

Baboucarr Lowe

History and Memory

(Interview (edited transcript) with Lyle Quasim conducted on 5/7/07 through 5/9/07.)

Tape one (Side A)

Ok my name is Lyle Quasim. I am 63 years of age. I was born in Chicago, Illinois to the parents of Miller T Rodgers and Ophelia Rodgers. I have two brothers and one sister. One of my brothers passed away, he died 7 years ago from an illness. I live here in Puyallup, Washington, in the State of Washington. My brother and sisters continue to live in Chicago. Both of my parents have passed away. I came to the State of Washington in 1967 in February in the military. I went to high school and college in Chicago. My extended family on my mother's side are labor persons. My brother is being with the United Auto Workers for over 40 years. He is a retiree and he continues to work with the retiree section of the United Auto workers. My aunt, her name is Roth, who is 85, worked with the United Auto Workers for over 60 yrs ago. Roth's last name is Webber. My other aunt, my mother's sister, May Lukas, was with the Shoe Workers Union. She was married to Ernie Luckas, who was with the meat packers. He was on their national board and may have been president for a while on the national board.

My mother was with Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. So I come from very extensive labor family on my mother's side. My father's side came from a native American background. My grandmother was full blooded Cherokee Indian and my father was half Cherokee, half African American. He was born on the Indian reservation in Oklahoma. They left the Indian reservation and came to Chicago in the 30s, 1930s. My

grandfather was a pull man porter worker, and they headquartered in Chicago and that's how he came to Chicago with my mother. And my father came with his father to Chicago from the reservation, and they met in Chicago. So one side of my family is Native American, and my grandfather was a minister.

In Chicago I was involved with my mother's side of the family primarily doing labor activities. My mother was investigated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities while she was with the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. They claimed she was infiltrated by the Communists. I can remember as a young kid my mother discussing her Union and the Federal Bureau of Investigations. I can remember copies of the International Workers of the World, solidarity publications, all being part of the union activities and the national Communist organizer by the name of Karl Liveberg being involved in various activities at Mine, Mill and Smelters Workers Union. My mother knew that Mr. Liveberg was one of the national Communist persons. And so just one other thing about my background, my father became a tailor. He made clothes for a lot of entertainers and sports figures, including Jesse Joe Walkar. Two persons he made clothes for fought for the heavy weight championship of the world. My father was an avid golfer and a sports person. My father was primarily a capitalist and my mother was primarily a socialist, and they eventually parted company for many reasons, not the least of which was a different world view and political philosophy. I am a product of both of those, the communist socialist perspective and the capitalist perspective, the entrepreneurial money making aspect.

I grew up in Chicago and was a member of several street gangs, being arrested on numerous occasions, never convicted of any felonies, but major citations for loitering and

disorderly conduct which were universal against young black men in Chicago. Most of our gangs were territorial as opposed to crime gangs. We defended our territory in Chicago against other gangs and in fact we were responsible for keeping peace in our neighborhood. I graduated high school went to college, went to the University of Illinois in Champaign, Urbana. This was during the civil rights movement 1963-64 and I was kicked out of the university for social conduct, for protesting the civil rights issues and for poor academic achievements, because my focus was not academic. My focus was civil rights. Coming back to Chicago I was drafted into the military and was absent without leave from the draft for well over a year, but eventually I joined the United States Air Force.

I joined the Air Force to avoid ending up in a rice paddy in Vietnam fighting a capitalist war. My goal was to get kicked out of the Air Force. I did not get kicked out of the Air Force initially, but I worked to organize [civil rights issues] in the Air Force. We eventually had an airman advisory committee of which I was a member and eventually the chair. I was nominated and was selected as the airman for McChord Air Force Base for the quarter, the airman of the year and won numerous awards and received accolade and citations as an airman while still continuing to organize in the Air Force against the war. I was eventually sent to Vietnam in 1968, and this is an interesting story for me because the background that I just give you start to lead up to reasons of why I believe and think as I think. I took a very strong stance against the war. I took a very strong stance in favor of social justice, and it became very clear to me that racism was only a tool of capitalism and social injustice was a tool and the war in Vietnam was a tool of capitalism. I came to understand that white people in America did not say we don't

like black people and to show you we don't like black people let's go to Africa and bring black people to America and oppress them. They didn't care about black people, what they cared about was economics and black people came to America as indentured slaves and white people came to America as indentured servitude as it was called. White people tended to blend into the majority culture and black people didn't. In order for white people to take this land, which was already owned and occupied by native Americans, they needed to create distinctions, and people could identify the native Americans by their color and culture and people could identify Africans by their color and culture, and so the white folks who came as indentured servants started to blend in with the other white folks. Authority rested with white men who owned property, so there was immediately social stratification based on privilege and based on capitalism. And the reason that Blacks and Indians and, eventually, Chinese on the West Coast, who were brought over to build the rail roads and offer cheap labor for capitalism were easy targets was because we were distinctly different from the ruling culture, and, so, it became a question of economics as opposed to a question of race.

Race was just a marker that gave the ruling class a tool to utilize cheap labor and enhance their ability to have command and control of capital markets. And, so, for me growing up in Chicago and understanding the economic history of America, it made me understand the racial history of America. I saw the sins of this country all emanating from capitalism and I see that the way same today. Nothing has changed in my view of how America is organized. So, I am now here and, I am now an agent of the US military and they are saying to me go out and oppress Vietnamese persons and extend our capital markets around a whole series of things, not the least of which are oil and ports of

call and the ability to trade other stuff . So I said, hell, I am not going to Vietnam to help white people continue to control the world through capitalism, and the military said, well, if we send you to Vietnam you gonna go, and I said no way. So as a result we made a deal. And this is very interesting, because when I was in Chicago growing up there were lot of times that you have decisions to make and you try to figure out the best results for yourself. I had learned in Chicago that it is very difficult to make a deal with people who are in control and have authority because they would not honor the deal, but I suspended my knowledge of that and said maybe I can make a deal with the Air Force. What they said was that you don't have to go to Vietnam, because you are very popular on this space, and we don't want to challenge your popularity, but we are in control and we don't want to look like we backed down, so what we will do is we will send you to Japan for a temporary duty assignment, and I said fine. I go to Japan for three months for a temporary duty assignment. So I went to Japan. I went to Tachikawa, Japan, and I was having a good time and then one day they walked in and said you are now going to Vietnam. I was there for about a week, two weeks maybe, and I said wait a minute we had a deal and they said we don't make deals with people like you. And they said we gonna send you to Vietnam for this three months and then we gonna keep you there for another twelve months, so you will do fifteen months in Vietnam and don't ever challenge us again. And so they basically escorted me with all my belongings to a plane, put me in the plane and sent me to Vietnam.

Now I learned many things from my mother, not the least of which is, she said if you get put in jail for organizing, organize in jail. Don't let people define who you are, so when I got to Danang, Vietnam, in 1968, we started to defy the command structure in

Vietnam. I was a medic, so I wasn't on a combat unit, I was on a support unit that dealt with people who had been injured in Vietnam. And there were lot of people in Vietnam in the military, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, who were there and did not support the war, and what a courageous group of military people in the Air Force who were doctors and nurses and corps men. I was a corpsman or medic. What they did and myself included, was we set up a clinic in downtown Danang using military equipment and in that clinic we will treat anybody who came to the clinic for any reason. And it was a way of trying to provide value to people in Vietnam, while American forces were in the process of attempting to control that country and in that attempt to control we were destroying significant parts of the country by bombing and by napalm. Napalm is an agent that was used to create fires and defoliate parts of Vietnam, and eventually the authorities put an end to our ability to provide the service. The doctors and nurses who were officers were dealt with much more harshly than I was, because I was enlisted, but I was sent back to the United States because of my negative view of the war. I was not given the privilege to stay and oppress the Vietnamese and I said, well this is great, if I had known this, I would have started earlier and I came back and continued to work against the war.

