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University of California
Berkeley, California

Everett Brandon
POLITICS, LAW, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker, PhD
in 2008

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Interview #1: 02-08-2008

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01-00:00:00

Meeker: This is Martin Meeker interviewing Everett Brandon for the Politics, Law, and Human Rights series, and today is the 8th of February, 2008, and what we like to do first is just to get you to say your name and where you were born and what year.

01-00:00:38

Brandon: Everett Brandon. I was born in the Panama Canal Zone in 1931.

01-00:00:47

Meeker: Well, there must be a story behind being born in the Panama Canal Zone?

01-00:00:50

Brandon: Yes, yes. My dad was an American from Colorado and he had served in World War I and came back to work at the YMCA in Pueblo, Colorado, and I guess this qualified him for this job in Panama. Panama was the place where the Panama Canal was located, and Americans were there who owned the Canal Zone, so they were setting up permanent living houses and schools, and that sort of thing. My grandfather came from Jamaica, and he was very instrumental in setting up the schools for the minority population, really West Indians who were building the Canal. And so my mother was there. My father came to be an administrator in one of these communities in the Canal Zone, where mostly West Indians lived. Then he met my mother and I was born. Had four siblings—two brothers and two sisters.

01-00:01:57

Meeker: So your mother was the daughter of a—

01-00:01:59

Brandon: The Jamaican—

01-00:02:00

Meeker: The Jamaican grandfather?

01-00:02:01

Brandon: My father was an American from here. He died seven years after I was born, with five kids. So I stayed in Panama until I was 13 and then I came to the States and lived in Gary, Indiana for a year, moved to Los Angeles, finished high school there, eventually went to UCLA, finished there, and then came to San Francisco after UCLA.

01-00:02:34

Meeker: Being that you were born in the Canal Zone, did that mean that you were born with US citizenship?

01-00:02:39

Brandon: Right, right.

01-00:02:40

Meeker: OK. Right, right.

01-00:02:40

Brandon: If you didn't have American parents, even if you were born in the Canal Zone, you weren't considered Americans. You had to have an American parent.

01-00:02:50

Meeker: OK, all right. So what drew you to the United States at age 13?

01-00:02:57

Brandon: Well, I guess from a distance of the Canal— you know, I guess if my father lived, you know, we'd have probably maybe even come earlier. But we were destined to come because you can only go so far in Panama. You can only go to school so far, and the opportunities there would not be conducive to staying there and looking for a career and opportunities. So that was my mother's ambition, as soon as we got old enough to come to the States. So we all did. She came and my four brothers and sisters came, and so we made a life, yes.

01-00:03:30

Meeker: Why did she pick Gary, Indiana?

01-00:03:32

Brandon: Well, she picked Los Angeles really. She picked Gary, Indiana, first because that's where my aunt was. My father's sister was there and she's the one that we came to live with, so I lived in Gary for a very eventful year.

01-00:03:48

Meeker: Why do you say it was eventful?

01-00:03:49

Brandon: Well, the Jackson family was right down the street, so that family was there. And then...

01-00:03:55

Meeker: Did you get to know them?

01-00:03:58

Brandon: My aunt knew the parents very well. We didn't know that they were going to be, you know, famous and all of that. But I think they had gone to the same church with my aunt. People sort of knew each other. I think his father worked in the steel mills where my uncle did. So there was that kind of closeness. And it was just a great year to be in the States. In 1945, the war was just over. People were just getting back into civilian life and there was this great big change going on and it was just a very exciting time to see the States for the first time and to just see the dynamics. And then when I was there, Froebel High School was really the only integrated school in Gary, Indiana, and at the time the white students struck against the black students. They didn't want to be an integrated school. And I remember Frank Sinatra coming. This was back in 1945, way before he was—It was the first time he was famous. He got

unfamous, then he became famous again. But he came to Gary and sang us songs by him. I thought that was one of the most remarkable demonstrations of commitment by an individual, you know, way back then before it was popular to do that kind of thing.

01-00:05:13

Meeker:

So he came to sort of quiet the white students' rebellion?

01-00:05:15

Brandon:

Yes, came to quiet— yes. People didn't want— they didn't want him to come. Newspapers didn't want him to come. Wanted him to stay out of it. You know, "You got no relationship to Gary per se," but he just saw that this was happening and on his own, voluntarily, come in and settled it.

01-00:05:28

Meeker:

How did it feel?

01-00:05:29

Brandon:

Felt pretty good.

01-00:05:30

Meeker:

How did it feel to be a student in the middle of that? I mean, it must have been not only unwelcoming to a high school, but this was your introduction to the United States, too.

01-00:05:42

Brandon:

Well, I guess I have this sensibility that everything is just— I look at everything as a curiosity. Wow, look at this happening. You know, look at this— look at this phenomenon, look at this event. So I was there. I went to all the events just to see. I went to the school. I had not gone to the Froebel school site before. I went, I guess, to see, to check it out. And I went when Frank Sinatra came. I went to the auditorium and sat near the front because I just wanted to get it all— you know, just the phenomenon to see this happening.

01-00:06:33

Meeker:

Did he communicate a particular kind of message?

01-00:06:37

Brandon:

Yes, yes. Yes, very much so. You know, he sang— he sang a lot of songs. He was famous for *Night and Day*. "Night and Day, you are the one." Like those kinds of songs were very big. But there's one he sang—about home—

01-00:06:56

Meeker:

"House is not a home"?

