call her Sole, C-H-I-N-O-S-O-L-E. And
1077 her last name is Williams-Brewer. And the baby's name is, Asadel, A-S-A-D-E-L, which is
1078 Arabic. Douglas, which is his father and both grandfather's middle name. I thought they might

1079 make it D-O-U-G-L-A-S-S, after Fred,³² but they didn't, [and his last name is] Brewer-Williams.
1080 [pause] No, wait! She didn't name him that! [laughs] His last name is Ilhaam, I-L-H-A-A-M,
1081 which is my daughter's middle name. And she intends for it to be everybody's last name at some
1082 point in time but right now only the baby has that name. [laughs] I forgot.
1083 [Brewer] is her partner's name, the dad.

1084

1085 MFF: And she is the daughter of your first husband?

1086

1087 CR: Yes.

1088

1089 MFF: And can we get his information?

1090

1091 CR: Yes. His name is Kenneth Jones. Well, wait, his name *was* Kenneth Jones. Last I heard his
1092 name was Sheik something, but he's had many names. Kenneth Jones. Actually though, legally,
1093 my second husband adopted Yasha. Even though biologically Kenneth is her father, we split up
1094 when she was eight months old and she doesn't really know her father. And Don Williams, who
1095 is my second ex-husband, is legally her father, who she considers her father, and is the father of
1096 Damoni Williams, my second child. Damoni lives in Seattle with his father, my ex-husband. He's
1097 been an entrepreneur, he had a record shop and studio as a young man. Then he got a job with
1098 UPS and did recruitment and hiring for UPS, which really suited him, he's a very personable
1099 guy.

1100

1101 MFF: Sorry... [apologizing for something inaudible, CR pauses]

1102

1103 CR: Huh?

1104

1105 MFF: Excuse me.

1106

1107 CR: (laughs) That's all right,\; did you want to say something?

1108

³² Frederick Douglass

1109 MFF: No.

1110

1111 CR: Okay. He [Damoni] has many children. He has his real estate license now that real estate is
1112 crashing around him. So he's having a hard time, needless to say. He never was the scholar my
1113 daughter was. He always was the kind who would say, "Just tell me about it," rather than reading
1114 it himself. He is a bright young man who, again, I don't think has done as much with his life as
1115 he could. But he has five children. He actually has four biological children and was raising his
1116 wife's youngest sibling. In fact, when they first got married, they had five of her siblings. He had
1117 eight children when he was like twenty-three, twenty-four, something like that. Her five siblings
1118 and three children of his own. Two with his wife and one with a woman he wasn't married to.
1119 And I gotta give it to him, he's been very much involved in all of his children's lives. He now has
1120 another son, and this past year he and his wife after thirteen or fourteen years separated. So
1121 they're all up in Seattle. My grandchildren are two fourteen-year-olds, one twelve-year-old, and a
1122 seven-year-old. And then there is the sixteen-year-old who was the sister of his wife, who they
1123 raised like a daughter. Yeah, so. He has serious potential but he still needs to work on it.

1124

1125 MFF: When is his birthday?

1126

1127 CR: June 26, 1972.

1128

1129 MFF: And both of my kids were really close with my parents. By virtue of our living here in
1130 Portland for most of their early years, they had lots of opportunity to spend time with them and
1131 were both very close to my folks. I'm glad they had an opportunity to really know them on their
1132 own and develop their own relationships with them. I think it's had an effect on their social
1133 consciousness. Both of them are politically active and interested. Next?

1134

1135 MFF: So back to you. (chuckles) So, you grew up on . . .

1136

1137 CR: Ninth and Shaver, uh huh, sure did.

1138

1139 MFF: Have you always lived in the house you live in now?

1140

1141 CR: When I'm in this town! [laughs] Well let me see, how'd that go? I rented a couple of houses
1142 before we bought this house, in Portland. But living in other places was always more interesting
1143 to me. The thirteen years that I was gone from here living in the east I rented this house out and
1144 actually there were a couple of times I wanted to sell it, but property wasn't doing much and
1145 trying to do anything from 3,000 miles away is next to impossible. And I'm so thankful that I
1146 didn't sell, because I couldn't afford to buy the house that I'm in now if I were just trying to get
1147 it now. We bought this house in 1973. We found it in 1972 but we didn't sign the papers 'til
1148 1973, and paid fifteen thousand dollars for it. Yeah. Things have changed *a lot!* [laughs].

1149

1150 MFF: Pretty good price!

1151

1152 CR: Things have changed a lot. The last time I looked it was valued at over 300,000. I don't
1153 know what's happening now it's probably back down to 250 or something but. So, it was a smart
1154 thing to hang onto it even though there were periods there when I was in law school when it was
1155 really hard to pay rent there and pay the mortgage here. Fortunately the mortgage was like 175
1156 dollars so that helped but, that's not the case anymore of course. I've come back and refinanced a
1157 couple of times, but still I'm doing better than the three hundred it's valued at. Yeah, I've lived
1158 on Vancouver, I moved like I said in '72 and that's been interesting. My neighbors haven't
1159 changed that much, the people over here are the same people that were there when I left in '80.
1160 There were people before them, but the family that's there now has been there for more than
1161 twenty years. The people over here [gesturing] were old-timers and the woman died, well I guess
1162 it's been four or five years ago now. She was there when I left and she was there when I came
1163 back. And they've sold it and a younger couple has moved in with their kids. The neighbor on
1164 this side [gesturing] has always been white, and the neighbor on that side [gesturing] first was
1165 white and then became, think they're Cuban. They're black, but I think they're Cuban. And I
1166 don't know if you noticed but my neighbors across the street, I'm facing the backs of their
1167 houses. I've really never known for sure who my neighbors across the street are because the
1168 front of their house faces the next block over.

1169 The neighborhood has faced a lot of change, racially as well as physically. The infill, the
1170 building that has gone on the last five, six, seven years.

1171

1172 MFF: if their backs are facing you, which block was built first? Or is that the way they aligned
1173 it?

1174

1175 CR: It looks like that's the way they aligned it. I think that street over there is Moore. The name
1176 of the street is Moore. And why their backyards face Vancouver and their house faces Moore I
1177 couldn't tell you. I have not a clue. My dad believed that this neighborhood used to be cherry
1178 orchards, I guess at the turn of the century. Because my backyard and the two neighbors on either
1179 side of my backyard, all of us had cherry trees in our backyards. The neighbor over here's was
1180 cut down before mine; I cut mine down, I don't know, ten years ago or so, because they had
1181 gotten old and every winter a chunk of it fell off and I was afraid that a chunk of it was going to
1182 fall on my deck, and so I went ahead and just took them out. Then that neighbor took hers out a
1183 year or two later. But the numbers of cherry trees, and the fact there's an alley that runs through
1184 behind my house that runs I don't know how many blocks through in both directions, my dad
1185 believed that at one point this was an orchard. My house was built in, I think it was '21, 1921. Or
1186 was it '27? I think it was '21. So this is an old neighborhood, most of the houses were built in
1187 and around that same time. The arrangement of the houses though, I couldn't tell you. I have not
1188 a clue.

1189

1190 MFF: It's kinda random.

1191

1192 CR: Yeah I think so, tell you the truth. Probably who put them up and when they put them up.

1193

1194 [pause]

1195

1196 MFF: I apologize for the pause.

1197

1198 CR: Oh that's quite all right.

1199

1200 MFF: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the set up of your neighborhood? Or the
1201 dynamic of your neighborhood?

1202

1203 CR: Yeah, I could say some more about the neighborhood. I mean the development—it's not just
1204 my neighborhood, the whole Northeast—the development of additional housing while at the
1205 same time putting in bicycle paths and taking out car lanes has been incredibly annoying. The
1206 north-south transportation routes, the main streets, Interstate [Avenue]—you put a light rail and
1207 take out lanes. Vancouver—you put a bicycle lane, and take out a lane. Williams—they left two
1208 lanes and put in a bicycle lane, and two cars and a bicycle cannot drive at the same time.³³
1209 Because the cars want to move over and give the bicycle room and they've made the lanes so
1210 tight you have to stagger it practically. They did it on Broadway—what used to be five lanes is
1211 now four lanes and a bicycle lane. The traffic pattern makes no sense to me. You do infill, you
1212 build more housing—more multi-family housing at that—not single-family dwellings but multi-
1213 family dwellings, which one assumes will attract more cars, and then you reduce the number of
1214 lanes available for cars to drive in at the same time. I don't understand the logic. I guess they're
1215 just trying to create gridlock. Because eventually I'm sure that's what they'll do.

1216

1217 If all of the units that they've put into the neighborhood get filled up, and everybody isn't riding
1218 a bicycle—which I bet they won't be—you can't get anywhere! It's made no sense to me, how
1219 they've dealt with either bumps in the road or those turnaround things you have to go around, 7th
1220 [Avenue] with the bumps and the stop signs and you know, it's just really annoying.

1221

1222 And the bicycles. I'm definitely not a bicycle fan. And every time I see a bicyclist run through a
1223 light, I just want to hit them with my car. Because it's like if you're gonna act like a car, act like a
1224 car. Follow the rules! Just 'cause you're on a bicycle doesn't mean you get to go through a red
1225 light, you know? The first two years that they put this bicycle lane out here in front of my house
1226 if I saw three bicycles a day I'd be really surprised. I was really angry the first couple years
1227 because it's like, where are the bicycles for this lane you've put out here? Only in the last year
1228 have numbers gotten to be significant. So significant now of course that I have trouble getting
1229 out of my driveway because I have to wait on the bicycle and then by the time I've waited on the

³³ City and private development in the opening decade of the twenty-first century created increased bicycle lanes in inner Portland, including on N Williams and N Vancouver avenues. The lanes sparked debate over gentrification, as well as what many residents see as the city's continued interest in developing the inner city at the expense of outer lying areas.

1230 bicycle then here come some more cars you know? [chuckles] It's annoying. I have to tell you,
1231 it's really annoying. I don't understand why bicyclists have to ride on the main streets. Why can't
1232 bicyclists ride on side streets?