I worked with a group call The Shelter Half. In a movie that came out last year called *Sir No Sir*, a documentary about the war in Vietnam, the project we worked on here in Tacoma, Washington, was mentioned. We put together efforts against the war while I was in the military to convince soldiers and air men not to participate in the war. We had a couple of news papers that we published, one was GIU, the other was FTA which meant Fuck The Army. We operated this group called The Shelter Half which is a

piece of military equipment..... and we participated in all sorts of activity. We counseled people in the military who were absent without leave, we counseled people who were conscientious objectors to not participate in the war. We counseled people who had been lied to with reference to joining the military and not understanding clearly what that whole process is about. We counseled people who thought the military was a good thing and went to war and found out it was not for the stated purposes of freedom and democracy, it was about capital markets. And so we worked with those individuals and many of them went to Canada. We worked with the Vancouver Committee to Aid War Resisters, we worked with other organizations call the Revolutionary Union, with Liberation News Service called LNS, we worked with the Venceremos brigade, which is a group of people working with Cuba. There was a very rich and robust community of dissidents who fought against capitalism in this country. It is my position that we have a capitalistic country which uses democracy to support it. We do not have a democratic country, we have a country built on capitalism and capital market and, we use democracy to prop up capitalism and, as a result of capitalism in this democracy we have significant class struggle and that class struggle deals with women, deals with people of color, deals with white people who are not privileged and have lower income. It is the whole issue of capitalism. Just in today's news we find that the oil companies were the biggest winners of the 2006 economic battle with tens of billions of dollars in profit, while we have in this country forty million people who do not have health care, and it is just incredible.

Tape one continues (Side B)

So let's go back to The Shelter Half. I was eventually brought under charges in

the military and I had charging papers that identified a whole series of offences and initially there were twelve offences and they went forward with five of those offences. And those offences are as follows: association and affiliation with individuals who support the overthrow of the government by force; the second charge was falsification of official government documents; the third charge was making disloyal statements against the military while on duty and in uniform; the fourth charge was fraudulent enlistment; and the fifth charge was conduct unbecoming.

So let me quickly go through each of those counts. On association and affiliation with individuals who advocate the overthrow of the government by force number one, I just listed some of the organizations that I was associated with. We were also in rooms with the George Jackson brigade, which was a very vital organization. I worked with the Black Panther Party, I taught school for the Black Panther Party. I taught mathematics and I was involved with the free lunch program and free breakfast program for the Black Panther Party. I was not a member of the Black Panther Party. I was a full supporter of the Black Panther Party and I probably did more work than people who were members, but I didn't need to be a member. I already had an organization, my organization was The Shelter Half and we worked together to deal with issues relating to capitalism and we associated with the Venceremos brigade which worked in support of Fidel Castro in Cuba, but I wasn't a brigadista. I worked with the Revolutionary Union but I wasn't a member of the Revolutionary Union. I worked with the Black Panther Party but I was not a member of the Panther Party. There was association and affiliation with individuals who advocated the overthrow of the government by force. [The] Revolutionary Union thought that we should have a more democratic government as

opposed to a capitalistic government [and these were] the principles that were fought for in Cuba by Jose Marti and Fidel Castro and hundreds of thousands of others. They got all of the publicity, but there were tremendous numbers of people fighting against Batista, the Cuban dictator, who was an American capitalistic puppet. So the first charge had me linked with all those folks. It was not a false charge, was not like they were saying, you know, let us make up something on this guy. They said you did this, and I said yes to all of that. These are the people that I am identifying with.

The second charge was falsification of official government records. They alleged that I used my position in the military, because I worked in the administration in the hospital, to alter or amend the government records to try to keep people from going to Vietnam. I did not acknowledge that I done that then and I do not acknowledge that I had done that now, but that was their claim. They were not able to sustain [the charge] and I made no comment. On the third charge, on making disloyal claims against the military while on duty and in uniform, one of the things that I participated in was at the University of Washington in 1969 when we put the Army on trial. We put the Army on trial for war crimes and I was in uniform and I participated in that trial. There were also demonstrations and rallies around Tacoma that I attended in uniform and so they were correct. I did make statements against the military while on duty in uniform. But where I disagree with them about was [the issue of being] disloyal. My loyalty is to the people of America not to the government of America.

The next part of the indictment was fraudulent enlistment. I had been drafted into Army but failed to show up [and instead] attempted to enlist in the Navy but the Navy would not accept me because I had not participated in the draft. The only reason I wanted

to join the Navy were two reasons, one is that the Vietcong did not have a Navy and so I would not have to fight in Vietnam and the second reason is I was told that if you want to get out of the Navy, out of the military, the Navy was the easiest branch to get out of.

You could create a disturbance, pretend you were gay, and do all sorts of stuff, you know, [and then] just get you out of the Navy, but they would not let me in. I went by the Air Force recruiter office and he was desperate to make his recruit goal. He said, first of all, you have to take a test, and I didn't look like I had been to college because I was living basically a street existence in Chicago and my teeth are false teeth. I am 63 now and I was 23 then, I looked older then than I look now except for this little bit of gray hair and because I weighed about a 140 pounds. I weigh 220 pounds now. I weighed 80 pounds less. When you live on the streets it's a pretty hard existence you know, you don't look like a college student. They said if you can pass the test and I took the test and I scored very high on [it] and they said oh my God. And they look and said you have arrest record, you have been arrested ten, twelve, thirteen times, and they said on your application don't put down your arrest records.

I did at the instruction of the recruiter and I am responsible for my actions and I accept that, but I was doing it to the direction of this guy who said I wanna get you in, I wanna make my number. So I put down no arrests and so when I was being adjudicated in the Air Force they said false enlistment because I had not put down all of the arrests, as directed by my recruiter. He said you never being convicted of anything [therefore], we don't care about that. Don't put it down. The last item was conduct unbecoming. Now that was the one I disagreed with the most, because I thought my conduct was very becoming of an American patriot, of a citizen of the world and a citizen of the United

States. I thought my conduct was very becoming. One of the things that came up in my investigations is the mention of being against the war as a violation of the Constitution of the United States of America. And it may have been one of the very few times that I was actually observably angry because you will see the whole time we have been together that I am a very level person, but this really pissed me off and I can't say it any plainer than that.

I said the constitution that you put in my face identified me as only three fifths of a human being. The three fifths compromise in the constitution said that black people in America were not counted as a full person. Can you imagine someone telling you that you are not a whole person? That you are a three fifths of a person and putting it in the constitution and tell you that you are in violation of a document that doesn't even see you as a full human being. I said get that shit out of my God - damned face. To this day, when people talk about the founding fathers, the founding fathers were slave owners, were white men who owned property, who didn't care about white men and women who didn't own property, didn't care about Native Americans and did not care about slaves. So this document to me is bullshit. It is not something I embrace as much of America embraces. Now there are good parts of the constitution, yes, [but] were those constitutional good parts ever directed to me, no. The fact that I can now benefit from some of them I appreciate, but I can tell you they were not constructed with my benefit in mind.