01-00:06:57

Brandon:

"House is not a home," yes. And that was his theme, because in that song, there's all of these things about black and white getting together, workers working, building the country, the whole theme of America, what it means to

be an American. We're all one— together, one people, that sort of thing. And he spoke between each of the songs. It was his thing and he was— this was in the Civic Auditorium in Gary and [it was] filled with all of the students from all over the city. And he just pulled it together. It's still very clear in my mind what a special moment that was. I've always wanted to write him and to thank him and to even write about it, because I think it's a forgotten piece of history that's very important.

01-00:07:45

Meeker:

Yes, I've never heard of it before. That's fascinating. So how then did your mom make the decision to take the family to Los Angeles

01-00:07:51

Brandon:

I think that was always in the works. I didn't even know I was coming to the States with my mom. I mean, it wasn't that much— we didn't talk about it. I didn't know what was going on. I'd just finished the ninth grade and then all of a sudden, yes, "You're going to the States." OK, you know... But I didn't know a lot. And I wanted to come to the States but it wasn't a burning ambition. You know, my life was very happy there and there was nothing that I knew I wanted to do in the States except... The only reason we were coming to the States was— that I saw was to study and to go to school. And I knew a lot about the States through the movies. In the Panama Canal Zone we got movies just as quickly as anybody got them, because the armed forces were there, and so we had the latest radio programs. So our life was very exposed to what was going on in America. So I had no real ambitions to leave Panama at that time except just to come here for education. You know, that was the goal. So I thought that's what I was coming for. And then my mom— I didn't even know my mom was coming the next year with the rest of the family. I didn't know she was making this big move to the States. But after one year, she came to Gary. Then my aunt wanted to keep me in Indiana and my mother was very shocked that anybody wanted to take me from the family. Anyway, we moved to—

01-00:09:16

Meeker:

Were you the oldest?

01-00:09:17

Brandon:

Yes, I was the oldest. I think that was her plan, to come to L.A., because my older brother— an older brother by my father's first marriage, and he lived in L.A., and the rest of the— and some of the other family, my father's family, my father's other. Yes, the whole family— the rest of the family was all in L.A., except for my aunt in Gary. So apparently my mother made all those arrangements to come to Gary just to sort of stopover, you know, get me and my sister together, who had come earlier, and then we moved to L.A. I came to the States when I was 13 going on 14, so I was only 14 going on 15, you know, when I came to L.A.

01-00:10:14

Meeker: Where in L.A. did your family move?

01-00:10:16

Brandon: We moved to 52nd and Broadway. They call it Southeast L.A., but it's really not. At that time, you know, Watts and South L.A. was way, way, way far away. But it was, you know, a middle class neighborhood and my older brother lived not very far away. My mother, unknown to me, had enough money to put a down payment on a house. That's still there. We lived on 52nd Street and that's where we—

01-00:10:54

Meeker: Is that near the Central Avenue area?

01-00:10:59

Brandon: Sort of. For us, Central Avenue is far away. But it's sort of near the Central Avenue area, yes.

01-00:11:07

Meeker: I know L.A. a little bit—

01-00:11:09

Brandon: Do you? Yes.

01-00:11:10

Meeker: Yes, I'm trying—

01-00:11:11

Brandon: It's near Broadway. You know, Broadway?

01-00:11:13

Meeker: Broadway is one of the main streets downtown, right?

01-00:11:14

Brandon: Broadway, yes, downtown. Broadway goes all the way downtown. So I was between Broadway and Main. My two streets went all the way downtown. Yes. You know, USC is not too far— within walking distance. Central Avenue is within walking distance. The Exposition Park, the Coliseum are all within walking distance.

01-00:11:33

Meeker: I went to USC, so that's one of the reasons I know this.

01-00:11:35

Brandon: Did you? Oh, yes, yes. Yes. Well, good, good.

01-00:11:39

Meeker: When I was down there, we did a little work on Central Avenue at that old hotel that was there, so that's how I know a little bit about the area.

01-00:11:47

Brandon: Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Yes.

01-00:11:50

Meeker: It's got a real interesting cultural history.

01-00:11:52

Brandon: Yes. Well, Figueroa is the next street over. It runs right into USC.

01-00:11:55

Meeker: Yes.

01-00:11:59

Brandon: And so— yes, so I live right next to that area.

01-00:11:58

Meeker: Oh, OK. So near the Coliseum and everything. Right.

01-00:12:00

Brandon: Yes, yes. Near the Coliseum area.

01-00:12:02

Meeker: Well, how'd you like that? I mean, how was L.A.? That must have been a big, exciting place to be for you?

01-00:12:08

Brandon: Very exciting. You know, very exciting. Yes, we grew up there. My sense is that if you go to high school in the States you are— you become an American. That's where you learn to be an American. So that's where I went to high school and began to look at sports and study and kids and friends. I lived right near the Coliseum, so I was selling papers out there very early at sports games. So I saw all the sports games when everything was happening, and great track meets were happening and the great football seasons were going on. Pacific League baseball was big, and I played tennis around Pancho Gonzalez and those kinds of guys. He used to play out there in Exposition Park. So that was a time for growing up. I think L.A. was a good place to grow up in those days.