1233

1234 MFF: I can't tell you.

1235

1236 CR: [laughs] I don't understand, I just don't understand! And the bicyclists who have their
1237 babies, in those pull things—they need to get tickets. They just need to be cited for being
1238 negligent parents. I'm waiting for the child to be run over and the parent to keep on driving on
1239 down the street. How are you going to supervise your child [emphatic thump, like a hand hitting
1240 a table] when you're riding a bicycle pointing forward and your kid is being driven along drug
1241 on the street behind you with all the exhaust blowing into him and carrying on. I think that's
1242 criminal. I'm sorry, I really think that's criminal. And you're out there on Martin Luther King
1243 [Boulevard]?³⁴I've seen it! You're on Martin Luther King with a kid in your thing behind you
1244 and pedaling up and down the street like you've got right of way. Like that means something. So
1245 what if you have the right of way if you're dead you're still dead, you know, with the right of
1246 way. And there's no way a bicycle and a car are ever going to be equal competitors. I don't get it,
1247 I really don't get it. This is not a bicycle friendly town, I don't care what they say. [laughs]

1248

1249 MFF: Case in point downtown—all the people getting hit.

1250

1251 CRR: No doubt, no doubt. Or my favorite story is the bus driver suit. The lawsuit where the
1252 bicyclist and the bus driver were having this competitive thing. And the bus couldn't get around
1253 the bicyclist and then finally the bicyclist stopped and he hit the bus with his hand or some
1254 craziness. And the bus driver let a passenger get off of the bus who then hit the [laughs] bicycle
1255 rider in the mouth and got back on the bus, and they drove off [laughs]. You didn't hear about
1256 that?³⁵

1257

1258 MFF: I did not hear about that.

³⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd is a main thoroughfare on Portland's inner east side.

³⁵ The incident occurred on January 22, 2004. In 2013, an arbitrator found both parties equally at fault. See http://www.oregonlive.com/commuting/index.ssf/2013/06/cyclist_randy_albright_and_tri.html

1259

1260 CR: The bicycle rider sued Trimet and ultimately I think he got some money but not the big
1261 money he wanted. But the incident of the lawsuit prompted a whole lot of people to write.
1262 Bicycles and dogs, I'm telling you, this town thinks it's friendly to bicycles and dogs but it's not!
1263 Just like it thinks it progressive in regard to race relations, but it's not, you know? People were
1264 writing in, and I had to laugh, because it really showed how many folks were hostile to bicycle
1265 riders. I thought the incident was hysterical. I tell people about it, they're like, "Oh, you got
1266 bicycle riders?" I'm like, "Yeah. Yeah, we got bicycles all right, and it ain't all that, let me tell
1267 ya."

1268

1269 But the bicycle thing, and dogs in the park. Man, I had a crusade going for a minute, and then
1270 they found him. Two years ago I think it was, when they had the dogs being killed in the park
1271 with the food that—a couple of years ago somebody planted some poisoned food—and these
1272 dogs that were running around free ate some food, and a couple of them died or whatever and of
1273 course it was a big outrage. But if you had your dog on a leash you wouldn't have had to worry
1274 about it, right? I went over here to Peninsula Park one day, I was taking a walk, and Peninsula
1275 Park—have you ever been to Peninsula Park?

1276

1277 MFF: No, I haven't been.

1278

1279 CR: Go to Peninsula Park sometime, it's a really nice park. And it has this beautiful rose garden.
1280 It's over here on Ainsworth and Albina. So in the middle of the rose garden there's a fountain.
1281 And when I got to the park, there was a woman sitting by the fountain with one of those throw
1282 things—you put the ball at the end at then it's like a—I never saw one before this woman—it's
1283 like a hook spoon and you put the ball at the base. . .

1284

1285 MFF: A whiffle ball?

1286

1287 CR: A tennis ball, smaller ball. Why, I have no idea. Instead of throwing the ball in your hand,

1288 you put the ball in this thing and, yeah okay.³⁶ So she's sitting on the edge of the fountain,
1289 throwing this ball in the water, as her two dogs jump in the water and go get the ball, and then
1290 come out and shake water everywhere. And then she takes it and throws it. And so I walked past
1291 the fountain and I was standing up high watching them. And there was some kids who came
1292 along, who wanted to play in the water. It's not really meant to be in at all, I don't believe, by
1293 anybody. But the dogs were carrying on so the parents came in and guided on out of the area.
1294 And she sat there and did that for ten minutes or longer, I don't know, all I know is it was long
1295 enough to make me mad. And I'm standing there watching her. Finally she gets her dogs and she
1296 leaves and a *second* woman, comes down to the pool with *her* dog and starts the same thing all
1297 over again. *Now* I'm crazy right?

1298 So I come home, and I'm just like—and there are dogs running, they're loose dogs. And
1299 I grew up with dogs, I don't dislike dogs. But I also don't trust dogs and a strange dog running
1300 up to me. it's not "ooh" [mocking admiration, affectionate tone] I'm not petting it! You know? I
1301 don't want it. I want you to keep your dog with you, that's your dog, you hang on to it. I ain't ask
1302 for your dog, right?

1303

1304 And so usually when dogs run up to me I just stop, and stand there. And then they'll give me,
1305 "Oh he won't bother you," and I'm like, "Call your dog, you know. Call your dog."

1306 So I came home, and I got the phone book and I found Multnomah County dog whatever. And I
1307 raised all kinds of hell. And I was complaining about dogs off the leash, dogs in the water, and
1308 making all kinds of complaints about, what's the deal with the parks? That very summer, they
1309 started this whole six am to nine am dogs off the leash—they got some kind of regs [regulations]
1310 that are supposed to guard—or not guard—well yeah, guard, the public—supposed to allow dogs
1311 off the leash during certain times, at certain parks, with dog runs and all this. I don't see where
1312 anybody's following any of that. I mean they're still off the leash whenever. And I guess they've
1313 got three people from the county to enforce what little enforcing is going on. But everybody I've
1314 talked to who is an old member of the community is upset about the dogs, because people don't
1315 keep their dogs on a leash first of all, and even when they do, they still let them run half a block
1316 ahead of them, you know, the leashes are so long.

³⁶ Charlotte is referring to a "Chuck-it," a popular dog accessory for playing fetch that allows the owner to throw the ball farther than he or she could with the unaided arm.

1317

1318 MFF: Do you think it's a cultural thing?

1319

1320 CR: I'm sure it's a cultural thing. Actually, I still believe that the people bring the dogs into the
1321 black community as protection from the black community they're moving into. And the way they
1322 allow their dogs freedom, and I guess the "dog is a part of the family" thing. A dog is a dog. I'm
1323 sorry. A dog is not a part of the family. I mean it can be a family pet, but it's not a part of the
1324 family. I don't get it, um, but dogs and bicycles clearly are a cultural thing, maybe a race thing.
1325 I've only seen, maybe... actually I haven't seen *any* black people on a regular basis riding past
1326 my house. And I do see certain white people regularly riding past my house. Or when I get out
1327 there in my car, I see the same people at the same time. But very few black people riding past.
1328 It's primarily white people that I see riding. On their way to work anyway. The [black] people I
1329 see riding don't seem to be on their way to work. They're just out there riding. [laughs] You
1330 know, probably had their license revoked and can't drive and so they're on a bicycle instead. I
1331 don't think it was like they really intended to be on a bicycle. There's a lot of cultural difference,
1332 a lot of cultural difference. And it causes stress. No doubt. Causes stress.

1333

1334 I actually think, everybody and every thing has a place, and you have to work your way up from
1335 that place, and I think a lot of black people don't think that white people who are new to the
1336 neighborhood know their place. They want to take over. And some of that is our fault as black
1337 people, because we aren't running the neighborhood associations like we should. We aren't at the
1338 community meetings where decisions are being made as to what will happen. Sometimes we
1339 know, sometimes we don't know, sometimes we know late. So some of it, you could say, is our
1340 fault for not protecting ourselves better. Although with regard to the housing thing, every city has
1341 gone through the same gentrification, it just took a little longer to get here. I mean I watched it
1342 happening in DC. I watched it beginning to happen in New York, in Harlem. And like everything
1343 else that works its way west, five years later, it's happening here. And it shouldn't have been any
1344 surprise it was coming. The infill is a little bit of a surprise, the new construction that went on.
1345 The new multi-family dwellings that went on. I can remember when I was a kid, I didn't even
1346 know anybody that lived in an apartment. There were so few apartments in the Black community.
1347 Everybody had a house. You might have had a duplex, but apartment buildings? There weren't

1348 any, until the Lloyd Center area really began to grow, and that was still the early '60s. Very, very
1349 early '60s, late '50s. But earlier than that, everybody had a house. It might have been a raggedy
1350 house, but it was a house. It wasn't an apartment [chuckles]. Yeah. Next? [pause] We done?

1351

1352 MFF: We've pretty much covered what I had planned to.

1353

1354 CR: Okay, let me bring my work experience up to date because I didn't really finish. The
1355 [NAACP] Legal Defense Fund—my job with them was primarily employment discrimination,
1356 with a focus on working poor black women. The job exposed me to more feminist theory, which
1357 was good, and gave me a better appreciation for feminism. And the question of 'are you Black or
1358 are you a woman' for us is always an issue. And for those of us who are always black and always
1359 women, you know, sometimes... there was a period in the '70s when Michele Wallace wrote
1360 *Myth of the Black Macho*... is that what it was called?³⁷ I can't even remember now. There was a
1361 period when there was a lot of antagonism between black men and black women. And sometimes
1362 black men would blame the white feminist movement [influence] on the attitudes of black
1363 women and [say] "Oh, you're just modeling," you know, "you're just imitating white women."
1364 When in fact we had real issues of our own, with black men. Without a doubt.

1365

1366 I mentioned briefly when we talked before that my first husband was a member of the Nation of
1367 Islam, and while married to him I also joined the Nation of Islam. Which was difficult because
1368 the Nation of Islam called Malcolm X a hypocrite, and I had developed a very strong affinity for
1369 Malcolm X even though he was dead. I liked his position, I liked his attitude, I liked what he had
1370 to say about Black Nationalism. But I tried to adopt or adapt what was expected of me [clears
1371 throat] and the Nation of Islam had problems, as far as I'm concerned, dealing with women.
1372 They even taught in their studies—you had these canned lessons that you would get from
1373 Chicago that you had to memorize and stuff—and in the lessons they taught that the woman's
1374 brain, the female brain, was smaller than the men's brain. Never knew exactly what science they
1375 used to come up with that, but anyway, that was their belief. And that the woman should follow,
1376 physically follow, the man. I mean be-a-step-behind follow the man.

1377

³⁷ Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* was published in 1978.

1378 I was only married for a year and a half. I was divorced by the time my second anniversary rolled
1379 around. We had a lot of differences, needless to say, and in the end it wasn't worth trying to make
1380 sense out of the differences, as far as I could see. I was pregnant and the Nation had a rule that
1381 after your third month of pregnancy women weren't allowed to participate in the mosque. And
1382 we had just gotten a mosque started here. My first ex-husband helped to organize Portland's first
1383 Islamic mosque.³⁸

1384

1385 MFF: Where is it located?

1386

1387 CR: [pause] I was about to say it's the same building they have now on Martin Luther King—I
1388 think that's right. Why am I thinking it was on Mississippi? You know I don't know! I was able
1389 to go there so few times, because literally they didn't have one at first. Then when they got one I
1390 was pregnant and couldn't go, then after I had the baby I still couldn't go 'cause I didn't have
1391 clothes and I didn't sew. So after I found somebody to make clothes so I could go—because you
1392 know you had to have a uniform and you had to have long clothes and whatever—I only
1393 managed to get there two or three times before I decided it wasn't working for me.