So three years and eight months later, I was directed to leave the military. So I left the military and I was very happy to leave the military and I continued work on social justice issues in Tacoma and Pierce County. So now we are up to 1970, and for the

next forty-seven years my presence in this community has come to two different roads and you might ask how can a person travel two roads at one time. I can give you a copy of my resume and you would say this is a wonderful outstanding citizen. He went back to college, received an undergraduate degree, a graduate degree and a honorary Ph.D. He became the director of the state hospitals, became the state mental health director, he became the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services, at that time the largest department in state government. It had 19,000 employees, spent over \$14 million a day. I retired, came back to work now as Chief of Staff for Pierce County, orchestrating the activities of 16 major county departments, married for 35 years, a home in Puyallup, a home in Canada. So this is an outstanding young man, he is done well in this country. You can look at the resumes on the cabinet of two different governors, Governor Lowry and Governor Locke, ah, what a fine outstanding citizen. Or you could follow a different road and say this person never changed his position about capitalism, about socialism, about social stratification, about the under class and about the inequities that this country continues to push. So, on this road, you will see that this person joined dozens of civil rights actions and activities. On the executive board of the NAACP, I chaired the Tacoma Pierce County Black Collective, I continue to support anti war activity, I am on the board of South Sound Peace and Justice, I am anti-Iraq War. I was anti-Gulf War, I was anti all of the military interventions since Vietnam, and I speak out on those issues. I will go to forums. I was at the University of Washington speaking against the first Gulf War. I am on panels and I support resisters of wars of aggression.

The constitution that people like to say [as being] so important say that it is unconstitutional to engage in a war of aggression and this is war of aggression, the Iraq

war. Vietnam was a war of aggression and Grenada was a war of aggression. Our military industrial complex has been orchestrated for wars of aggression in support of capitalism and none of those things have changed. What happens is that a lot of people just don't ask me that question, they said Lyle we just leave him alone. Because they know I was also fired as the state mental health director. I sued the state and won around \$240,000 plus, [because] they said that I was improperly fired. One of the reasons that I was fired is because I was with the legal redress committee of the NAACP looking into racist employment activities in this community and captains of business and industry said to the governor, who is guy? He works for you and he is out here in our face. Get rid of his ass. I was fired and I came back to run the agency that fired me, and they said how could this be. How could this person who got a five count indictment by the military [can come back and] work for the military? They said wait a minute, this doesn't make sense, this is crazy. If you are seen as a person who is anti-military, one, why would you go [and] work for the military, and second, why would the military hire you? I say I want to heighten the contradiction. People think that the military is a moral, principled organization and I suggest that it is neither driven by morals nor principles. The military is a pragmatic organization. They don't care who you are, what you have done. If they think you could help them, we have supported dictators, we have supported murderers, we have supported countries that oppress women, that put children into slavery. You know, [if] we can get something from those countries, we don't give a shit and why will they give a shit? [laughter].

They have hundreds, thousands of people, mostly black, who grow up in the inner city, the ghetto, gone to Vietnam and addicted to heroin and they didn't have anyone who

knew how to talk to them. They said this kid has a degree, he grew up in Chicago, he walks like they walk, talks like they talk, and would you come and help us transition these people back into American society? Now I am a patriot because I believed in the people of America and those are people of America being pawns in the war, pawns who now have [problems] as a result of the war. These people have seen things and done things that we would not ask human beings to do and [now] they are self medicating.

They use heroin, they drink alcohol and those things are made available to them. Just think about crack cocaine, just think about heroin. We are talking about terrorism and we gotta go fight al Qaeda in Iraq, but we cannot stop heroin and crack coming into this country. Yes, we could. You go to the airport, everybody taking off their shoes, right, everybody goes through this check. Now if that was the case, we could seal the border, nobody is coming across this border. Every airplane, every private jet, every boat get searched. We got 130,000 troops in Iraq, we could have 130,000 troops searching every man, woman and child, boat, vehicle that comes into this country. Heroin could have been a non factor in Vietnam, but it was a way to keep people sedated and so now those folks are coming back and drug addicted, and they say, Lyle, would you be a part of Madigan Army Hospital's drug treatment program, because you have used drugs, have studied psychology and sociology, would you come and help us? I said sure, because I am a patriot, I will help those people because they have fought in and it is my responsibility as a patriot to help those folks.

So the military didn't say we don't like Lyle because he was against us and therefore we gonna deny him a job and the ability to make money. They said, shit, we don't give a damn, if you can help us you could be the devil himself we will get in bed

with. Look at the dictators that we have gotten in bed with all around the world. Amen!
Did the people not know or think everything is fine with South Africa? No! We got apartheid but we trade with them. So when people say how did he get on the wrong side of the military but then go to work with them, why would he work for them and why would they ask him to work for them, is because I had something they need and they didn't care about what my history was, and I would go because I have an obligation to the people in this country and they are who I serve.

And same thing from a civil rights perspective. I used the money that I make and the intellect that I have gained to work on behalf of people in this community.... I look at social issues and I say how can I resolve those issues, how can I be a party to resolving those issues, how can I participate in resolving those issues? And so that's how I spend my resources, I spend my time, I spend my intellect, trying to deal with that. And so as a result, I need a good job, I need a good - paying job and I had good jobs and I have been well compensated and I have brought to this government value and am a hard worker. I provide results and they said, well, shit here is the next job, here is the next job, he is competing for those jobs and he is successful in those jobs. And you look at my career, and you say, hey, this is a wonderful resume but I used those resources. I used that intellect back in the community that I served and all those are civil rights activities and I can start at some point about how we organized. We could go down chapter and verse, you know this activity, this activity, this activity, what do we do in the 70s, what do we do in the 80s, what do we do in the 90s.

Well, you know part of what it is like growing up in this country is that in the earlier years your world is very narrow and, so, you know, you are included in your world.

And what I mean by your world being very narrow is your mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, your neighborhood. And so when you are four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years old you just about figured out that, you know, the world is ok and you are part of it. But what I found out when I got to be nine and ten was that there were separate worlds. I went to the South and I was told don't say anything to white people, you be very careful. You may find in your study about the story of a young man call Emmett Till who was beaten. Emmett Till and I are about the same age, if he had lived. And so that happened and here I am going to Arkansas and Mississippi during the summer time and one of the crazy things about America is that they said Chicago was inner city and is too dangerous, and where did they send me? To the South. They said it is safer in the South, because we wouldn't let you have exposure to white people in the South and we will protect. And so I learned when I got to be ten, eleven, clearly by the time I was twelve, that you have a separate set of rules.

Tape two (Side A)

This makes a significant impact on the child, you know. We ended up with a television and you didn't see any black people on television. This is the early days of television, you start to see the power system and you didn't see any black people, and then you start to see your parents and your parent acting differently when they were around white people. And then when you went to the South you hear somebody call your grandfather boy, hey boy get over here. Growing up in America, you learn, I learned very quickly during the time that I grew up that there was stuff that I am a part of and stuff I am not a part of. There were things I can do and things I better not do. And much of what

I do today is because of how I was imprinted when I was eleven, twelve, thirteen years old.