01-00:13:01

Meeker: What high school did you go to?

01-00:13:03

Brandon: I went to Manual Arts, which is still in that general area. At that time, Manual was a primarily white school. I went to Jeff first, and my first cousin, who was older than I, took me out of Jefferson, wanted me to go to a more academically strong school because she thought Manual was that kind of school. So all my brothers and sisters went to Manual. We all graduated from there.

01-00:13:32

Meeker: Had you already shown some prowess at academic work? Some promise?

01-00:13:38
Brandon:

Well, in Panama we had a great education. I credit it all to that. When I came here, they all thought that, and what's the word I'm looking for? Instinctively, they thought I was not academically well-prepared, coming from Panama. Because people never even heard about Panama, much less knew about it, in Gary, anyway. Total foreigner. Total alien, you know, which was part of the excitement, because people took me as a novelty and because I was so different, so new, and I spoke with this great accent. So I spent the first part of my life in Gary just learning to speak American, learning— listening to the radio and helping to speak and learning to speak like that. Because I was OK until I opened my mouth and I had this huge accent. Yes, "Hey, where you from, boy?" So in L.A. I began to lose all that. You know, I began to become part of the American scene.

And so I was very curious. I was all over L.A. I'd take buses, go walking. You know, I used to love to walk as I did in Panama. I was always walking around the place. I would just walk all over. So for me, it was an experience of sort of taking in and viewing, just observing— observing life and people and that sort of thing. So my cousin took me out of Jefferson High School, which was the all-black school. Jeff was a popular school. I don't know how my life would have been if I'd stayed there. But then— then I went to Manual. My grandfather, as I said, came and started a school system. My mother was a teacher, came from a family of teachers, so we were very well prepared. That's what's taken me all through my life, that good education. Went to Cal and finished— yes, finished law school there, just for the challenge or heck of it. Just because I always wanted to do that, and I went to do that. But it's all based upon that great education that I got there and that's what's really taken me through life here. We're one of the few families in L.A. where three brothers, especially three black brothers, graduated from UCLA.

01-00:15:52
Meeker:

Did you speak Spanish as well as English when you came to the United States?

01-00:15:57
Brandon:

No. My brothers and sisters did, and they know more. For some reason, I was not a Spanish speaker. I mean, I went back a few years ago and came back speaking all this Spanish, so apparently, you know, whatever I had, I really cleared it out very quickly, really forgot it very quickly. I didn't speak Spanish, but we spoke Spanglo— whatever— Spanglish, I guess. You know, there were Spanish words all throughout our language and I— and we studied Spanish in school. Our school was English but we studied Spanish. But my brothers and sisters— I'm shocked how well they speak in Spanish, and it didn't happen to me. I guess I was not all that aware of what I needed to speak. Just spoke what I spoke.

01-00:16:54

Meeker:

You suggested that your life may have been different if you continued on in Jefferson instead of going to Manual Arts. I wonder if you can speculate about how that difference would have worked out.

01-00:17:07

Brandon:

Well, I tell you. You know, there was a philosophy there that I kind of suggested.. I think I saw Governor Davis talking about doing this and that— in those days, the top 15% of kids in the school would get a chance to go to the universities, the best schools, like UCLA. That's how they did it from any school. So when you went to UCLA— USC was more money— so UCLA was a dream school to go to. So it was much easier to be in the top 15% at Jeff than it was at Manual and that's one of the— kind of reasons I wanted to stay there, because when I went to Jeff, my God, I was like, "Boy, you're going... These kids aren't even reading, much less advancing, challenging." And you could see— wow, you could really be at the top of your class very easily. So I was kind of settled in— settling in there, you know, before my cousin came in and yanked me out of there. That's where all the big athletes were. One of my best friends, Thelton Henderson, who is a federal judge, was one of my best friends at the time growing up in L.A., in the later years. He went to Jeff during that time and he went straight to Cal from Jeff, that sort of thing. The football stars were all from Jeff and Jordan, the two black schools.

01-00:18:49

Meeker:

What was the other—

01-00:18:49

Brandon:

Jordan High School was the other black school in L.A. And those are the people who made up the bulk of the student body— the black student body at UCLA.

01-00:19:00

Meeker:

When you're saying the black schools, were they 100% black or were they— were they neighborhood based schools in neighborhoods that—

01-00:19:07

Brandon:

They were neighborhood based schools.

01-00:19:08

Meeker:

They were predominantly black?

01-00:19:09

Brandon:

Right, right.

01-00:19:10

Meeker:

Would there also have been like Hispanic students, as well, or...?

01-00:19:13

Brandon:

Not a lot. If there were, there weren't a lot. Yes, they were at Roosevelt High School. Every section had a school. Roosevelt was the Hispanic school at that

time, so that was— they may have had some black students in that school and you may have had a handful of white students at Jefferson. I'm not sure that that— even if there were any white students at Jefferson. And then Manual only had a handful of black students. Yes, yes. Until Manual became more predominantly black, then the whole neighborhood soon became black.

01-00:19:51

Meeker: What year did you graduate high school?

01-00:19:53

Brandon: 1948.

01-00:19:54

Meeker: '48. OK, all right. So this is— were you aware of any beginnings of civil rights activism at that point in time? I mean, obviously, Brown versus Board and so forth doesn't come until the mid-fifties.