1394

1395 And I left my ex and when I left him, the Nation had a process where people were supposed to
1396 report on each other if they weren't behaving appropriately or whatever. Whatever reason they
1397 felt they needed to report you. And I, knowing my attitude and personality, decided I would be
1398 reported on more often than I felt like hearing about it, so I just kind of faded away. I should ask
1399 Lurlene [Johnson Shamsud-Din] that question, Lurlene could probably tell me where that first
1400 mosque was located. I want to say it was something on Mississippi before they moved it over to
1401 Martin Luther King but I just can't, I really can't place it.

1402 But I decided that, even though I thought at the time being a member of the Nation of
1403 Islam would—how do I say this. OK, let's try it again. At the time I joined the Nation, I had
1404 other friends who had joined the Black Panther party. The Black Panther Party in Portland was
1405 run by Kent Ford. And I like Kent, but I don't know that I'd want to follow Kent. So the Black

³⁸ In 1961, Clarence Debiew and his wife formed the first mosque in Portland associated with the Nation of Islam and the Black Muslim movement. It was located on North Williams Avenue. "Albina Community Plan: The History of Portland's African American Community - Download," accessed February 25, 2015, <https://multco.us/file/15283/download>.

1406 Panther Party in Portland was always kinda questionable for me. In Seattle, Aaron and—what
1407 was his brother’s name?—Dixon, ran the Panther Party in Seattle.³⁹ And I actually had a few
1408 friends that were in the party in Seattle. And because of COINTELPRO,⁴⁰ it was the federal
1409 government’s, or the FBI’s specifically, concerted effort to undermine the Black Panther Party. I
1410 mean there have been a few books published that have unearthed documents where, between the
1411 infiltrators, the FBI either members or informants who joined the party strictly so they could
1412 inform on them, as well as set up incidents. Or, as in Chicago, provide the floor plan so the
1413 police knew exactly where to go to kill Fred Hampton.⁴¹ You know, I had a lot of respect for the
1414 organization. But I had reservations about our local leadership. And didn’t get involved with the
1415 Panthers here. But by that time also I’d joined the Nation of Islam, and at the time you could not
1416 be involved in politics with the Nation. It was all about the Nation, whether it was on the
1417 religious side or on the entrepreneurial side. They did not want you to participate in political
1418 activities. They considered themselves separate from everybody and everything and wanted
1419 physically to separate and that was part of the platform, was to get five southern states and
1420 become all black. I thought that was unlikely to happen but it was a good idea if it would have
1421 happened.

1422

1423 I didn’t have much to do with SNCC,⁴² because there wasn’t a SNCC organization that was
1424 where I was at various times. Although SNCC’s philosophy probably would have fit better than
1425 anything. The Black Panther Party though, to get back to what it was doing and what it was
1426 about, it, like the war, and like drugs, left some people scarred, because it had some internal
1427 issues also. And again, as far as women went, women, as always, even in Christian churches,
1428 women are the workers. Women are the backbone of the organization. But they’re rarely the

³⁹ In 2012, Aaron Dixon published a book about his experiences with the Black Panther Party. Aaron Dixon, *My People Are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain* (Haymarket Books, 2012).

⁴⁰ COINTELPRO, an acronym for Counter Intelligence Program, was the name given to the federal government’s efforts to gather information about, infiltrate and at times disrupt or discredit organizations deemed subversive. Although similar programs existed before and after, COINTELPRO refers specifically to programs in operation from 1956-1971. Among other groups, COINTELPRO focused on the Black Panthers, communist and socialist organizations and Civil Rights organizations.

⁴¹ Fred Hampton as the leader of the Illinois branch of the Black Panther Party. He was killed (many say assassinated) by the Chicago Police Department and FBI in a joint raid in 1971.

⁴² Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

1429 spokespersons or the leadership. But without women the organizations would crumble because
1430 they're the one's doing all the work. And that was pretty much the case for the Black Panther
1431 Party as well as, to a large extent, the Nation of Islam. So those movements came and went, and I
1432 think that people who were involved with both of them have war stories to tell you about how
1433 their lives were forever affected. I know mine was affected in the way that I could never go back
1434 to Bethel AME Church. I don't know that I could really articulate the reason. I know that
1435 organized religion is a problem for me generally. I do believe there is a God, I do believe I am a
1436 spiritual person, but I'm not much on religion. I think that the leadership too often forgets they're
1437 supposed to be an instrument of God rather than The Leadership, and therefore I have difficulty
1438 following folks, I guess.

1439
1440 The Black Panther Party is actually getting a little more play these days. I've even heard rumors
1441 that they're trying to reinstitute it. The Black Panther Party was truly done in with by the federal
1442 government. There was a shootout in Los Angeles. There was the brother in New York who went
1443 to jail for several years. You don't know for sure how much stuff would have happened if it had
1444 not been for agent provocateurs, you know. You really don't. But they were instrumental in so
1445 many ways, with food programs and health programs and activities for kids and stuff, that it was
1446 really a shame. Some people speculate that the gangs filled the void that the Panthers left when
1447 they disintegrated after having amassed a bunch of people that were semi-organized as a group,
1448 but then what do you do?

1449 There've been a couple documentaries I've watched about LA gangs who really do
1450 believe the void in the Panther leadership is how communities became misguided, you might say.
1451 Or refocused, or unfocused. But it's a shame because the Black Panther Party was really an
1452 inspirational organization. I remember living in Los Angeles watching when the brothers went to
1453 Sacramento carrying guns.⁴³ I think after ten years of dogs and water hoses and bombings and
1454 clandestine murders where people just disappeared, there was an interest in seeing us fight back.
1455 There was an interest in western, northern, younger people who didn't have the southern
1456 experience, didn't have as much belittling and grinding down by whites in the areas where we
1457 were compared to the south, that they just always kind of questioned non-violence as a strategy.

⁴³ On May 2, 1967, a fully armed group of California Black Panthers marched on the State Capitol in Sacramento. They were protesting the recently introduced Mulford Bill, which would repeal a California state law that allowed citizens to openly carry loaded weapons in public places.

1458 And seeing the Panthers stand up and say, “We ain’t taking it anymore!” was truly inspirational.
1459 It was interesting to see the brothers with guns, and I’ve heard Bobby Seale⁴⁴ talk about how
1460 they actually got lost walking around in Sacramento and ended up in the wrong place. But at the
1461 time carrying a gun in plain view was not against the law. Unless you were black of course, and
1462 then it scared them to death! But it really was inspirational for younger black folks who had
1463 gotten tired of seeing nothing but dogs and water hoses and people going to jail. It put out a
1464 completely different image and vibe, and that was fine with me.

1465
1466 Although I have to admit I had another friend that used to talk about when the revolution comes.
1467 I have never had much experience with violence. I’ve been fortunate in my lifetime; I didn’t get
1468 spanked by my parents and I haven’t had men who beat on me. And I didn’t get into fights with
1469 girls that went in school and whatnot. So we would joke and I said when the revolution came I
1470 was going to be the USO. I’d be behind the lines handing out donuts and coffee--being an
1471 inspiration to the troops! [laughs] I didn’t know if I could actually pick up a gun and shoot
1472 people. I probably could have, but at the time I wasn’t sure. But I definitely could be inspirational
1473 [laughs], so that was the role I chose for myself. Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case is, the
1474 revolution never came--probably fortunately because I’m sure we’d all be dead now if it had,
1475 judging by how the urban riots went. I don’t know that anybody ever won one of those. When
1476 the time came, the tanks and the National Guard and probably the U.S. Army would have
1477 appeared.

1478
1479 MFF: *Probably some martial law?*

1480
1481 CR: Exactly, exactly. [laughs]

1482
1483 Actually riots are something we haven’t talked about. That’s something that needs to be
1484 addressed, because Portland actually tried its hand at a couple of those and didn’t get very far.
1485 But they did throw a rock or two. It’s interesting how urban, no, race riots, that’s the term, up
1486 until the sixties, nearly all those so-called riots were white people pillaging in black
1487 communities--just killing folks, burning stuff. From Civil War Draft Riots in New York [of

⁴⁴ Bobby Seale was co-founder of the Black Panthers, along with Huey Newton, in 1966.

1488 1863], and some stuff in Louisiana--just again and again and again. And then in the sixties it was
1489 a turnabout. And suddenly black people were burning up their own communities instead of white
1490 people coming into the black community and burning them up. I've never quite fully understood--
1491 -I mean I do understand on some levels--but I don't understand on other levels. Burn, I guess,
1492 what's closest to you, because to get on a bus and ride across town and burn up you probably
1493 might lose your incentive to burn--or not be able to get there. The argument was "you didn't
1494 own it anyway." I mean the black people who were setting the fires didn't own the businesses or
1495 the buildings that burned, but the result was you had people burned out.

1496

1497 I moved to LA on the day the Watts Riot[s] broke out.⁴⁵ And after five or six days it seems like
1498 finally we could get out again. It might have been longer than that. You had to be in by dark,
1499 something like nine. They had a curfew and National Guard troops parked in parking lots of
1500 grocery stores and up and down the street and everything. The helicopters [were] flying over
1501 areas that were being looted. You could sit at home and watch television and see people you
1502 knew stealing stuff. It was very strange. But when it was over we drove over to Watts--I wasn't
1503 in Watts, I was in West LA. It was scary; it was devastating. I saw LA in 1992⁴⁶ when it burned
1504 again and it was still devastating. I mean it's just blocks and it stayed that way; it stayed burned out for
1505 years and so did it this time. It stayed burned out. It wasn't like, "Oh, get insurance money and build it
1506 right back up." It took a long time for it to build it back up. Just like Katrina has taken a long time. But
1507 the spark that starts those things is typically the same always: either an actual or perceived police
1508 something--and usually actual--and a few people end up getting a whole lot of people who are frustrated
1509 and angry and poor, always poor, to riot and use the riot as an excuse to steal, an opportunity to liberate
1510 things.

1511

1512 The riots that occurred in the sixties, they just spread one summer after another, from one place to
1513 another. And [the riots] really scared white folks--scared them probably more than anything else black
1514 people had done. The marching and singing didn't scare them. Riots did, even though they didn't spillover
1515 into their communities. To know that there were black people willing to burn and loot was enough to
1516 scare them. But they also prepared much better as the years wore on--their armaments got better, tactics
1517 got better, if you will. More effective--that's a better way of putting it, because better is questionable. But

⁴⁵ The Watts Riots lasted from August 11 to August 17, 1965.