I knew that I was not a part of what America [thought of] as good. I was part of the underclass in America. When Jackie Robinson started playing baseball, I said shit, my father played baseball and I said you couldn't play with the whites, he said no. So you learn early on that this system uses you but it's not for you in the same way that it is for white people in America. When I was growing up [there] was a clear understanding that I was to behave differently, that I was going to be treated differently and the measures of my success would be different. And you wanna talk about having an impact, to this day I tell people [laughter] life is not fair, America, its never being fair, is not fair now and will not be fair tomorrow and if you wake up in the morning with the expectation that its gonna be fair, you are a damn fool. Because when was it fair? Was it fair when we were on the slave ships, was it fair when they wrote the constitution, was it fair [during] World War I, World War II? It was a segregated military, a segregated economy. Then you go to Korean conflict, then you go to Vietnam, then you go to the Gulf War and every skirmish in between. Is it fair that disproportionate numbers of black people are in jail? You think we just wakeup in the morning and say we wanna be criminals, so send us to jail? I learned at ten, eleven years old that there is no fairness, nor is there an expectation of fairness. If I walk away with one thing, I tell people just don't expect fairness. Don't expect it. Here when I was eleven years old my brother and I got on the back of my grand daddy's truck in Arkansas, and my grand daddy said now you get in the cab of the truck, and he rolled up the windows and locked the doors. It was hot, and he said if anybody come up don't say nothing to him. We cracked the windows so we get little air, and white

people walking by, but we don't look at them because they may say something to you. If a black person in Arkansas don't say yes sir and yes mam, they [whites] take you down and beat the shit out of you. My grand daddy said what ever happen don't open this car door and don't say nothing to anybody. You grow up with that and you understand, and that's how my up bringing had a tremendous impression on what I think and how I behave today.

I go to an event and am with a white guy, his name was Chuck. And Chuck and I fly from SeaTac to Spokane, three hundred miles from here, and I am in charge of the mental health system and we go to this hospital which is part of my responsibility. And here I walk in the hospital in Spokane and there is a message from the governor and I walk up and this white guy walks up, and she said we have a message for Mr. Quasim and handed the message to the white guy. He said no, that's Mr. Quasim. She said no, Mr. Quasim, he said that's Mr. Quasim. She couldn't imagine me being the person in charge. You had a white man and a black man, so this is not when I am twelve, I am an adult running the system and you walk into this hospital and even after he said to her three times no this is Mr. Quasim, she continues to talk to him and gave him the message. I don't have to go back to Chicago. In this job there is a land dispute and people came to [county] government to say we want the executive to hear this dispute. So I am the Chief of Staff and when the executive is not here I am responsible for all this activities and when he is here I am still responsible He gets elected, I don't get elected, he appoints me. I work for him, and I have people sitting around this conference room and I am the only person of color and am sitting at the head of the table. This is the power position you know, and there is an attorney, white guy, sitting on the side of me and another white guy

sitting a little bit further down. When the people who came to have the dispute brokered talked, they talked to them. They couldn't help it. They didn't say let's go up to his office and disrespect this black man. First of all they didn't know I was gonna be there. They say we are here to speak to Mr. Ladeberg [Pierce County Executive]. I said am speaking for him. They said, well what is your position? I told them what my position is. Oh, so, what does that mean. I said it means that I am gonna make a decision today about how we do it, they start talking to the white guys, and I said, you know, I think you better make sure you know who the decision maker is. It is very difficult for America to have an image of black people that is a positive image. These people did not get up in the morning and say I don't like black people, I disrespect black people, I will not value them in the same way as I value white people. They can't resist it, it is how they were socialized and if you ask one of them, they say, no, oh, no that's not right.

But when they actually start to behave and to execute they do that with that in mind. I have a home here and I have a home in Canada and am at my home in Canada not very much and I have had this home in Canada for seven years and it is in this housing development that I moved into. It is right on the ocean [and] is very beautiful and reasonably expensive and we have a club house with our own swimming pool. Now I have been living there [since] the first homes opened up. I moved there on a weekend when the first homes opened up, so I was the group of four people that moved in. We all moved in the same day. Seven years later, I go to sit in the hot tub and a white woman walked up to me and said, do you live here, are you a guest. Now she didn't ask any other white people if they were a guest. Excuse me, for the record, what she said is who are you a guest of? She never asked if I lived there, for she assumed I am there visiting

somebody. The other people, she didn't query them and I don't know whether she saw them. I have lived there as long as anybody and there are folks I didn't recognize. She feels strong enough and privileged enough that she can ask me and it is no different to saying in Mississippi "what are you doing here boy?" It is the same thing. It is not different. I have privilege and you don't. I learned that when I was twelve, when I was eleven, when I was ten and it is with me today. You know, I got on a suit, a tie, I get on the elevator in this building and people don't see you as being in charge of anything and now I just kind of laugh at it.

Well, when did I become an activist? I will have to say when I went to college. All the things that I saw growing up as a kid in Chicago, all the contradictions and the ability to read, write and reason put me in a position [which says] this is insane, this does not make sense. Why are we pretending that there is equality? Oh, they say, we want equality because we want black people to be able to go to school. What about if I don't want to go to school? So now I don't get equality. What about if I wanna live some place? I watch all of that and, so, now I am in college and I watch the civil rights struggle in the South, and I said I need to be a part of that. And when I went back to Chicago, I am dealing with issues in Chicago, I am dealing with them with a different frame of mind. And then when I got drafted in the military and ended up joining the Air Force, you asked when did I become an activist? Activism means act right, but what causes people not to act, what causes people to accept the status quo? It's because they think no matter how bad it is, it will get worse, [for instance] if you push back against apartheid, well at least you are in the streets in the township..... [laughter]. Well shit, I look up today and think this is bad, but is it as bad as Robin Island. When I was in college I had no rent, I

had no family, and I found out that the most dangerous black man in America is the black man who says I got nothing to lose. There is nothing you can do to me that will hurt me and that's how I feel today. I felt that way in college, when I was twenty, and I feel it at sixty three. I have no predators [and] nothing can happen to me that will hurt me. If they said to me I don't have this job tomorrow, it don't bother me. I have enough money. I don't have to work, if they take my house, I got another country. I got a house in that country, if they take that house I can still live. I live very comfortably and it is long time since I slept on the floor, but I can [still] sleep on the floor. I know my mind and body is strong enough and I don't need a job that I will have to worry about.

I learned that activism in college, so my initial activism started when I was in college. And the first time you get hit in the head is very scary and it hurts, it stings and then you say, oh next time you get hit on the head, you know I can handle it, and you get hit again and you said shit, my head is strong enough to take it. I feel the same way today. And when I challenged the military, I said am gonna come out [from] this ok.... You know what drives you, people should have dignity and your dignity shouldn't be based on I am a surgeon or truck driver. If that is what you chose to do, that is what you chose to do. I ran hospitals for a long time and am talking to this doctor and, well, he said, you know, we are very important to the health care system. I said not that much. He said what the hell are you talking about? I said more important to the health care system is the garbage collector than a doctor. If we don't collect garbage and deal with infectious, airborne kinds of disease potential, we don't have enough doctors to treat all the people that are going to be sick. So I value the sanitation, sewers, garbage collectors all those folks right up there with the physicians. They are just as important and maybe more

important than you are [the physician]. Now you went to college longer, we should pay you more money, that's your recognition, but in terms of importance you are not more important. You have no more dignity in my eyes than that janitor. So this is all [a] civil rights angle that is non traditional, you know marching, flags, demonstrations, sit-ins.