01-00:20:07

Brandon: Doesn't come until '54. Yes. No, I went to the Army, and I think that's the first time I really began to feel the need to participate and to take a stand and to get up and move the rest of the people to doing something. No. And before that— before, when I was in high school, I was just sort of taking it in. And in high school, Yvonne Braithwaite Burke was in my class. And she was the first black— The problem is at black schools— even though there was segregation, all this activity was going on— they were doing more in every city than anybody could do. In Panama, you just didn't have that kind of a life. You know, wow, look at— look at this. Yvonne Braithwaite was the first black person I ever saw get up on the stage in our high school and speak so eloquently and just lead the whole thing. And I'd never seen this before— a black person just commanding the whole program.

01-00:21:17

Meeker: Was she like a student elected official or something?

01-00:21:20

Brandon: Yes, right. Yes, she was like one of the big student stars, yes. Yes. I remember Sarah Vaughn coming. That was the first time I'd ever seen a black lady come in and speak so elegantly and eloquently and commandingly. Yes, these were just new experiences for me. Because in Gary, Indiana, I was in this all black school, so I hadn't had— hadn't had the white experience at all. In the Panama Canal Zone, you don't have that experience. You know, the races are very much separated. So even though I was an American in Panama, I lived in the black community. Could go into the white sections and the white facilities but did not identify— But never had I had the white experience until I went to high school at Manual in the 10th grade.

01-00:22:13

Meeker: What do you mean about the white experience?

01-00:22:17

Brandon: Knowing— knowing whites, knowing a white girl, knowing a white guy. Talking, hanging out.

01-00:22:23

Meeker: So integration? Like an integration— integrated setting? Is that what you mean?

01-00:22:33

Brandon: I mean, in a non-racial setting. You know, where you're not white, I'm not black, you know. Where you're just—where you're just hanging and communicating and it doesn't have to do with your protoplasm. It's another thing. And so I'd never had that. Never had that until I went to Manual. Didn't have much at Manual. It wasn't until I went to UCLA, really— that I really began to have sole relationships with other folks, white—

01-00:23:15

Meeker: You mentioned something about going into the army?

01-00:23:18

Brandon: Yes, um-hmm.

01-00:23:19

Meeker: Were you drafted after high school or did you enlist?

01-00:23:22

Brandon: Yes. I joined the National Guard, because in my day, I'd worked ever since I came to the States. Had a paper route in Gary, Indiana, and I worked in a gas station here when I came to L.A. Because there were just the five of us and my mother, so we were kind of living tightly. Never felt poor or devastated, but we couldn't ask our mother for things because she was barely keeping things together.

01-00:24:01

Meeker: What kind of work did she do?

01-00:24:04

Brandon: That's another story. She became a seamstress, but she was a teacher in Panama, and when she came to the States, when we moved to L.A., she got a job initially as a teacher or teacher assistant, and then the school board began to implement something that said that if you weren't a citizen, you couldn't work in the school system.

01-00:24:33

Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:24:33

Brandon: Yes. And she lost that position. So she also was a seamstress, a very talented seamstress, and she eventually became like the top seamstress for the designers— designers for the mass-produced clothes. So she then was that person who sewed for the designers.

01-00:25:02

Meeker: So, gowns and everything?

01-00:25:04

Brandon: Right, right. Well, sewed on. You know, doing the patterns and kind of like— Look at the shows. Now the guys do their own, but in those days, there's somebody there, telling them to pad it and do this or that. So she would sew from the models. The real models would come in and she would sew against them and that kind of stuff. So she kind of enjoyed that, when she was done. She stayed there for the rest of her life until she stopped doing that. In the meantime, my brothers and sisters and I were just growing up and advancing in our lives. I had initially thought I wanted to be a doctor. I was taking premed courses and that sort of thing. Then I went to India when I was at UCLA, and that sort of changed my life.

01-00:25:53

Meeker: Well, did you serve in the army prior to going to UCLA?

01-00:25:58

Brandon: Yes, um-hmm.

01-00:25:58

Meeker: Can you tell me a little bit about your period in military service?

01-00:26:03

Brandon: I joined the National Guard around 17. I was supposed to be 18, 16—. Can't remember. I joined at 16 or 17. Supposed to be 18. And lied about my age. So because they gave you \$30 a month and you got paid every three months. Boy, that \$90 was a big chunk for us in those days. So that was— that's why I joined. I went down the street and joined. So we all went down there and joined. Everybody in the little neighborhood went and joined the National Guard because you could get \$90 over three months and you just had to go down there, I think, maybe once a week, maybe twice, and doing soldiering stuff. So that's what I was doing for a year— year and a half. And then we were drafted in the Korean War, and the National Guards in California were the first ones sent out— sent to Korea. We lost a lot of people because of it. A lot of guys didn't get a whole lot of training, had to go very quickly. And so we were just drafted very quickly, very quickly. I got this letter from Truman saying, "Welcome to the Army. Your date is two weeks from now." We were in so quickly. And I'm flabbergasted. I have no idea what's going on. "We're leaving already?" And so the day came and they put us in these trucks and shipped us up to Camp San Luis Obispo. And at that time, I'd made like PFC or something like that. And then we got up there and we started soldiering. We started the real stuff and started training for boot camp. And that was just rigorous. You know, crawling around, you know, setting— you know, bullets flying over, all that stuff they make you do. Digging foxholes, fighting, simulating wars, and invading. I didn't know what they were doing.