⁴⁶ The LA Riots of 1992, also known as the Rodney King Riots, last from April 29 to May 4, 1992.

1518 more effective in quelling riots.

1519

1520 But the unrest and the . . . you know, I'd actually rather see black people riot and burn down a town than
1521 gang wars where they're shooting each other over craziness. At least they're trying to make a political
1522 statement in a riot. I can't find anything redeeming about gang wars where kids are shooting each other
1523 for nothing. But the political nature of things was so heightened in the sixties. Everything was politics.
1524 And everybody viewed their lives from a political framework. And maybe that's coming back; I hope
1525 that's coming back. I hope Obama has re-instilled some political consciousness in masses of people and
1526 it's not just all economics. Which it's been since 1980, it's been all about the money: making the money,
1527 got to get paid.

1528

1529 So back to my jobs, all right. After working for the legal defense fund and struggling to stay even,
1530 certainly not getting ahead. I came back to Portland to try to get my folks a hand, and I got a job over the
1531 telephone before coming back. And [I] started working as a hearing officer with the Oregon Liquor
1532 Control Commission (OLCC), and I never expected to stay on the same job for as long as I have. It's
1533 longest I've worked on any job. It's 15 years; where has the time gone? Now I work for the Office of
1534 Administrative Hearings as an administrative law judge. I actually planned at one point to try to get hired
1535 by the Social Security Administration to do administrative law judge work for the feds, who paid more
1536 and who I thought, as a benefit program judge, I could be more useful. But it never happened. In between
1537 dealing with my folks aging--and aging myself--and coming back to the place where I . . . I just want to
1538 take a vacation. And every time you start a new job of course you start building your vacation time over
1539 again. And I have gotten to the place now where I can accumulate a day and a half a month, which makes
1540 taking a real vacation easier, and retirement is right around the corner. So where am I going and why am I
1541 going there now? I work as an administrative law judge; I had done agency and board cases, primarily the
1542 OLCC, but also pharmacy and PERS public employee retirement system, and real estate, and teachers,
1543 and nurses--did quite a few nurses cases--and in recent weeks I have been ... should I even get into this?
1544 I've been first promoted, then reclassified downward. Then they rescinded the reclassification downward
1545 and put me back where I was, gave me a raise, and then reclassified me downward again. It's a big mess
1546 all related to money, I believe. And I'm now doing unemployment insurance hearings exclusively. I'm not
1547 doing OLCC or any board commissions anymore. And I'm also in the process of using my union to file a
1548 grievance, and eventually I'm on my way back to the civil rights division to file a complaint on the basis
1549 of age, race and sex against my employer. Yeah, so that's a long story, or a short story of a long version
1550 that I know didn't make much sense, but it doesn't make much sense what they done.

1551

1552 But do you know administrative law? Most people don't. So let me get on my administrative law soapbox
1553 for a hot minute. Criminal law and civil law are what most people know about. Civil law is a lawsuit for
1554 damages, usually money. You know what criminal law is?

1555

1556 MFF: *Yes*

1557

1558 CR: Administrative law grew out of the regulatory and benefit aspects of a lot of what FDR [Franklin D.
1559 Roosevelt] created. If you create a right for somebody, such as Social Security, and then you tell
1560 somebody you're not eligible. Or the amount they give you is not what you thought you were entitled to,
1561 there has to be a mechanism for the recipient or the beneficiary to challenge it. You have the Constitution,
1562 which sets up courts that are under Article Three of the Constitution, which ensures a trial court, and your
1563 Supreme Court, and Court of Appeals. When you pass a law, the legislature gives the executive branch
1564 that law to enforce and to regulate. So it's the executive branch that needed some sort of the judiciary, if
1565 you will, when it came to the benefit programs or the regulatory stuff that they were enforcing. And a
1566 body of law called administrative law grew up. Whenever there is a license that you have to have for an
1567 occupation or business, an agency--a government body--will issue you that license. If they deny the
1568 license, or if they say while you were operating with the license you violated rules and regulations that
1569 control the industry or that business or that occupation, they can try to take your license, or they can fine
1570 you for violating the rules. And therefore you would have a right to contest their agency action. That's
1571 another aspect of administrative law. A third area is regulatory stuff with ratemaking: electric rates, gas
1572 rates, water rates--really all that stuff.

1573

1574 MFF: *Is it all strictly utilities?*

1575

1576 CR: Or any kind of ratemaking, any kind of licensing. Any kind of ratemaking is all administrative law.
1577 Public Utility Commission (PUC)? Yeah, that's administrative law; there are administrative judges who
1578 work there and people can challenge the ratemaking. People can offer comments when rules are being
1579 changed and written, or whatnot. So there's this huge body of law that affects everybody's life that
1580 nobody knows about, which I find incredible. You know about criminal law, and you know about civil
1581 law, but the likelihood of you ever having a trial that is civil or criminal is minimal. First of all, even if
1582 you're involved in the process, I think it's less than three percent of the cases that get filed actually go to
1583 trial. They either get settled in civil law, or they get plea-bargained in criminal law. If everybody got a
1584 trial, they would be years and years before they ever got to court. There aren't enough judges for the
1585 amount of time each trial takes. So the system operates off the expectations that the majority, the vast

1586 majority, is never going to get a trial.

1587

1588 At administrative practice, we do more hearings, which are trials. We do more administrative hearings
1589 than the state, federal, civil, and criminal courts do combined because pretty much everybody gets a
1590 hearing. Not much gets settled. Some but relatively speaking, not much. Nowhere near the amount that
1591 goes on in civil and criminal court. But every occupation—it has grown tremendously since the 1940s--so
1592 that every occupation pretty much is covered with a licensing body that regulates how that occupation
1593 will be operated. And everybody has a right to a hearing. Okay, so across the country, traditionally the
1594 hearings officers were in the agency that does the regulatory stuff. And over the last twenty years, there's
1595 been a movement to separate the hearings from the agencies to make the hearings part of separate body,
1596 and not have the hearings officer, which is now been changed to administrative law judge, be an
1597 employee of the agency that's being challenged by the citizen. Twenty-some states have adopted some
1598 sort of a panel, or an independent body of administrative law judges, who have been taken out of the
1599 agencies and work together doing work for the agencies. Oregon did it in 2000. Oregon created the Office
1600 of Administrative Hearings in 2000. And I was the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, where I was an
1601 employee doing Oregon Liquor Control Commission cases; it was one the agencies that got put into the
1602 Office of Administrative Hearings. It was DMV, the motor vehicle part, DHS, all the benefit programs,
1603 and the employee department--with the unemployment insurance hearings--as well as the OLCC.
1604 Everybody else, all the other boards and commissions didn't have a fulltime paid staff. They would either
1605 contract out, or have one person who they designated but wasn't a fulltime job. All of the boards and
1606 commissions, by law, were required to use a judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings. Some of
1607 the boards and commissions, like Workmen's' Comp, has their own separate group. BOLI, the Bureau of
1608 Labor and Industries, they have their own; they're not a part of the office. It was all a political deal
1609 making, who's in and who's out. It makes no sense. Everybody should be in as far as I'm concerned, but
1610 they're not. So since 2000, I didn't just work for OLCC. I primarily worked for OLCC, but I also started
1611 picking up all these other boards and commissions and whatnot. Now since the summer when they started
1612 messing around with my classification, I'm only doing the benefit program, which actually is easier work.
1613 It's just you do a lot of them. While the boards and commissions, one case could last for months. You
1614 have lawyers on both sides and the AG [Attorney General] representing the agency usually. The orders
1615 would take days to write. Now I do five hearings a day, twenty orders a week. And I can't tell you any of
1616 them. I don't remember who I talk to. You can't. Give me my notes, I could tell you all about it. But what
1617 three cases did I have today? I'm like . . . uh . . . you know? Because you're holding the hearings and
1618 writing orders from yesterday's cases, and twenty in a week? When I would do five in a month with the
1619 other stuff? So, anyway, that's my job. And everybody, I believe, everybody should understand

1620 administrative law, because it will eventually affect you. Just given the nature of it. And if you want to
1621 work somewhere, it will affect you. [laughs] Okay, that's my latest job. And basically I'm living for the
1622 weekend, trying to figure out how I can afford to retire. That's where I am now. Yes. Is there anything
1623 left?

1624

1625 MFF: *I've covered all my areas for this particular interview.*

1626

1627 CR: Oh, very good! I guess the only thing left to say is Otto and Verdell Rutherford, my parents, were
1628 really exceptional people. I wish I could have done as much with life. I may have gotten more education
1629 than they got, which doesn't mean a whole hell of a lot. But as far as being useful, and helpful, and
1630 making a change, I don't think I've even come close. I think my greatest accomplishments are probably
1631 my kids. I've minimally done stuff that's worth talking about in my opinion. But my folks really did; they
1632 gave a lot. They gave a lot to this community for no money. They just did it because it needed to be done.
1633 They wanted things to be better for my generation and my children's generation. And I appreciate them
1634 for it. And they were nice people. My mom was just a jewel. She really was. My dad could be kind of
1635 cantankerous at times.

1636

1637 I remember there was a march. I didn't tell you about the shooting. That was something else I was going
1638 to mention. I went to Portland State between 1974 and 1976. And in 1975 or 1976, one or the other,
1639 within a six-month period of time, the police had shot, I believe it was, four young brothers under curious
1640 circumstances.⁴⁷ And two of the brothers were literally blood brothers of two of the students at Portland
1641 State. Rosemary Allen's brother and Sandra McFerrin's brother-in-law, I think it was. Brother? I don't
1642 know. Anyway, we ended up organizing a march and taking a delegation to go meet with the chief of
1643 police. And as the result of the march, which hundreds of people showed up for, it was well attended. But
1644 what was funny, it was on a Saturday.

1645

1646 MFF: *Do you remember the exact day?*

1647

1648 CR: No, but I could find it, because my mom save newspapers. I've got a picture, in fact it might be in
1649 here . . . a picture of the newspaper . . . ooh, I put my hand right on it! Look at me go! Spring of 1975,

⁴⁷ In 1975, a Portland police officer fatally shot 17-year-old Rickie Charles Johnson during an alleged robbery attempt. He was the fourth Black male shot and killed by Portland police in a five-month period. The others were Kenny Allen, Charles Menefee, and Joe Hopkins. Charlotte Rutherford was a founding member of the Black Justice Committee. The group sought a federal investigation into the shootings of all four men.