But trust me, I was the first state hospital director that was not a doctor and they were really upset. The State Medical Association, the State Psychiatric Association, they thought they had died and gone to hell. And, so, the doctors had a parking lot, you know the parking lot was right in front of the hospital. There are two thousand people working in the hospital some of them have to walk three blocks, but the doctors they parked right in front of the hospital. I said what the fuck is this shit? I said take the sign off the doctors' parking lot. He said what? I said there is no more doctors' parking lot, and doctors said wait a minute, what are you doing, there is no place for us to park. I said yes there are lots of places to park just not in front of the hospital. If you wanna get here early there is a parking spot there, but the parking spot goes to the first person to get there and not to you. But he said we are doctors! I said yes and, you have more training, we pay you more money, you have an office, but parking is not a privilege that you get. But he said it is wet, I said you think you get wetter than the lobby worker? Show up early, if the lobby worker is late you get the spot, that's fine. And if you show up late, then get you damn umbrella that's how you stay dry.

We used to have the on call doctors over night and they had a room where they can sleep. You know what they used to do, they used to bring the food from the cafeteria to the doctor. I said no more food and I said wait a minute, there are people who work nights, every day they brought food which they put in a bag or they go to the cafeteria. So

you either bring you own evening meal or go to the cafeteria. I said, we don't serve you, we are not servants to you. You don't get to park, you don't get to be served. And they said Lyle is crazy, and they said, you know, what we gonna do, we gonna make you an honorary member of our state society. I said, oh, really an honorary member? So you can come to our dinners, you can hang out with us. They said you must have a status problem. He is rebelling because he is not a physician, so we will let him hang out with us. You know what I said? I'm gonna join your association as soon as I join the janitors association, as soon as I join the association that deals with the grass cutters, as soon as I join the nurses and when I join all those, then I will join yours. But I don't allow people to think I identify with you over them. People have to have respect and dignity. Whether you drive a truck or operate a computer you have a right to be here, you have a right to be here and you have a right to dignity, you have a right to respect and when people take that dignity away from you, I will be on your side, I will fight with you, I will put my reputation on the line, I will put my money on the line, I will put it on the line with you.

That's what civil rights is all about. Civil rights is about the ability for people to stand in appreciation of one another. Some people think civil rights is about getting a whole bunch of stuff, you know, and who can we oppress, [because] we have been oppressed so lets find somebody else to oppress. Civil rights is not about getting stuff, oh now I get a big house and now I get a car. And if you wanna have a house, have a car, and God bless you, if that makes you think that you are real, then I am not..... gonna dictate that to you.

But for me civil rights is about equality. And first of all black people can't get into schools, then they can't get in the neighborhood. Now we are in the schools and in

the neighborhood, and they said, well, how about the Hispanics? I don't want to have privilege so I can oppress somebody else. I don't wanna be oppressed and I don't wanna oppress anybody. I don't want my dignity taken away from me and I don't want to take anybody's dignity away from them. You know if you wanna talk about events in the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and the 2000s we can go back and sort out those events and do those kinds of things, but for me you have to understand the motivation. It is more important for me to know how you think than what you think, because you may say I agree with Lyle and they may say, oh, that's great, but I wanna know why you agree with me. If you agree with me, because you think am a good guy or think I am a bad guy and, so, I disagree with you, but [it is better] if you understand the principle by which we come to agreement, how we see the world together. Me and my wife are very romantic in love, but you don't stay together for thirty-five years of romance [laughter]. You know, you stay together because you have similar beliefs [and] you see the world in the same way, that the same things that bring value to me bring value to her. When I was in court after having been fired, my wife worked and she worked for the state, and they said if you continue in this direction we might have to terminate your wife. So, I said, honey, what do you think? She said let them fire me, I don't care. Other people with a different value system, they will say, now, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, don't mess up my career, maybe we got to get divorced, you know, you slowing me down, I could be making all that money. That's not the value. We have similar values; we have similar values about equality, justice, respect and dignity. You know, that is what drives my civil rights agenda. That is what gets me involved in working against the port in the 70s, when the Port of Tacoma did not have people of color in hardly any significant position or in

any number. A position of administrative activity, that's what puts me with the health department to say issues around AIDS and [other] issues.

You know, something has to drive you to bring a better day for people around you. And some people would say Lyle is a black nationalist, he doesn't even like white people. Wait a minute, how do you come to that conclusion? Well, you know, you changed your name, your name used to be Rodgers and you are now Quasim, what is all that about? Well you know over there in the Sudan they don't have a name Rodgers. What the hell I got your European name for, why would I have that. Well, see, you don't like white people. I say, I like white people, I just don't wanna be named after them, you know, I am not part of your genetic heritage, why should I be named that? They said, well, you chair this black organization [The Black Collective], white people can't be a part of that organization. I say right, they can't, well is that not discrimination, I say no. I say every day that I get up and go out in this world it is dominated by white systems and white values and every image comes back to me as a white image. I wanna go some place once a week where the image is black, I deserve that sanctuary. Well, that seems right, [but] if you are fighting for equality how come I can't be a member of your organization, [and] when do we have our organization you couldn't be a member of? I say, well, you don't understand who got the power. I don't have the power. If I don't like white people, there is nothing I can do about it. I will just walk around disliking, it can eat me up inside, I get unhealthy and sick and don't even know why I am sick, because I got all this hate. Because I can't do nothing about it. You don't like me, there is something you can do about it and history has proven that you have been able to do just about anything you want to do, because you are in charged and we are not.

There is an article in the paper this morning about Barack Obama. They say is he black or is he not? If Barack Obama stands in that street corner, and me and him are standing by, and the police drive by, you know what they will see, two black people. They didn't say, oh, when is he black? I can have on a thousand dollar suit, you can have on a shirt and pair of pants, they don't say, well, that's the Chief of Staff and that's a student. They will say two black men [are] standing there, two black men standing on the corner [laughter] and, so, you know it is clear. And the person I am married to is white. [Does] that work for you? Well you still don't like white people. Well, shit, I like my wife. We have been married thirty-five years. I think she likes me, I think I like her. You think I don't like white people? No, no, no, you must be a Muslim, you don't smoke, you don't drink [and] you changed you name. I say what's wrong with being a Muslim, if I were Muslim what's wrong with that? You think praying to a Christian God who is white flips my boat? How did God, how did Jesus, get to be white with blue eyes and long string of hair. Shit, looks like the place he come from his hair ought to be little darker, his hair a little kinky, but you would think he was born in Sweden [laughter]. Yor y'all keep messing with the picture, you know he gets a little whiter, taller, skinny and long hair. If Jesus is black and had kinky hair, I somehow don't know what the fuck I am doing, but I am buying none of that. And if that makes me whatever you wanna make me a label of or call it, have a good day [laughter].

I came to Tacoma in the military and I became involved, because I can't help but be involved. It is an inner voice that I can't help but obey, that says be involved. And I love the Christian doctrine. Here is what the Christian doctrine said. Jesus said when I was hungry you would not feed me, when I was naked you would not cloth me and when

I was homeless you would not house me. When I drive down the street and I come to the freeway exit and there is this person standing there, people say I bet he is making a lot of money, I bet he is just gonna have drugs with that money, I bet he is gonna do this, I bet he is gonna do that, and I said that is Jesus. That is a person I don't know what he is gonna do. As far as I can see, he doesn't look like he got much to me, why would I stand in judgment of that. Here is five dollars, five dollars is nothing to me, nothing in my life changes because I spent five dollars. Everyday I pulled off the freeway [and] I give them a hundred dollars my life wouldn't be any different, so why wouldn't you do it? It is civil rights for me. I don't know about other people, [but] there is external awareness and internal force that says to me, Lyle, every time you pass that person be uncomfortable, every time you see people who are not housed be uncomfortable, people who are not fed be uncomfortable. So I am on the board of the emergency food network, I used to be on the board of the Martin Luther King Housing Association. How do we feed people, how do we house people, how do we educate people. To me, that is Christians talking about faith and in the Bible it says faith without work is meaningless.