This was a whole new army. This was 1950. Korean War starts, so they try to— how they going to train people, train all these new guys. Yes. I eventually ended up sending a lot of guys overseas— {break in audio 28:34} being in a skeleton crew where we would be pared down to just a basic unit, table of organization, and then you'd bring a whole lot of other guys in to fill in, and you'd train with them, go through the army tests, pass that, and then they would go off, and then another group would come in. So we were sending a lot of guys over right away, you know, doing that kind of training. And they were bringing the rawest guys you ever saw. I mean, pharmacists, librarians, teachers, laborers. They were just bringing people you'd never dream of and making them soldiers. Because— they began to start drafting guys then. So that was the first time. We were in Camp San Luis Obispo in California for the most part and then I served up in Fort Lewis, Washington, and then I went to Texas and back to Fort Lewis. I wanted to be a doctor, so I chose medical technician. I wanted to be in the medics. So they sent me down there to school, surgical technician school. And that was the first time I'd ever been to the South. That was a huge experience being in Texas.

01-00:29:49

Meeker:

Why do you say that?

01-00:29:52

Brandon:

Well, I just didn't know the mores of segregation in the South. And plus, coming from Panama, I never even understood all the nuances, anyway. You know, I was learning all that coming to the States. And down there, you see real segregation. People in the back of the bus, people being subservient, people knowing where you could go and don't go. The black-and-white designations on the signs.

01-00:30:24

Meeker:

So the distinction between life in L.A. and life in Texas was stark to you?

01-00:30:28

Brandon:

Oh, very stark, yes. Very, very stark. Yes, attitudes, relationships— It was very, very stark. But again, you know, I still value that— that I never saw a lot of the nuances, because that's something you learn. You learn how to be black and how to make the other person white. Yes, that's something you pick up. And then if you don't know those cues, you just sort of drift into it until you got— Someone's got to teach them to you. So if you don't know, if you haven't seen this at all— And in Texas— and then where people live, they're discouraging kinds of places in which they had to live. Little shacks with outhouses. Very prevalent in San Antonio in 1950, 1951, something like that. And I would never go in the back of the bus because I was in uniform. So I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't pay attention to all the stuff I wasn't going to do. And I felt my uniform protected me and I made it do that. I felt very empowered by being in the army. I felt I'd done my service to America. I felt, "Shit, this is it, you know. Can't do a goddamned thing more. I am in. You

know, I've done it." So that did come from there and that's— And the army's the first time I ever took some— got out front to lead the civil rights action.

01-00:31:57

Meeker:

Well, did it work? Did your uniform protect you by sitting in the front of the bus?

01-00:32:00

Brandon:

Oh, yes. Yes. I went to a large carnival kind of a thing that was happening in San Antonio once, and then I went inside, this great big thing. You know, real horseshoe kind of a set-up. Just went all around. And I went in and I was just shocked. You know, place was just full— San Antonio was just full of black people and there's no blacks in there. So I go through the whole thing, all around, and just— a great big— kind of like a horse track. And all of these carnival things going. And I circled the whole thing around. So just as I'm coming out, finishing and everything— nobody has said a thing to me. Then somebody comes to me and says, "Listen, you know. Negroes aren't allowed here except for one day in the week. That's June tenth. So you aren't allowed here until that day." So things like that.

I've never had an aggressive— an aggressive racial incident. Never, I don't think. Nobody's ever aggressed me except one in Chicago, I think. It wasn't even aggressive. I was the one that took it on. But, you know, the main kind of racial incidents, again, are the kind of subtle ones, not aggression, just somebody expressing their own personal prejudice and trying to gain status by putting somebody down. I see a lot of that in segregation. People gaining status by exercising racial biases. Makes them feel better and stronger. Also why I didn't take it in the States, basically, because I didn't come from a background where you felt inferior. So I see somebody acting that way and then I see them as inferior to me and not as bright as me, not as smart as me, don't look as good as me. They don't have as valid a sense of place in the world as me. You know, with their shit. As long as it doesn't harm me. I loved the TV show, what's his name, Archie Bunker [*All in the Family*]. Because he was so powerless. I mean, he was racist but it was such a powerlessness. People who don't have any power, I just smile at them. I loved that show because you see guys like that all the time. This is the way I treat people. And to me, that's how I deal with the white people. It's the ones who are in power, you know, that you're frightened of. You're frightened of their racial attitudes. Yes. And that's generally my sense of whiteness and racial discrimination in this country. You know, I'm amused by those who have nothing to offer, you know, who act superior as a result of it, you know, take it on as a need— that they need to feel good about themselves. Yes.

01-00:35:49

Meeker:

So you mentioned that this sort of coming to some sort of consciousness about civil rights and so forth started to happen in the context of the military?

01-00:35:59
Brandon:

Yes.

01-00:36:00
Meeker:

You know, and the late '40s also was the time that the military— that Truman was supposedly desegregating the military. How did you experience that?

01-00:36:10
Brandon:

Yes, very interesting. Yes, he did so around that time. But my unit was pretty much— My unit as a National Guardsman was pretty much black, you know, all black, so we were there. Later on, when he began to bring people in, when they began to draft people in, they began to do it— putting guys in integrated units for the first time. But my unit was pretty much all black.