1650 [laughs] that's all I can tell you now. But we can find the newspaper that it was in. But what I was going
1651 to tell you was that when I got to the police station with the delegation that was meeting with the chief.
1652 When we walked in, who did I see standing by the counter but my dad! I was so shocked to see him
1653 standing there. I'm like, "What are you doing here, daddy?" He said, "Well you said you were coming
1654 down here, and I wanted to make sure everything was alright." I'm like, "Well, okay, thanks a lot!"
1655 [laughs] And he just stood in the . . . that was actually the Black Studies department's newspaper. That
1656 was my work-study job. Did you see? That was me at the bottom. There ought to be an article about why
1657 we were marching or something. But anyway, my dad was a man's man. I don't think they make men like
1658 him anymore.

1659
1660 I also need to talk about my mom's collection. My mom saved articles in newspapers and magazines and
1661 whatever she could get her hands on that had to do with black folks. She had a collection of local
1662 magazines--local newspapers I should say--going back to the early 19 . . . local black newspapers going
1663 back to the early 1900s. The Advocate was the first black newspaper here in Portland. And I actually have
1664 two or three editions, my first one being 1918. And OPB [Oregon Public Broadcasting] did a
1665 documentary on Beatrice [Morrow] Cannady,⁴⁸ who was the editor of the Advocate newspaper. And the
1666 producer heard about my collection and called and asked if she could see some of the newspapers,
1667 because she had only been able to find microfiche. She hadn't found any hardcopies. And [she] came
1668 over, and took pictures, and interviewed me and had, you know, three sentence of mine in her video. But
1669 the newspaper thing was . . . she was really pleased to have actual copies. And I need to find a home for
1670 my mom's stuff, because it's just down in the basement. I had sense enough to tell her that I wanted it a
1671 long time ago. I mean, when I was young. And then when I came back here in the nineties, she got a
1672 request for PCC [Portland Community College] for some of her papers to do some kind of exhibit. And
1673 she said, she told the young woman to contact me, because she said the papers were really mine. So when
1674 the woman called me and asked me about the papers, I was like, whoa, yes, but do you plan to
1675 compensate my mom for using the papers? And she was like, we . . . um . . . I think we can give her \$300.
1676 Well that's fine; just give her something. So when she got her first check and the woman came back next
1677 year and did it twice, she was so proud of herself having actually gotten paid for the first time in fifty
1678 years. She had done exhibits for other things at other times. And my dad actually had the nerve to get
1679 angry because nobody ever paid him for anything! [laughs] It set up some competition between them that
1680 I thought was pretty funny.

1681

⁴⁸ Beatrice Morrow Cannady (1890-1974) was the editor of the state's largest black newspaper and a co-founder of the Portland chapter of the NAACP.

1682 There was another incident where somebody had written an article about him. They had three of four
1683 articles written about him toward the end. And in the article, they had listed it as Verdell and Otto
1684 Rutherford. And my mother gave me the article, and I read it. And she was just laughing, and my dad's
1685 jaws were tight. And I'm looking at both of them, and I didn't get it. And she said, "My name is first!"
1686 [laughs] It was a big deal that it didn't say Otto and Verdell Rutherford and it said Verdell and Otto
1687 Rutherford! There was some stuff going on between my folks that I'll never understand. After sixty years
1688 of being together. They were together for 63 years and then lasted two more years after my dad went into
1689 assisted living. No, foster care, they called it.

1690
1691 Yeah, they were funny. My dad used to tell the joke: Don't take a girl to Sunday school unless you plan to
1692 marry here, or something like that. That was how they started out, going to Sunday school together. Yeah.
1693 I'll never know 63 years [laughs] with the same person! But that's another story too. Okay, well I guess
1694 we need to wrap it up! [Laughs] Can you think of anything else I should elaborate on or add more to?

1695
1696 MFF: *Not at this particular point in time.*

1697
1698 CR: I hope I didn't have too many "ums," but I'm sure I did. I notice Michelle Obama says "um" too. It's
1699 a way to keep the mind going.

1700
1701 MFF: *Maybe it's a cultural thing.*

1702
1703 CR: Could be! [laughs] Could be.

1704
1705 MFF: *Anything else you would like to add?*

1706
1707 CR: I think what you're doing is very important. This is totally unrelated. But, I mean, in terms of my life
1708 and all that. I think that it's unfortunate we've let a lot of time get by and a lot of people who should've
1709 recorded what they had to say about their life experiences.

1710
1711 But my generation--I'm 61--it's amazing what ten years can do. I came into adulthood at a time when
1712 "black is beautiful" was the expression and it set a tone for my generation in terms of those of us who
1713 were politically active, in terms of how we view ourselves and how we view each other. Using the terms
1714 brother and sister is still something that I do; that was real common in those days when you referred to
1715 another black person. I think that the difference between my brother, who's ten years older than I, is so

1716 extreme because of what was going on in our adolescence and early adulthood. I mean, my stuff was at
1717 the height of the Black Power movement and I was very much affected by it. He was before the Black
1718 Power movement, and if anything was affected by the Beat Generation that went on in the fifties. The
1719 sixties were just . . . he was in the Air Force, he was in a whole different sort of place and not still
1720 developing. While between my mom and dad's stuff as a youngster, and then the height of activities as a
1721 young adult, my life, I think, was enriched in racial ways that a lot people haven't had the benefit of. I've
1722 known folks who were reluctant--black people--who were reluctant to talk about race with white people. I
1723 have never been. I mean, my kids will tell you that throughout their entire lives, talking about race is
1724 something I've done. Talking about color is also something that I've done that we as a people have not
1725 done sufficiently.

1726
1727 The issue of color within the race is still an issue, in fact is probably more an issue that has been for a
1728 while. The video thing and everybody looking Hispanic has just bloomed and young black women I don't
1729 think have an appreciation for their own beauty. I think the hair thing is part of it. We've got straighter
1730 blonder hair now than we've ever had before, and a disinterest in natural hair for the masses. But the
1731 masses probably didn't really wear natural back in the day. If they did it was for style only, it wasn't about
1732 any commitment to natural hair. Which is kind of too bad, I think.

1733
1734 But issues of race have always been important to me, and I've made them important for my kids. And
1735 being able to talk about race has always been important to me. My daughter, I think, has had a more open
1736 or . . . because of going to white schools and living with white people, either in the dorms or renting
1737 houses or apartments, I think she's more comfortable on a personal level around white people than I am. I
1738 can get there with some people if I've known them for a while. But I think she's more open and willing
1739 get there faster, generally speaking, than I am. I think I still have more resistance and more defenses in
1740 general when it comes to white people. And coming out of a Black Nationalist perspective is part of it, I
1741 think. I don't know; I probably could use some clinical time on some of these issues to understand myself.
1742 [laughs] Pay for some services. But they would have to be culturally relevant, so that's another story.

1743
1744 There was something else though that I thought about that--now it's gone--I meant to mention. Oh shoot,
1745 what was it? Well, we do this one more time, right? So if I can't . . . I can mention, oh this isn't it...

1746
1747 I can mention my business that I didn't mention that I think is important. My first husband and I had one
1748 of the first—if not *the* first—black, Afrocentric store in Portland, it was called Black Fashion and we had
1749 clothing, jewelry, and books. Actually half the books were off my bookshelf; that's a whole other story.

1750 On Martin Luther King, which was then Union Avenue, and off of Fremont, of course the building's been
1751 torn down now. We had a store; it was a storefront and an apartment in the back.

1752

1753 Oh! I know what I wanted to mention: African Liberation Day, which I don't even know if it still exists or
1754 not. We talked about the Black Educational Center before, which was an independent private black school
1755 that my daughter went and my son also, although he only went for one year, and she went for three. That
1756 was located off Northeast Seventeenth off of Alberta and organized by Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris,
1757 whose names were Ishola and Makini. Joyce Harris is still around and so is Ron for that matter. Ronnie
1758 runs the Alberta Ministerial Alliance Head Start program, and he's the national Head Start chair, or
1759 president, whichever. But the school would also sponsor African Liberation Day parades every year. And I
1760 took my kids to the parades, and other demonstrations that we had here in Portland occasionally, as
1761 youngsters. And I think they, I know they remember. And I think they value the need to expose children to
1762 political activity. And I can remember walking down Williams Avenue or Martin Luther King, one or the
1763 other, yelling "Africa for Africans!" with the BEC Black Educational Center children. I don't know if
1764 African Liberation Day still happens. I haven't seen anything about it.

1765

1766 When I was in DC, Kwame Toure, Stokely Carmichaels' All-African Peoples' Revolutionary Party would
1767 sponsor African Liberation Day.⁴⁹ And they would take over Malcolm X Park. It was pretty interesting.
1768 What was fascinating to me was to see eighteen different kinds of Muslims. I mean, Nation of Islam was .
1769 . . by that time, Warith Deen Mohammed⁵⁰ had disbanded the Nation and, I guess, Farrakhan had taken
1770 back over. So you had the bowties with Farrakhan, and you had the t-shirts with Warith Deen
1771 Mohammed. And then you had various other Sunni and Hanafi and I don't know what all. But some
1772 wearing veils and some wearing white, and it used to really amaze me that we could splinter off as
1773 Muslims as much as Christians did. And have ninety-seven different varieties. [laughs]

1774

1775 But African Liberation Day was always an interesting event. Black folk would turn out. They have
1776 speeches, and dances, and entertainment, vendors, and food. It would be a great gathering. I have to ask
1777 somebody about that. I was thinking about that the other day. I haven't heard about African Liberation
1778 Day in twenty years? 1988? Yeah, that would be about right. Maybe when Stokely died and Nelson

⁴⁹ Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998), a prominent Civil Rights activist and member of both SNCC and the Black Panther Party, changed his name to Kwame Toure following a trip to Africa in the late sixties.

⁵⁰ Warith Deen Muhammad (1933-2008) was the son of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Following his father's death in 1975, he disbanded the Nation of Islam and formed the more mainstream Islamic organization, World Community of Al-Islam in the West. In 1981, Louis Farrakhan revived the name Nation of Islam for his own organization.

1779 Mandela got freed we don't need that anymore! [laughs] I don't know, you can check that one out for me.
1780 Check it out on the Internet.

1781
1782 Yes, but the Black Educational Center was a wonderful school and I'm really sorry it doesn't still exist.
1783 Because now that charter school money is available it might have been able to hang in. They had the kids
1784 wearing uniforms: red, black, and green. And they focused heavily on scholarship and also African and
1785 African American history, giving children a sense of themselves, their worth, and their responsibility to
1786 our people. So it's really too bad it's not still in existence. But it was around for twenty years easily,
1787 longer than that, which for a private, non-funded school, not religiously affiliated, I guess is a good track
1788 record too. Okay, I think that's it. The African Liberation Day is something that occurred to be that I
1789 wanted to mention. I think it was like June 25. It was definitely summertime. And June 25 is the day that
1790 keeps sticking in my head. And I actually think it grew out of something Marcus Garvey did. But I might
1791 have made that up. [laughs]

1792
1793 MFF: *I'll let you know.*

1794
1795 CR: Okay! Well Monica, thank you.