If I just profess faith I will have all the favor, I love the lord, I love God. I love, I love and go home, eat dinner, watch TV, pat my wife on the butt [laughter] and say, you know, God is good. Well, I don't know where is your work, what did you do that didn't benefit you? I don't get paid for this. I will go and try to make the thirty-four community colleges as good as I can make them. I don't get paid to chair the Black Collective. I get up every Saturday morning [and] fifty-two Saturdays a year that's where I go, that's where I do my work, that's where I provide value, that's what civil rights is about. Civil rights is about doing stuff, not talking it. There are people who talk about the work and

there are people who go out and do the work. Some people talk and do, some people do and talk, but you have to get them together. There must be an external awareness and understanding, and an internal motivating force that's says as a result of who I am, this is how I define myself and in some ways I don't have a choice. My discomfort will be so great that I don't have a choice.

When I came here in 1967, they had a program that they were starting to pull together called Model Cities. Model Cities was a government program which tried to build community infrastructure and to try to hire people of color, people from the inner city, African Americans, Latinos, poor whites, but with big focus on blacks because of the civil rights issues and we were underrepresented everywhere except in the military. [We were] underrepresented in the police force, there were I don't think any African Americans who were fire fighters. We were under represented as educators and as teachers, we were underrepresented you name the sector, we were under represented except for the military, and you could only live in a very small section of Tacoma. You couldn't rent a house or buy a house just about anywhere. We were limited to where we could live, [a] small stretch in the Hill Top was the location that we were able to reside in and we had a couple of businesses, we had barber shops and beauty shops, not much more than that. We might have had cleaners and record shops but, by and large, black social mobility and black employment and black inclusion in the governmental system was just about non-existent. So there were no blacks selected, blacks appointed. And then came the NAACP, Model Cities and the Urban League. It was the major game in town at that time, then we had other organizations that went by different name^s of one set or another, [such as] the Minority Concerns Taskforce, the Metropolitan Development

Council. They worked around issues [concerning] people who are poor, some of whom were people of color, some of whom African Americans.

I was married in 1972, and I worked for the federal government, and I lived in a place called Lincoln Heights, which is a very, very poor community, still poor to this day and that's where my wife and I lived, and I worked in Seattle, so I took the bus to Seattle every day. We had a car and she didn't work, so she needed the car to get around, to get groceries and do things [and], so, she was looking for a job and she is white, and I said one of the things we ought to do is maybe get halfway to Seattle, so I am away taking the bus halfway, and you being in the middle between Seattle and Tacoma will have a lot of range to look for work. You will be in the middle which is more strategic. So in the same year [1972], she went to find a house to rent and she found one and she said, Quasim, we got this house. I said great, and she said, you know, I think I found a job working as a key punch operator, you know this was before computers. They were doing key punch cards and all that kind of stuff, and I said, ok, tomorrow after work we would go up and visit with these folks. So we were married in September and so this is November, December and it gets dark very early. So I get off from work and she got the car and we got in the car and drive up to Federal Way. I think am home a little early so is about 6:30 in the evening and this white lady opens the door and then she said oh my God.

I knew exactly what it was, but Sheila didn't quite understand, she said we are here to sign the lease [laughter]. She said I have to call my husband, he is in Idaho. So she gets on the phone and she comes back and said we can't rent you out. I said thanks, Sheila said what! I said honey lets go and we get in the car and she was sad and upset. I said this is not a problem. She said you are not mad, you are not angry. I said I cannot let

these people control my day. There is no open housing, black people cannot live where they wanna live and because I am married to somebody white doesn't get me through the door, and I have known that since I was twelve, now I am grown, twenty-seven years old, twenty-eight years old. You know it is not right, but I got things to do and things to accomplish and I can't let that destroy me. I am not gonna go picket the lady's house, because I don't have time to do that. I got to make my time leveled against larger things. And Sheila really understood, she got it immediately, she said, yeah, you're working on this civil rights project and you're working on this thing and this thing, I said yeah, we will get to her one day, just not today [laughter].

You had to work with certain realtors and you can only live in a limited number of places and getting loans for homes were documented to be much more difficult if you are black, with the same amount of income and all the measures that they deal with. You know they look at your debt structure, they look at your income. It was just more difficult to get through the banking system, and to this day we find interest rates are higher for poor people and people of color. All of that same stuff [still] prevails. The documentation was not as open, we didn't have some of the same laws that prevail now that allows us to look at the books. They have what was call red lining, where the red line was the district that you could buy in and rent in. And what happened was, [if] you live in the area, you went to the schools in your area and, then, when busing came you could go to different schools. You go to a different area, but you came back to your neighborhood, and, so, here you had to endure a bus ride plus go to school all day. Other kids could walk to school but in the name of integration this was the inequality or the lack of fairness that people had to go through. So in 1970 poor job opportunities based on race, which means

less income potential, which means less buying power for potential homes in a restricted area and segregated schools, that was our life.

The nation is not healed. The nation is worse now than it was when I was growing up in the 40s, 50s and 60s. Boy this affects a lot of people who are liberals when I say this. They say you mean to tell me Quasim you are not better off today than you were thirty years ago, forty years ago. I don't think black people are, when you look at the number of black people who went to college, the percentage of people who graduate from high school, the relative level of poverty as equated against the economic levels of the majority of the society. This is a capitalistic country so now we have some black people who are heads of fortune five hundred companies like Fedex and that kind of stuff. But the majority of employment is done by small business, not by large corporations, and black folks as entrepreneurs with integration have lost most of their business.

When I grew up in very segregated Chicago, I went to a black grocery store that was owned by black people, I went to black cleaners that was owned by black people, I went to a black laundromat that was owned by black people, I went to a black shoe store that was owned by black people, shoe repair owned by black people and they hired black people. I just came back from Chicago yesterday from the same neighborhood I grew up in. Houses stayed in the same spot, [but] not a single a black business The chain stores that come in, they are not owned by black folks, the chain cleaners that come in are not owned by black people, and even though some black people work in those places, they work through the white power structure. And it is from a question of comparative economy and I am not an economist and I cannot give you my bibliography on what I am about to tell you, but I am alive in the world and I am looking everyday. I see a lot of

stuff and I want to tell you that I look at the drop out rate. So there is two ways to compare this, you can say Lyle there are a cohort of black folks in 1950, there are a cohort of black people in 2007. Is this cohort of black people better than the cohort of black people in 1950? And if you run the numbers most of them would say, oh yeah, they make more money..... .

Tape three (Side A). There is no side B to tape two, because the tape broke during the interview process and had to be fixed.