01-00:36:57
Meeker:

So they weren't putting white soldiers in your unit?

01-00:37:01
Brandon:

No. The whole time I was in an all black unit and...

01-00:37:07
Meeker:

Did that seem unfair to you?

01-00:37:10
Brandon:

Well, I went in that way and I didn't want to be in the white units, you know.

01-00:37:14
Meeker:

Yes.

01-00:37:13
Brandon:

You know, I was dreading, because I was going to be transferred and a couple of times, my name was up for transfer. I thought my name was up to go to Korea at one time and it never happened. So I never wanted to be in a white unit but I never had any fears of that happening. But I was very satisfied where I was. And then I started as a PFC and I was a top sergeant by the time. Within two years, I was the staff sergeant, which was the highest you could get in my unit as a sergeant. So I was advancing really, really very fast, because I had all of this good background. My grandfather taught me to type when I was a kid, and that's just taken me everywhere, being able to write and type. And so I was able to do that, wherever I was, wherever there was that kind of a need.

01-00:38:21
Meeker:

So how long was your commitment to the army?

01-00:38:24
Brandon:

Well, I didn't have any commitment. I was out in two years.

01-00:38:27
Meeker:

You were out in two years?

01-00:38:27

Brandon:

I was out in two years because the mothers of the National Guard demanded that we be released because we were supposed to have been going in just as an early force. So they were going on two, three years and there was no relief. You know, they're bringing guys in, they're drafting guys in. So it became a real major California movement to bring us home, to get us out. As quickly as I was drafted, I was very quickly discharged. One incident that happened when I was in the army— I was up in Fort Lewis and we used to go into the USO in Tacoma and they had black nights, which was one or two days of the week, and then the rest were the white nights. And I was aghast at that, totally aghast. I did see Louis Armstrong and other major stars there. They used to bring a lot of great stars there, it was a really intimate place. You could get right there with those guys and meet them, so that was a good thing. And they were bringing really great acts. So all the great acts around the country at that time were very much available to USOs. They would stage them and they were right there, putting on really great shows. So we did do that. But we only did it on separate nights. This was in Tacoma. So it came around. We were all assembled together, which we didn't do a whole lot. But we were assembled in our battalion— two battalions together and several hundred guys. And we were assembled there and this was just an appeal to collect funds for the USO to fund what we were doing in the USO program in Tacoma. And I remember just finding myself on the stage saying, "We just shouldn't be supporting segregation like this. We just should let these people know that it's not right, that what they're doing is totally unfair, and the only way we can call attention to it is to just take a stand." And the guys are waving, you know. And my captain is saying, "What are you doing?"

01-00:41:03

Meeker:

And did it generate any change?

01-00:41:09

Brandon:

Yes, yes, it did. Not on that issue, but it just raised the issue. Yes, it did. It really did. It just raised the issue, and then all of a sudden, it was on. People were talking about it in Washington. People think this is a great liberal state, but Tacoma was just as backward as anywhere else, you know. It did begin to open up more. I mean, I wasn't a big part of it. I wasn't running to the USO all the time and this wasn't one of my missions. But before I left, the USO was integrated. You could go almost any day that you wanted to. Yes, so maybe it did happen. But before then, it was just no one ever raised the issue. I mean, no one ever mentioned there was an issue.

01-00:42:07

Meeker:

You know, Truman is desegregating the forces but these USO outposts kind of continue on this segregation inertia?

01-00:42:13

Brandon:

Yes, yes, yes. Exactly.

01-00:42:17

Meeker:

And then it takes someone like you to raise the question?

01-00:42:18

Brandon:

Yes, yes, yes. Yes. And then I wrote to Thurgood Marshall. Yes, then I began to read things like the *Pittsburgh Courier* when I was in the army. Began to get exposed to that kind of stuff that became very, very important then, because you felt like, "God, there was nobody out there looking out for you." And the only way you could find that was to read the *Pittsburgh Courier* and see what the NAACP was doing. And it said it was fighting all these things. The NAACP was fighting for integration. The NAACP was fighting, you know, for Truman to push the integration and stuff more. Thurgood Marshall had gone to Korea to see whether or not the black troops were treated fairly. Because there were complaints coming out of there, and that sort of thing. So you're in the army and the only avenue, the only contact you had with anybody who's got some kind of power out there to do something is the NAACP.

01-00:43:29

Meeker:

Did you join them as a--

01-00:43:32

Brandon:

Well, I went to work with them later on— when I was in college, I started an NAACP college chapter. Yes. Yes, later in San Francisco, Willie Brown and I. He's now on the national board of the NAACP, but he and I started out together doing NAACP things. NAACP has been my life. If I've done anything all my life, it's been because of pushing the NAACP mission— that's what I do. I personally push the NAACP mission. You know, that's where my mission came from and that's what I do. I'm a life member and that sort of thing. But my life has really been pushing the NAACP agenda.

01-00:44:17

Meeker:

Can you recall the first time you heard about the organization?