1796
1797 MFF: *Yes, I'd like to thank you for your time, Charlotte.*

1798
1799 CR: It's been enjoyable.

1800
1801 MFF: *And I look forward to our second interview.*

1802
1803 CR: Me too.

1804
1805 MFF: *And I guess we're done.*

1806
1807 CR: All right, thank you.

1808
1809 [End of First Interview]

Kenneth Coleman
HST 409; Schechter
March 16, 2015

1 Oral History Interview, part 2

2 Narrator: Charlotte Rutherford

3 Interviewer: Monica Fields-Fears

4 Interview Date: November 22, 2008

5

6 Transcribed and audited by Kenneth Coleman, March 2015, and Carolee Harrison, August 2015

7

8 [Start of track 2 of 3 of recorded audio interview]

9 MFF: *All right, take number three. This is an oral history interview with Charlotte Rutherford at her*
10 *home in Portland, Oregon. The interviewer for the Portland Civil Rights Project is Monica Fields-Fears*
11 *and the date is November 22, 2008. And this is interview number two. Could you give me your full name,*
12 *date of birth and place of birth?*

13

14 CR: Charlotte Bernadine Rutherford, April 10, 1947, Portland, Oregon.

15

16 MFF: *I'd like to ask you about some specific details of your business, Blackfashion.*

17

18 CR: [laughs] Such a business as it was! Yeah, it was located on what is now called Martin Luther King
19 just off of Fremont. It was a storefront. Most of the buildings along that whole block are gone now.

20 They're entirely different from what they were in the late sixties. And if I remember correctly, we had a
21 furrier next door to us. I don't recall any other black businesses on that block at the time. The majority of
22 black businesses had been on Williams Avenue and Vancouver Avenue further down around Russell. By
23 the sixties, a lot of the businesses were gone, but there were still a number of businesses remaining. They
24 really didn't get wiped out completely until the seventies, when Emanuel Hospital expanded.¹ What they
25 had planned to have as a radiation cobalt center or something. They bought up a lot of property and then
26 they didn't do the building that they had anticipated they were going to do. But in the late sixties, there
27 were still a number of restaurants and small businesses—service industry types—along Williams Avenue
28 and not that much, if I remember correctly, that made it over onto what was then called Union Avenue.
29 Directly across the street there was a McDonalds. And I can remember in high school when they built the
30 McDonalds, it was just really wonderful, because kids now had a place to hang out in the neighborhood.
31 But as far as black businesses go, I really can't think of any that were in the block at that time.

¹ In the postwar period, several urban renewal projects displaced thousands of mostly black residents living in the Albina District. The most notable projects were the construction of the Memorial Coliseum in the 1950s, the creation of Interstate-5 in the 1960s, and the expansion of Emmanuel Hospital in the

32

33 MFF: *What businesses did you frequent that were black-owned during that time?*

34

35 CR: Oh, wow.

36

37 MFF: *That existed at that time?*

38

39 CR: There were restaurants. There were record shops. Barbershops—not that I went to a barbershop.
40 Beauty shops. Not much in the way of retail that I can recall. There were other kinds of businesses that I
41 didn't frequent, like pool halls. That's about all I can really think of that were there in the sixties. Earlier
42 than that there were more dance halls and flophouses, where people could rent rooms—not hotels—they
43 were that big. But if I remember correctly that was the mainstay of what was on Williams Avenue in the
44 sixties. But in the fifties and forties there was everything happening on Williams Avenue. But by the
45 sixties, things had started to thin out and spread out.

46

47 MFF: *Can you be more specific about these places, such as names?*

48

49 CR: No. [laughs] Restaurants? No. Tropicana, it's still there. It's the only thing that's still there on
50 Williams Avenue. Geneva's, the Cotton Club . . . let's see here, the Cotton Club was on Williams Avenue.
51 The building is still there, but the business is long gone. Geneva's was a tavern, bar, club that was on
52 Williams Avenue between Skidmore and Mason, or whatever the street south of there is. Now it's just a
53 big vacant lot. It was one of the last black-owned neighborhood clubs. Oh, there was also Lou's Higher
54 Ground. That was a club on Williams Avenue and Killingsworth. It's now where the used furniture store is
55 on that corner. That was a club, called Lou's Higher Ground. It's only thirty years ago you know? [laughs]
56 Nay, forty years ago! That's the best I can do for now.

57

58 MFF: *And when you first began your business, how was it getting financing and getting the space?*

59

60 CR: [Laughs] There was no financing. Half of the books that we sold came out of my library. We had a
61 number of things on consignment, where we took stuff in and if we were able to sell it. We split the profit
62 with the person who placed the stuff. The building itself was a storefront and we rented the back to live
63 in. So, getting the building as a whole, that was something, to tell you the truth, my ex-husband did. But I
64 don't remember there being any big deal about it, other than coming up with the rent for it. The clothes? I

early 1970s.

65 think my ex-husband managed to get an investor initially. At the time there were a number of white
66 people who thought helping out the black community would be a good thing to do. I don't know if was
67 morally, or financially, or socially, or what. And if I remember correctly, there was somebody, and I don't
68 even know who it was now, who invested some money that my ex-husband came up with. That may have
69 also helped contribute to the stock that we had. But it wasn't much on an investment, I can tell you that. It
70 wasn't much of a store! It was a storefront as they call them. But we had goods and stuffs. Oh, and we
71 also had some friends in San Francisco who he managed to talk out of their goods on consignment, again,
72 to have in our store and pay them later. So it wasn't going to SBA [Small Business Association] and being
73 a formal business plan and doing it like it should have been done, [as] people are doing it today. It was a
74 place to live and a business in front, and stocked with the best things you could come up with with limited
75 resources. And that's pretty much what we did.

76

77 MFF: *Is there anything else you would like to add about that?*

78

79 CR: That's about it for Blackfashion. It didn't last but a year or so, if I remember correctly.

80

81 MFF: *Did you have a lot of clients?*

82

83 CR: We had a lot of people coming in there. I don't know how many people were buying anything.
84 Actually we even ended up sheltering a couple of folks who were running from the FBI out of San
85 Francisco. Didn't have anything to do with the store. But there were a couple of guys who—I don't even
86 remember how we got them, but somehow they found our doorstep and needed a place to stay—that we
87 later found out folks were looking for them. We didn't know at the time that was happening, because of
88 some shootout stuff in the Bay Area. So we had a lot of people hanging around all the time, but they
89 weren't shopping, really. [laughs]

90

91 MFF: *Just more of a social scene?*

92

93 CR: Yeah, or political. Or both. I think that's about it for Blackfashion.

94

95 MFF: *Okay, now I'd like to get into the Black Education Center [BEC.]²*

96

² Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris founded the Black Education Center (BEC) in 1970. It was originally located at 63 NE Morris Street and later moved to 4919 NE 17th Avenue.

97 CR: Oh, yes. That was a really worthy institution. I'm sorry it doesn't still exist. In addition to being a
98 standard K-6, I believe, grade school—maybe it was K-8—they also took responsibility for sponsoring
99 Kwanzaa events and, like I said, the last time the African Liberation Day parade and other events that
100 were race conscious in the community. The BEC, Black Education Center, really instilled in their kids not
101 only the basic academics, which, regardless to your political beliefs, everybody needs to learn to read and
102 write and do math. They also focused the kids more on their individual responsibility to learn and
103 contribute back to the community in ways that public schools didn't do. They focused on race, which
104 public schools don't do. They focused on the history of the race and trying to teach children that it was
105 their obligation to forward the race, to do things to further issues of freedom, justice, and equality in a
106 nationalist kind of setting. The kids wore uniforms—green and red. I think they may have changed as the
107 year wore on. My children were in there at the beginning.

108

109 MFF: *What years did your children attend?*

110

111 CR: 1973, no that's wrong. Let me think about it here. My daughter was born in 1969. She went to Head
112 Start under one of the BEC teachers, before they opened the school up as a fulltime school. They did
113 Saturday schools for a year or two before they were fully accredited to open up fulltime. Kindergarten, I
114 put her at Ockley Green, but decided to take her out and put her back under the preschool teacher she had,
115 who had done so well with here when she was in Head Start. So 1973 or 1974 would have been when she
116 started and 1978 or 1979 would have been when she came out. And I put her at Ockley Green and
117 basically a year or so later we left town. So she was in there for either three or four years at the beginning.
118 First through fourth grade I believe--no, first through third. Because the fourth grade she did at Ockley
119 Green. The fifth grade she did have a year at Catholic School. I took her out of there and put her back at
120 Ockley Green, they put her in the sixth grade. So, she was there for three years, but she already had two
121 years prior to that when she was in Head Start with one of the teachers that was at the Black Educational
122 Center.

123

124 I haven't kept up with many of the kids, but the few that I have kept up with have tended to do more
125 academically than might be typical of kids from that age group. I know my daughter has talked about
126 wanting to do a reunion of BEC kids, which I think would be great. I would love to see how they've
127 turned out and how the years have treated them. I do believe that the emphasis the teachers put on your
128 responsibility for the race to learn had a lasting impact on all of the children that went there. And the
129 academics were solid, also. It's a resource that this community still needs, and it's a shame it still doesn't
130 exist, or can't be brought back into existence, as the case may be. I know that there was only one of the

131 teachers left. At least of the early teachers, because as the years went on they changed things. And she's
132 off doing something else, so it's not likely the same people would revive the school. But there certainly is
133 a need. And now that there are charter schools and alternative schools and all kinds of other ways to fund
134 schools then there were at the time by strictly tuition from the parents, that the school might now have a
135 better shot at staying alive if the funding source was other than just on the backs of the parents. I think
136 that might have been partially why it went under: just the cost of keeping the school alive was more than
137 the few parents who were willing to put their kids there could afford. BEC was a great institution. And
138 Ron Herndon and Joyce Harris and Ayoka, whose last name I don't remember, and Makini, whose last
139 name I don't remember, are deserving of a lot of credit for having tried for twenty years to keep the
140 school alive.

141

142 MFF: *What was the start date and end date, or years rather?*

143

144 CR: I'm not sure about the end date. They did Saturday schools for two or three years before they went to
145 fulltime day school. And I believe they went to fulltime day school in 1974. So probably 1972 and 1973,
146 they were on Saturdays only. And actually I think they were on Martin Luther King in a building when
147 they were in Saturday school. They were. And then they bought what was Vernon Library over on
148 [Northeast] Seventeenth off of Alberta as their schoolhouse. And I believe they stayed there right through
149 the early nineties when they closed.³ I think that's about it for the BEC.