Yes it is a different process in Jim Crow, the rule you could not use swimming pools, you could not use toilet facilities, you could not use restaurants and there were signs that said whites only water fountains, you know what sides of the street you could walk on, you could not go a motion picture show and sit in the same section. So the rules were clear in Jim Crow housing, education, employment and all that stuff. In the earlier part of our interview, I talked about corporate capitalism, I talked about the financial structure of America, about the fact that black people were easy targets for financial exploitation, because you can see as a condition of their skin that they are not part of the majority, whereas an Irish indentured servant came over here and after five or seven years he looked like anybody else. So, now, it still comes back to the issue of financing. If you don't have a good job, if you don't have adequate employment, if you don't have education, then your ability to eat in restaurants are limited, because now you can't pay the price, you are priced out based on not having the money, you are priced out of the neighborhood by not having the money, you are priced out of so many things. So that is one way the economic segregation is equivalent to the Jim Crow condition. And that represents poor people, not just black people, and so the whole economic manifesto of

capitalism has visited itself again to a class structure, as well as a race structure, but it goes further.

In our conversation yesterday, we talked about if you and I were standing on the street corner and I have on a thousand dollar suit and you have on a ski jacket, what they will see are two black people standing on the street corner. They don't make that differentiation, that's part of what Jim Crow did. It was a monolithic approach to the identification of people of color. Just last night since we talked, I went to a meeting at the Waller Road Elementary School and I counted 111 people and I was the only black person there. I was the only person there who was not white. Now what does Jim Crow mean? Was there a sign that said nobody from this community who is not white can't come in? But the distribution of the flyers, the people who conducted the meeting, the approach to how the meeting was conducted, all those things were Euro-centric, not particularly inviting to a diverse group of people. No signs in Spanish that allowed people to be there, no publication in the papers that people of color in that community will read. There was nothing in the *News Tribune*. So it's the same thing. You have to make a qualitative distinction between process and results. What was the result of Jim Crow? You go to restaurants, black people are not there, the process was a sign that said whites only. What was the result of the meeting last night, you go to a meeting black folks are not there? The process was how you pass out the hand bills, how you make notice of the meeting, how you run the meeting and who is validated in the meeting. The results are the same. So we get to a situation where we evaluate the process, which is very important, but the evaluation does not end there. We evaluate inputs, we don't evaluate outputs. If I go to a neighborhood and there are no signs of diversity in that

neighborhood, it is the same result as if there is a gate put around the neighborhood and said for whites only.

You look at the American penitentiary system, and somebody can check the numbers, it is somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 million people incarcerated. Either people of color, mostly blacks and latinos, have...genes that makes them criminal or there is a system that produces an extremely disproportioned number of individuals adjudicated in the criminal justice system that lands them in the penitentiary than they do white people. So if you look at the results of incarceration and you think about Jim Crow and you think about what will happen to you if you drink out of that fountain, if you sat on the wrong side of the bus, if you went to the wrong part of the movie theatre; look at the criminal justice system and the economic system, it's to me a 2007 version of a 1937 phenomenon of Jim Crow. You name whatever part of that era of the emergence of the Klan, and, eventually, the White Citizens Council, and the corporate board structures that target people of color.... as a result the outcomes are not much different. So we are sitting in the County City Building, in the office of the Chief of Staff for Pierce County, so people tell me, Lyle, what the hell are you talking about, last time I looked at you, you were black [and] you are sitting here, but that is in some ways an exception that the system can tolerate and it is not the rule. It is not a merit-based system, is not if you are good, you got to go. Many other things have to come into play.

I have been the state mental health director and I was fired by Governor Gardner and Secretary Sugarman, Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services. I had a fairly large organization of about 4000 people in the administration that I was responsible for and at least a billion dollars worth of money that we spend for the

mentally ill and it was in the community mental health program and the state psychiatric hospitals. So after being fired, I went to work in juvenile rehabilitation as a part of the same agency and it's an interesting process by which that occurred and if you are interested we can go into that now but it's a long story. About the same time, this is 1987 and 1988, I was fired in November of 1987 and so during 1988 there was a deluge of illegal drug and gang activity that had visited Tacoma and Pierce County and it is started off in what they call crews of people. There was the T-town crew. There was a crew that was on the east side of Tacoma, another crew on the Hill Top, another couple of crews on South Tacoma, Lakewood crew, and these young men were in gangs like I was when I was in Chicago. We were territorial, we were more defense oriented, we had our neighborhoods, our recreational areas and we held that ground against anybody else coming in. Well, that was the basis for illegal drug activity coming into the Tacoma and Pierce County area and some of the people in the crews were recruited by drug distribution folks to say well you can make a little money if you do this, you sell this, this is the price point and all that kind of stuff.

It was a low intensity kind of process for late 1986 and most of 1987, but in 1988 with the explosion of crack cocaine and the amount of money that could be made from turning flake cocaine into crack cocaine, the entrepreneurs in the drug business needed foot soldiers. They recruited these crews to start to become their foot soldiers, and with this they imported the Los Angeles style of distribution and recruitment and they even imported many of the Los Angeles tactics along with colors and gang names and identifications for the street gangs known as the Bloods and the Creeps. And, so, we start to see the Bloods and Creeps flying colors of red and blue, and now not defending

I said yes before he [could] finish, and we sat down and started with a group of people, and we started to craft an approach of trying to organize communities in neighborhoods to resist drug activities in their communities, and this phenomenon of the open air drug dealing was immediately transformed to home based operation. We start to call them crack houses, and, so, people knew that they could go from this house from this neighborhood. And the traffic was prolific, ten, fifteen cars an hour, dropping by, buying crack and moving on and sometimes they were in the corner and sometimes they were in the houses, but it was not as much as it was in the down town area. The police found some different strategies, but we now have this whole phenomenon manifested in neighborhoods and the question became real clear to myself and others early that this is not a kid's issue. There are tens of millions of dollars being turned in the illegal drug business. High school kids don't have tens of millions of dollars, you know you got five dollars and you say I am gonna have crack cocaine habit, you know five dollars [laughter]. It had to be people who had jobs and we tried to follow the money, going back consistently to corporate capitalism, where is the damn money.

We knew that businesses were involved in this and people who worked every day were buying crack cocaine, people with MBAs, people with nursing degrees, plumbers, electricians, were buying and they had the money. Young people selling it, but people who were part of the main stream were buying it. And so we crafted these series of strategies call Community Mobilization where we went into neighborhoods, and one of the things I learned in labor organizing is block by block, individual by individual, household by household, knock, talk and work on strategies. And we did that for almost six months after I came to work at the Safe Street Campaign.

It was Halloween, November 1988 that we put this effort together, and then we had a big community meeting in January of 1989. I came to work at Safe Street Campaign in January of 1989 and from January 1989 till July of 1989 we put together a series of meetings, going to talk to people in neighborhoods. We put together what was called a play book that we thought we could take to every neighborhood and have them use the theme of that play book and customize it to their specific needs. So that would be the variation on the play book, and it was used as an organizing tool and this was our community mobilization effort. We generated a group of people to go out in neighborhoods to do this, and in recruiting to those folks the thing that I looked for were people who were not nervous and were not easily frightened, and I had people with GED, and Ph.D. The first two people I hired were women, and they said, Lyle, how can we go out and fight crime with two women, and these are people with guns and they are beating people up, and the first people you hire are two white women. One was an ex check out clerk from Safe Way. She had worked in Safe Way in the Hill Top neighborhood for eleven years, so she watched people come in and out buying their groceries, she knows the neighborhood, she knows the people in the neighborhood and she is not frightened by any of this stuff. She basically had a high school diploma, and the second person I hired had a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in community education, who was also not a nervous person and understood the science and technology around communicating your ideas to people in the neighborhoods. Then we hired some more folks, and these people came to work for next to nothing.