01-00:44:23

Brandon:

Well, I may have heard about it before but, I tell you, that was the only time it had any real meaning to me, when I was in the army, was the first time it began to have. When I was growing up in L.A., I didn't see it as anything. I didn't much identify with it, didn't know much about it, didn't know anything about the people. Didn't see anyone in L.A. who was involved in the NAACP. And then I came back, I began to see more. But, you know, so you just didn't meet them, you just didn't know. It just wasn't part of the agenda and that sort of thing. It wasn't even about it in school. You know, the NAACP was not even in the language of most of us, the textbooks during that time. The NAACP was just making its prime-time history, you know, during that time. And the first place I began— and even— there were even no discussions in my set regarding NAACP. I don't think they really came from anybody else. It was just my reading the *Pittsburgh Courier* and those papers for the first time in the beginning— wow, for the first time.

01-00451277

Meeker: How is it that a newspaper like the *Pittsburgh Courier* would be circulating through the army?

01-00:45:36

Brandon: They were national. They were national. That's what the black army guys read. That's the only thing we read. They were national. Yes, those were the the peak days for the black papers. That period and maybe a little bit later on. I mean, it's like not having a daily paper in your community if you don't have it— You lose your link with the rest— You know more about your neighbor through the paper than you do directly. And this is what I try to do here at my paper, to show people. Same thing I'm doing here. Trying to show people why it's important to know what everybody else is doing and to communicate and to keep abreast of what's happening. That's how we become a community.

01-00:46:22

Meeker: That's true. So when you finished your term in the National Guard, had UCLA already been lined up or was that something that you then had to apply to go do?

01-00:46:37

Brandon: Yes. Yes, we were inducted into the army, so when we finished that. Yes, I came back and I went to SC, actually, for a while, and I'd also taken some courses at City College, too.

01-00:47:02

Meeker: Were these the premed courses that you were mentioning?

01-00:47:03

Brandon: Yes, yes. These were all premed courses. You know, maybe some world civilization. SC had this great world civilizations class. I don't know if they still have it or not. But great class. You know, first exposure to world history and that sort of thing and the fine arts and that sort of [thing]. And so that was my first exposure, too. You know, I went to SC and took that class. World and civilization. And then I began to get exposed to college life. You know, said, wow, look at this life and began to know whites, too. White people on a much, much different level and began to recognize that I was—. Which I knew in high school, I knew that I was competitive. Began to recognize that I was competitive. I brought value. And so then I applied to UCLA and was taken right in and, it was UCLA, it was wow, just like the world just opened. Phfaw. You know, UCLA was like the dream school. SC was, too, for people who had wealth, but UCLA for every black person who made Bs, UCLA was a dear choice. It was the idyllic place to be and to have a degree from UCLA was everything. The word UCLA, the school letters, that was just everything to have.

01-00:48:39

Meeker: It symbolized, then, that you would have a successful life or symbolized that you would—

01-00:48:45

Brandon:

Yes, yes. You'd have a successful life. You would have people looking at you successfully. You would have the best girlfriends. The best income. You'd have a chance to reach the best income, the best jobs. more on top of your life than other jobs where they're just laborers. You know, they {inaudible} say so.

01-00:49:20

Meeker:

What did you choose to study at UCLA?

01-00:49:22

Brandon:

Well, I took all the premed courses. I had top courses. I was in class with Peter Johnson, in analytical geometry class and algebra class together, and I didn't know him. He was just another black guy in the class and I was in the class. And after the first hour, the teacher ended the class and told us what we were going to be doing. For some reason, we just instinctively looked across the room and empathized with each other. And that's when I first met Rafer. I didn't know who he was, really. But we were in this class and—

01-00:50:15

Meeker:

I'm sorry, the recognition between you and Rafer, did it have to do with the difficult content of the material?

01-00:50:21

Brandon:

Yes, yes. Yes, yes.

01-00:50:22

Meeker:

Yes, OK.

01-00:50:26

Brandon:

Yes. How impossible it mostly was. I had an anatomy class that was just the same. And I was at UCLA in the toughest classes you've ever seen in your life. Like ah! My life was just: wow, laboratories. But I was doing it. You know, I mean, it's what it took and it's what you had to do. But surprisingly, I had a friend who had gone on this Project India program a year before and she recommended me. She said, "You ought to try out for this." And so I found myself doing it, you know, making an application and then taking a test and taking another test, and then finally being selected in the final 24. Twelve were going to go and then the 24 trained for a whole school year and then they selected a final 12. So here I am, you know, becoming intimate with the greatest people. Congressman Jerry Lewis is one of my very best friends. Let me show you this. [shows a photograph of himself with other UCLA students] Look. This is Ambassador Ed Peck and Professor Joe Michaels. Oh, this is me. Yes, yes.

01-00:51:35

Meeker:

OK, look at that. And so you were one of the twelve that went?

01-00:51:40

Brandon:

Yes. So I was finally one of the twelve.

01-00:51:42
Meeker: Can you tell me the names of the five people here, if you remember.

01-00:51:46
Brandon: This is Joe Michaels. He's been a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Just retired. Ed Peck was an ambassador in many countries in the Middle East, and that's me, yes, between the guys. Yes.

01-00:52:03
Meeker: Now, these guys were students then, at the—

01-00:52:04
Brandon: Yes, yes. Southern Indian, yes.

01-00:52:06
Meeker: Put this on here just so we can— Oops. Oh. Sit here. Pretty much see it. There we go. Oh, that's great. So obviously you went to India?

01-00:52:22
Brandon: Yes, so I went to India.

01-00:52:23
Meeker: What was the attraction? Was this just something new? A new experience to have?