150

151 MFF: *Well, is there anything else you want to touch on?*

152

153 CR: Well, there was another issue you raised, and that was about my own education and how I managed
154 to put myself—or who put me through school—how I funded my own education. And that's a really
155 interesting question because my education lasted a long time. It took me eleven years to get my
156 undergraduate degree. When I first started to school right out of high school, I was in Los Angeles. And I
157 think I mentioned that going to junior college in Los Angeles was \$7.50 a quarter! So, my folks sent me
158 money to live in Los Angeles but going to school wasn't really costing anything. Everybody who lives in
159 California ought to have at least an AA degree, as cheap as going to school was. Then when I went to the
160 University of Washington, I think I was able to finesse the state of Washington into paying by virtue of
161 being on welfare. And if I remember correctly, they didn't want me to go and get a four-year degree
162 because I was on welfare. They only wanted me to get something that would allow a two-year degree.
163 And I fortunately had a sensible caseworker, who argued I already had two years of higher education.

164 Why did I need to go back and get two years of training, when I needed two years of additional education
165 to finish my undergraduate degree? And so I told her I was taking secretarial courses at University of
166 Washington and she didn't question that. And, therefore, I was able to get the state of Washington to pay
167 for my tuition and childcare so I could go back to school. Then the third time, I went to Portland State. I
168 was a work-study student and I was a resident. And I don't remember having student loans at Portland
169 State, so I must have been able to afford to pay for it myself at the time. Of course tuition was...

170

171 MFF: *How much was the tuition?*

172

173 CR: Yeah, I'm thinking it was something like four hundred dollars or six hundred dollars a quarter. I don't
174 think it was all that. I mean, it was enough for the time, but it wasn't just impossible to pay because I
175 didn't stay on campus. I had my own home; I had kids and a husband, actually. So then when I went to
176 law school, again I had work-study. I borrowed \$5,000 a year on whatever kind of grant money was
177 available to borrow to educate yourself. And I got a full scholarship to Howard, so I didn't have to pay
178 tuition to go to Howard. And the \$5,000 dollars I borrowed, I was able to feed my kids and pay rent with.
179 But I also ended up with \$25,000 worth of student loans when I came out of law school—three at Howard
180 and two at Georgetown. And I paid for my own education, but I was able to get a scholarship at Howard
181 and then the fellowship when I was at Georgetown. But you got to remember I had a twelve-year old
182 daughter and a nine-year old son to feed and clothe and educate while I was in law school, which was
183 tough. And the \$25000 that I borrowed to get through law school I was only able to pay off by refinancing
184 my house when I moved back to Oregon. I couldn't get the money together because the year after I
185 graduated for law school my daughter started college. And they didn't care if I had \$25,000 worth of
186 student loans of my own and had been out of the workforce for five years. They still wanted me to pay,
187 like, \$1,500 the first year, because I had only worked, like, half a year and then \$4,000 or \$5,000, \$5,000
188 or \$6,000 each year thereafter, which I had no time to save, having had my own debts from law school.
189 So, fortunately the NAACP Legal Defense Fund had a program where you could borrow against your
190 future salary. And I was an indentured servant to the Legal Defense Fund for the four years my daughter
191 was in college because every year I would borrow the money I needed to pay her tuition or my portion of
192 her tuition, because she was getting grants and scholarships and still taken out student loans herself to go
193 to Brown University in Rhode Island. And now I don't think they're charging anybody. I think they're
194 paying. I think Brown and Harvard and Yale—the Ivies—have decided that if you're making under
195 \$60,000 a year, you don't have to pay anything for your kids to go there. But my little \$15,000 that I was
196 earning, they still wanted me to pay \$1,500 the first year. And then it went up from there. So, fortunately I

³ The school closed in 1993.

197 was able to borrow against my income to pay her tuition, my portion of her tuition. And then work for the
198 year to pay it back and then borrow it again the next year. So all of the funding that I put myself through
199 school with was either a scholarship, like I got from Howard, a fellowship that I worked for with
200 Georgetown, or borrowing money. And fortunately, at the time you could borrow enough money to pay
201 your tuition. I don't even know if nowadays you can borrow enough money. Georgetown's tuition, the last
202 I heard, law school tuition... well, first Brown's tuition was over \$30,000 a year. And when my daughter
203 started it was \$15,000, and that included room and board. And every year she was there, it went up a
204 thousand. And I guess it kept on going up a thousand every year since to have gotten to \$30,000! [laughs]

205
206 I can't imagine any degree being worth \$120,000 for an undergraduate degree. I mean, obviously you're
207 not going to make that kind of money back with an undergraduate degree. So clearly you need to continue
208 your education. I've gotten to the place now where what college costs, if you're not planning on getting at
209 least a master's or a professional degree or a PhD, I don't think you should bother to go to college at all. I
210 really do believe you should get some sort of official training to prepare to do a particular occupation
211 because an undergraduate degree for the cost of it, if that's all you're planning to get, it isn't worth it on
212 the market. It may be worth it intellectually, but most people don't have the money to just spend money to
213 be smart. They tend to spend money to make money. So I've gotten to the place now where if a young
214 person didn't have advanced higher education in mind, I would encourage them to think about them
215 training in some sort of certificate or licensing occupation that will get them a better job probably than an
216 undergraduate degree. Because the undergraduate is going to be competing with a master's for a job. So
217 that was my funding for school.

218
219 MFF: *Earlier, we not earlier, in our last interview, you talked a little bit about the health center that was*
220 *located in your neighborhood.*

221
222 CR: Oh, public health centers, oh man, yeah, which I relied on during those welfare years, no doubt.
223 There was a building right on the corner from me where I live now. Public health centers used to be
224 accessible and they were really great for babies. If you had shots, if you had illnesses, and you needed
225 quick service because there were so many of them, you usually didn't have much of wait. And they were
226 cheap, if not free. And in fact that was one of the things I think I mentioned about the Black Panther Party
227 that made them one of the benefits to the community: health services that they tried to provide in your
228 neighborhood. Not having to go long distances to get services. That is a benefit that is sorely needed
229 again, where it's publicly supported if not subsidized. Where people can do walk-ins and afford the
230 services that they get. And it was so much easier for all of the stuff that children need: the immunizations

231 in particular, but also, babies are constantly getting ear infections and one thing and another, where you
 232 got to go to the doctor. And it's so much more convenient when they're accessible. I mean physically
 233 accessible. You don't have long distances to travel, let alone financially accessible because either they had
 234 a sliding fee scale, where you paid according to your ability to pay, or you didn't pay at all. I would love
 235 to see public health services back in the community like they used to be in the late sixties again. We need
 236 them more than ever. Now they have what they call urgi-centers, so that you don't have to go to the
 237 emergency room of a hospital and pay hundreds of dollars. You can go to one of these urgi-centers and
 238 pay \$40 or \$50 instead, but that's still more than what we were paying back in the day. And the people
 239 who worked in those clinics tended to have a commitment to the community. They tended to be culturally
 240 more sensitive to their clientele, recognizing that black and Hispanic people were more likely to dominate
 241 their clientele base depending on the neighborhoods that they were located in. And [they] made an effort
 242 to accommodate people, which was nice to feel welcomed in your own neighborhood. And quite often
 243 health services aren't like that anymore. I mean, you go because you have to go, not because you
 244 necessarily feel welcomed when you get there.

245

246 MFF: *Okay.*

247

248 CR: That's it? No, you have another question.

249

250 MFF: *Yes.*

251

252 CR: *Okay.*

253

254 MFF: *Actually it's kind of a two-part question. I know one of the parts you've already told me you don't*
 255 *have much to say about it, but I was going to ask you about your views on the Burger Barn "opossum*
 256 *tossing"*⁴ *and the "Don't Choke 'Em, Smoke 'Em."*⁵

257

⁴ On March 12, 1981, two white police officers placed dead opossums on the doorstep of the Burger Barn, a black-owned restaurant on Union Avenue. The city fired the officers following protests from Portland's black community. However, the police union successfully fought to have the officers reinstated. Leanne C. Serbulo and Karen J. Gibson, "Black and Blue: Police-Community Relations in Portland's Albina District, 1964–1985," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 22–23.

⁵ On April 20, 1985, Portland Police Officer Gary Barbour killed Lloyd "Tony" Stevenson, an African American off-duty security guard who had committed no crime, after placing him in a "sleeper hold." Two other Portland police officers responded to the incident by manufacturing and selling t-shirts featuring the image of a handgun and the words, "Don't Choke 'Em, Smoke 'Em." The two officers were

258 CR: “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em?” That was the brother they choked. Is that the one, the chokehold,
 259 don’t choke ‘em? I don’t know the “Don’t Choke ‘Em, Smoke ‘Em,” I know they choked a brother and
 260 killed him. But... they shot a bunch...

261

262 MFF: *The police . . .*

263

264 CR: Excuse me?

265

266 MFF: *The police . . .*

267

268 CR: In when?

269

270 MFF: *1985.*

271

272 CR: ‘85?

273

274 MFF: *Yeah.*

275

276 CR: Okay. All right, first of all I was not living in Portland during all of the eighties. The opossum
 277 throwing, they choked and killed and brother, I heard about a chokehold, and then there was the skinheads
 278 who killed the... What was he? Ethiopian? Somalian? Whichever.⁶ All three of those incidents occurred
 279 when I was gone, when I was not living in Portland. But I certainly heard about them. And in all three
 280 cases, clearly race was the paramount issue. The possum thing, the way I heard the story was police threw
 281 a dead possum in front of a black-owned business. And people in the community who told me about the
 282 story certainly believed race was a large part of the factor for doing what they did, and when they did.
 283 Clearly race was a factor with the killing by the skinheads. And using excessive force—although in recent
 284 years the police used excessive force on a few white folks too—but proportionately we black people have
 285 had more incidents where excessive force was used. Historically, and given our proportion of the
 286 community, given our size, the numbers of us, we are overrepresented in being killed by the police,
 287 without a doubt. That’s not new; it’s historical. For a minute, with community policing and people on the

fired and later reinstated on the recommendation of an arbitrator. *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁶ On November 13, 1988, three neo-Nazi Skinheads murdered Mulageta Seraw, a 27-year old Ethiopian man, in Southeast Portland. “1998 Story: Legacy of a Hate Crime: Mulugeta Seraw’s Death a Decade Ago Avenged | OregonLive.com,” accessed February 26, 2015, http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/11/1998_story_legacy_of_a_hate_cr.html.