They made twenty thousand dollars a year with no health benefits, no guns, no cars, and we went places where the police will not go, and, so, that was part of the Safe

Street strategy. Then we had another part of the Safe Street strategy that dealt with the basic building blocks of our community; the religious focus group, the business focus group, and the focus group on youths. We had seven different entities that we said we needed to organize around these groups of individuals and so we had leaders from the fifteen school districts in Pierce County come together, we had leaders from the business community come together, leaders from the ethnic minority groups come together, we had youths leaders come together, and all of these met and they crafted their strategies. What could students do, what could business do, what could ethnic minority groups do, and they all came up with their strategies, so we had a neighborhood strategy integrated with a community of interest strategy and communities of interest would be business, ethnic, etc. That became basically the Safe Streets Campaign and, we targeted crack houses and, we closed over two hundred and fifty crack houses. We took the location of doing business away from the individuals and we did a lot of innovative and interesting things. We were a finalist at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government for Innovation in State and Local Government. Out of several thousand applications, we were in the top twenty-five. We were noted by the Ford Foundation, and in the publication featuring Al Gore and a lot of other people on re-inventing America, the Safe Street campaign was a part of that.

We were on the television program Forty-Eight Hours. They came and looked at a day in the life of the Safe Street Campaign. We talked to people in other parts of the country, in Little Rock, Arkansas, Sacramento, California. We went to these locations and told them what we did and how it worked, and it worked because people worked together. We did not.... we did not defend that territory, and another thing that we did

which is very anti-intellectual and the people in the university systems think of me very poorly, because they said let's see what other people are doing. I said I don't wanna see what other people are doing; in fact don't show me because I am going to craft a strategy that is specific for this community. Now even though we went around later showing other communities what we did, I did not want to be persuaded by somebody else's effort and I wanted the direction that we took. What did we do that worked.... what could we do that worked because all sorts of things we imagine but what..... so we had to be practical in our approach to the Safe Streets campaign.

Folks came in from different cities, police chiefs. I say I don't wanna speak to a police chief who has gangs in his city because he don't know what the hell to do. I wanna speak to a police chief who doesn't have gangs in his city. I don't wanna talk to a failed system. I wanna talk to a system that has been successful and they were not very many and so we were basically on our own. Then they said you have to have an evaluation component and the University of Washington offered to do our evaluation component...way too much money. I said, I am not gonna do an evaluation component, and they said how would you know what you did worked, and I said when the pizza deliveries would go back in the neighborhoods, when the bums would sleep out in the parks again, [and] I walk in the neighborhoods and I see people walking and talking and pushing babies down the streets in strollers, that would be my signal that we have been successful. I could not afford a university analysis. We counted each one [crack house] we closed and they popped up some place else and we close them again. They said well you just closed over here and they go somewhere else, I said yes, but can you run a

business moving every three weeks? Pretty soon they will leave, and they will just go to some place, go to Seattle. I said well, Seattle will have to figure that out.

You know, here is the thing, Safe Streets was an effort in this community that continues to pay dividends. Results continue to cascade into the Safe Streets Campaign. When you close the crack house in your block what do you do? So, ok, we don't have drugs on our block anymore, let's go back to watching television, people said no. We got pot holes in our streets, poor street lights, poor schools. Once they learned to solve one problem, there is an appetite to solve other problems and when you say in the 80s Tacoma was a violent city, it was but peace in the neighborhood comes from concern not just about being against something but learning to be for something and people decided they will be for peace in the neighborhood. On May 5th, we had a community experience looking at the future of Tacoma [and] a lot of that came from what we did in 1989 when we had a community summit about the future of Tacoma. And miniature blocks that we organized became community networks and those groups that stayed together were funded by the City of Tacoma and all of that started out at the Safe Streets Campaign. Now they are not talking about drugs, gangs, violence, they are talking about hope, opportunity in the future and so it had the ability to be a key element in the transformation of the city from being a very violent city.

Now I also grew up from a very violent city. When the Fort Lewis army rangers got into a shoot out with drug dealers, I told the army rangers that's not how we gonna operate and one of the key persons in that group and I had a confrontation. We met at Pinch's Dillon and he opened his jacket and he had his gun and I had my gun. I said, you know, I am not a pencil pushing bureaucrat. We are out here in the streets dealing with

violence. I am ready to be as violent as you are and I told the gang members the same thing. When they made you a gun they didn't stop making guns, I got a gun. They say you are not suppose to have a gun, but I said if am on the streets and I think you gonna shoot me I will shoot you. They put out a bounty saying if myself and another person... Fifty-thousand dollars if you shoot Lyle Quasim or if you shoot Mark, and I said, if I think you gonna shoot me, I will shoot your ass first [laughter]. It was a violent time and we needed people who were not scared of violence. I have been shot growing up in Chicago and as best I can tell when people shot at me I shot back at them. I don't know who I hit, who I didn't hit, but I am not a bad shot [laughter]. It was a violent situation and it called for some very interesting approaches and the only thing that I looked for is fear. I will not hire any person, if this is very selective on my part I understand that, [but] if I felt the person would be nervous or become frightened. We used to paint out graffiti the gangs put out, we had a painting crew. Now if a person rolls up in a car while you painting out the graffiti all you got is a paint brush in your hands and you see guns in there now if you gonna shit your pants I don't need you [laughter]. You got to stand up and deal with this issue and so we found people, courageous [and] dedicated people, people who loved their community, loved their families, loved the peaceful way of life and were not vigilantes.

Well one of the things is that without numbers you didn't have enough black people to elect the black person. White people also have to vote for him, so you have to have message, you have to have good white people who believe in freedom and believe in equality, and there are tremendous numbers of those people around. It just warms your heart, warms my spirit, to know that there are folks who don't follow this direction, who

are privilege in the system and who would work with you. It was a wonderful sign that said we can be a part of the electoral system, but when you look at fifty-seven years later how many minority people are in the legislature? Very few. One [black] legislator in the senate, one out of forty-nine, I think it is, I should know this, after working in Olympia all these years, and two in the house. Now we have more people of color [and] I am just thinking of the black legislators. One of the great beneficiaries had been women.

Washington State has one of the highest percentages of women in the legislature. We look at the Tacoma City Council right now, there is not a single person of color, you look at the County Council there is not a single person of color on the County Council. We made some beginnings but they haven't sustained themselves and they haven't represented themselves. Now we have people on and off the council. We had one black person on the County Council in the history of the county. I think we had four black people on the City Council during the history of the City Council. It was a good day but it is not a day that has sustained itself. We don't have a single.... We may not have currently a single person on the Tacoma School Board.

1978 Yakima Black Women's Caucus. I remember people going to the Black Women's Caucus. Virginia Taylor, who now passed away, was the publisher of the *North West Dispatch*. There was a big issue around issues related to black women and issues related to other women of color versus white female issues, but the issue of employment has always been center to the struggle for equality for black people, and Virginia Taylor and her delegation to Yakima in 78 were concerned about employment. And it was a major part of their platform, because in 1978, as in 2007, the employment figures for black folks are not as good as they could be, and there are two types of participation in

the employment arena. One relates to just gross numbers and another relates to where in the hierarchy or continuum do black folks land. And so you can have an organization that had four - five percent African Americans, but ninety percent of those are in the lower jobs and not in management, not in policy, so there is an inability for people to have bothintegration into the employment system.

Authors Note

Side B of tape three was not transcribed. Issues discussed on that side of the tape include the Safe Streets Campaign, corruption, drugs, black students and colleges, among other issues.