288 streets and all that, I think some of us thought that the attitude of the police might change, just because of
289 familiarity and some sense of community. But it doesn't seem to be the case. But it's not unique to
290 Portland, either. So there's still an underlying sense of race-hatred, fear, I think fear from police. To tell
291 you the truth, I think that's why they overreact like they do. I don't know if it's projection. I used to think
292 about the fear that slaveholders held. Fear of insurrection, fear of more than two or three black people
293 getting together at one time for fear that they'd plan an insurrection. I really do believe a lot of it is
294 projection. I think it's what white people think they would do if they were in our circumstances. And out
295 of that fear of what they would do, project onto the black folk what they expect them to do and therefore
296 overreact to it. I truly believe that about the police. It's quite similar, I think, to slave master's views of
297 insurrection at every turn. And make sure you keep it under control. I don't know that there's much
298 difference between the shooting of a young woman and the shooting of the young folks I talked about in
299 the seventies. I mean, it's the same: overreaction to a situation and black folks die. But they have
300 overreacted to whites too, so the thing is the proportion is not right. If we're only ten percent of the
301 population, then ninety percent of the people they kill should be black, as opposed to ten percent being
302 white and ninety percent being black. Those are numbers I made up, but I'm willing to bet they aren't far
303 off. Race relations in this town, this state, and this country, still have a long way to go. It's the bottom
304 line.

305

306 MFF: *Do you think, have you seen a significant change since you've been in Portland?*

307

308 CR: Over the 61 years I've been here? Yeah, I suppose. But when you go from zero to one, that's
309 significant, but it ain't enough. And that's kind of how I feel about it. There have been changes, sure. I
310 mean, when I was a kid, you couldn't get a job hardly in this town. And that's changed significantly.
311 Although I think for some people it hasn't changed at all. So I guess it depends. I think there's what they
312 were calling underclass group of black folks who have been so locked out for so long they aren't even in
313 the mix as far as competing. They are so removed from the ability to compete. Whether it's academically,
314 socially, emotionally, you know? There is a sizable portion of white people too, but my concern right now
315 is black people who are not equipped if opportunity were made available to take advantage of the
316 opportunities. Any time you can get a high school diploma and not be able to read, there is a problem.
317 And that happens. I don't how it happens, but it happens. I do believe that somewhere I read that the
318 average reading comprehension level is sixth grade for a high school graduate.

319

320 MFF: *For Oregon?*

321

322 CR: [laughs] In general, I don't know if it specifically applies to Oregon. I can't imagine Oregon is much
323 different, you know? And I don't know that we know the real numbers of dropouts. If you start at
324 kindergarten and make it up to the twelfth grade in terms of kids who have dropped out along the way, I
325 don't know that we've really had accurate numbers, because they measure at different points. But I do
326 know that the modified diploma that kids can get now, are you familiar with the modified diploma?

327

328 MFF: *No.*

329

330 CR: I know it began in the eighties when I was gone, because I have a nephew who got one and my mom
331 told me he was getting, I was like, I don't understand. A modified diploma basically is a piece of paper
332 that says you went to high school and now we want you to leave. It doesn't give you enough credits to go
333 to college; it will give you enough credits to go to junior college.

334

335 MFF: *So is it a step down from GED?*

336

337 CR: It's a step up from a GED.

338

339 MFF: *Step up?*

340

341 CR: Yeah. It's a step up because it's a high school diploma. But the problem is you have not taken enough
342 math, science, or probably history or social studies to qualify for you to get into a college, any college.
343 But it gets you out of high school. They need to push them on. So if you stayed in four years, rather than
344 coming out with nothing because you haven't taken the academic courses you need to qualify for a full
345 diploma or to qualify for any college, then you get a modified diploma. And they're giving them out
346 today. You can get a regular diploma or you can get a modified diploma.

347

348 MFF: *And so with the modified one you can only go to junior college.*

349

350 CR: Yeah, because you have not taken enough.

351

352 MFF: *What do they do about people who can't test... don't you have to test into junior college?*

353

354 CR: You do?

355

356 MFF: *It's a trap.*

357

358 CR: Yeah, and the belief is probably they don't plan to go anywhere anyway. They just want to get them
359 out of here. You stayed four years but you didn't take the academics that you actually needed to get a full
360 diploma, which would have then qualified you to have access to a four-year school, a college of sorts. It's
361 a diploma, but it's called a modified diploma. Which basically means you went to high school, period.
362 And as long as we're giving out a modified diploma and calling it a diploma and you can't go anywhere
363 with it, what is the educational system doing? That's a real problem. That is a problem.

364

365 And the No Child Left Behind⁷ is not the answer. The teaching the test is not the answer. And holding
366 schools' finances hostage because their test numbers aren't satisfying somebody, is not the answer. And
367 now they got a thing with teachers. What is the proficiency? [A] certain number of teachers have to have
368 majored in the area they're teaching in or the schools won't get the money under the No Child Left
369 Behind act. Yeah, they've not only focused on the student, but they've focused on the teachers now too.
370 And certainly teachers need to know how to teach, and they need to know their subject matter. But I don't
371 know if the way they're going about doing it is the right way. But there's some level of proficiency that
372 teachers have to be able to demonstrate in their core subject to be qualified to meet whatever standards are
373 under the No Child Left Behind act, that's also biting a bunch of schools in the butt. So between the
374 teachers not being adequately certified.

375

376 [phone rings] Well, I just turned it off. I got too many phones to be able to turn them off, I'm sorry about
377 that. Definitely have to cut over that part.

378

379 MFF: *I thought I put it on hold. Sorry.*

380

381 CR: Oh, well, it would have to be start and stop anyway. So anyway that was digression into public
382 school systems now days. The No Child Left Behind act, right. Schools as physical structures need
383 money. The remodeling repair needs to be done.

384

385 [End of track 2; start of track 3 of 3]

386

⁷ The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a controversial iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which authorizes the bulk of federal spending on elementary and secondary education.

387 CR: All right? I think I was talking about the physical structures, and how schools need a lot of financial
388 help to improve their physical structure. I think there's also a problem with inexperienced teachers ending
389 up in the schools that are in the worst shape, because nobody wants to be in those schools. And as soon as
390 those teachers actually learn how to teach, then they move on. Our educational system needs a lot of
391 reform. I'm not an educator but I certainly have opinions as to what I see from the press. And what I have
392 observed with friends who are teachers [is] that our kids not academically focused like they should be in
393 the first place. Where this--among black kids, you're acting white if you're trying to be academically
394 sound--came from, I have not a clue.

395
396 I mean education was the foundation of our existence and coming out of slavery. That's all anybody
397 wanted to talk about, was getting an education. And I would think since education was the one thing that
398 was withheld from us when we were in slavery, somebody else thought it was a good thing to not be
399 educated to be free, or to be able to keep someone in bondage, required, on some levels, the agreement of
400 the person you're keeping in bondage. And education tends to open up the mind and open up the will and
401 create conflict when it comes to one person running another person. In fact, I remember reading in
402 Frederick Douglass' biography about the people who are most likely to run away in slavery times were
403 those who were closer to the city, not in such isolated areas, and had actually experienced some
404 semblance of freedom.

405
406 I also remember reading an article about slavery in Mauritania today. And it focused on a woman who had
407 run away from her master after her family had been enslaved for 500 years. They didn't have a word for
408 freedom in their language. And she ran away because she was afraid she was going to be killed. She
409 didn't run away to be free and she didn't know how to be free once she got away. She just lived kind of
410 on the margins of the society that she found herself in. And she didn't really have a concept of
411 individuality or freedom or independence or any of that. And I can imagine if your family has been
412 enslaved for five hundred years, knowing how to be an independent person ought not to be a part of your
413 language, your view of the world. And if you're not exposed to something, how can you know?

414
415 And it kind of reminds me of our kids. They haven't been exposed to as much as they need to. And,
416 therefore, have managed to make up stuff, in terms of what should be important and what isn't. And I
417 don't exactly understand where the parents were because I certainly stressed with my kids their
418 responsibilities to us as a people and to themselves as citizens of the world, as did my folks with me. And
419 some of what's going on has to be laid at the feet of the parents. I recognize that making a living and
420 buying all the gadgets that are out here is important, but it can never be important than spending time with

421 your kids, to [give] your kids a sense of self and place in the world, and a sense of responsibility. You
422 know, what's expected of them. Something is expected of them, not just hanging and having fun and
423 growing up. But unfortunately, I don't think enough parents have made that clear to their kids. So that
424 was the long way around about whatever your original question was. [laughs] Anything more?

425
426 MFF: *I've covered everything I have to ask you. Is there anything else you would like to add to the overall*
427 *interview though?*

428
429 CR: Well I'd like to thank you for giving me this time to try to remember as best I can and fill in the gaps
430 from some portions of my life. I think your project is incredibly important. I hope that you're able to get a
431 wide variety of voices from the community to speak on the history of the Civil Rights era in Portland.

432
433 I think that these are about the most exciting times we've ever had, at least in terms of what's going on on
434 the national level. That we can hope will trickle down to where it makes a difference on the local level. I
435 think that Obama's election—I think it will be good and I think it will be very confusing, because a lot of
436 people will try to make it out that we have overcome, when in fact Obama overcame. And a lot of people
437 who supported him, you know, have overcome. But at the same time, the majority of white people didn't
438 vote for him. The majority of certain populations of white people voted for him. But the majority of white
439 people didn't vote for him. And that's something I think we need to keep in mind. The other people who
440 got him in are significant factors in this country, but I think the mere fact that you had poor people voting
441 for McCain—poor white people, and six percent of black people—I don't know who they are—voting for
442 McCain? Says something very strange to me that I don't understand, because how people will vote
443 against their own economic interests? I just don't understand it. I don't. I don't care how much you don't
444 want to have an abortion, or how much you don't want gay people to get married. How those two issues
445 can trump your own economic well-being is beyond my comprehension. If you don't want an abortion,
446 don't have an abortion. That works for me. And if you don't want to have a gay marriage, don't marry a
447 gay person. That works for me too. But to vote against your own economic interests to prevent other
448 people from having abortions and getting married with gay people is just beyond my comprehension. And
449 there's something about the American psyche, at least white people, that I don't understand, bottom line. I
450 really don't, I wish somebody would explain that to me.

451
452 But anyway, I hope your project succeeds, I look forward to seeing your documentary. And I hope that my
453 comments are helpful and coherent. And I appreciate your time.

454

455 MFF: *I appreciate your time too. And I thank you very much for giving me the time to interview you.*

456

457 CR: You're quite welcome.

458

459 MFF: *Is that all?*

460

461 CR: That's it. Thank you.

462