01-00:52:29
Brandon: Well, it was a big thing on campus. It was like the biggest thing on campus, that we were sending students. People had been calling us the first beginning of the Peace Corps.

01-00:52:39
Meeker: Oh, OK.

01-00:52:40
Brandon: Because we were over there for three months, about, and we trained a whole year to kind of learn different parts of India, different subtypes, and you try to go there with as much expertise as you possibly can. So this is what this group of 24 did for that full year. We were in seminars, and giving reports, and studying and interviewing other folks on campus, and other academics, and then reporting to each other, and then having people come in and speak to us. Getting exposed to Indian food, meeting Indian people, and so my whole— That's why I said like, wham— So all of a sudden here I am. You know, when I'd told you about my life, it was kind of a sheltered little experience, you know. So wham—all these friends I'm making with Jerry and all these guys I'm showing you— You know, we were all being very intimate. I'm going to their homes, their families [are] just embracing me. Sandy Ragin is a great rabbi in L.A. right now. One of the brightest people in the world, and being in his home, in his Orthodox Jewish home and meeting his parents and having them treat me wonderfully and talk to me, and want to know about me, and to be so interested in me and following my progress— So India did all this to

me. So then we do all of this preparation and training and then I'm selected in the final twelve. You know, and I'm just having no idea. No initial idea about any of this kind of stuff, how I got there. And, of course, the competition to go is just severe, because you spend three months in India, your summer. So half the campus was competing for it and here I am, you know, just sailing through and becoming one of the final twelve and going over. Oh, there's a book I have. A guy named Tom Morgan wrote a book— *Friends and Fellow Students*— trip to India.

01-00:55:00
Meeker:

Yes. What year was that?

01-00:55:03
Brandon:

1955. Yes, *Friends and Fellow Students* by Tom Morgan. And he covered our trip for Look Magazine, and we were also featured in *Look* magazine in, I think, the January '56 issue, and then the book came after that. So yes, so here I am. So I go on this India trip and we travel all around the country, you know, sort of by group. Divide into two groups. My group was the traveling group. We were all over. The traveling team, you know, meeting Indian students, talking about America, talking about our experiences as students, talking about what we knew about each other, the importance of knowing more, and what America was like if they went there in our situation. So we did this. We met with everybody— in addition to students— Rotary groups— when we came into a community, we'd meet with the largest organizations in the area. We were always at all of the colleges, sometimes in high schools, lower grades. The USIA was a very popular agency in India, then. America was very popular then, so they would arrange all these places for us to go and they would set it up. And so we would do this and it was great. And we subsequently joined together— with each other. One group went to Calcutta and they were like the more intense group. They built a dispensary while they were there. And then we met together and combined, then we split again and met again in Delhi. We met everybody, whoever was available. The other group met Nehru. This is Nehru! And we met Rajender Pasad, the first president of the country. So we met everybody who was in our sphere who was around, because we were huge. Met the US ambassador, we were treated at his house. All of a sudden I come from Panama and here I am, you know.

01-00:57:14
Meeker:

You were almost like a US ambassador, then?

01-00:57:17
Brandon:

Yes, yes. Exactly. And yes, here I am, a US ambassador, you know, from the Canal Zone and with all of these great kids, you know, who are the superstars. Because everybody on the team was your like student body president and student body vice-president or, you know, all these kind of major players on the campus. But they considered me as successful as anybody else. We came together at a retreat in Carmel last year, all of these Project India groups that went on for 15 years. So they've been bringing all these people together every

couple of years. Phenomenal people. Just shows you the strength of a university, what it does over the years and what people accomplish. So they come together to talk about their experiences, what it meant to them, what it means to them now, that sort of thing. So Jerry Lewis announces something like, "And "Everett Brandon was one of the greatest guys who went to India."

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 02-08-2008.mp3

02-00:00:00

Meeker: So I imagine during this trip to India a lot of the students and other people who you met and had a chance to speak with were probably interested in speaking with you about the question of race relations in the United States?

02-00:00:17

Brandon: Yes, absolutely, yes.

02-00:00:20

Meeker: Did anyone prepare you for that? Were you coached about ways in which to talk about race in the United States or not?

02-00:00:31

Brandon: Surprisingly, no, but it all— but it was all there. I mean, I made it my specialty. Surprisingly not. You know, we weren't prepared for it. We didn't talk about race— you know, none of the subjects that we were assigned that I remember— and I would remember, because I would probably have got those assignments. But we didn't get any assignments to study race, which I wish I had, and which is what I did when I was in India. I went to the USIS library because I realized I just didn't have a lot of facts, true information that I needed to have to kind of substantiate some of the things I was saying. So I spent a lot of time, I remember, in that first week or two at the USIS library in Southern India just really poring through stuff, reading books and getting all this stuff together. Because by that time, for a whole year, we'd been doing that kind of stuff, and I'd really been trained to do research and get information. So I was really into it, and we were kind of prone to do that, to find out about what we were doing. All the guys were doing that. It was a very— you know, very fascinating group. Joe Michaels, one of our guys, was studying Indian religion, and what he did— what he came up with and what he did with some of the religious folks, that was astonishing. But that's what— we were learning on the job. And so I did that. And if I were going to say anything— yes. If I was going to make recommendations to the group, I would definitely say that that should have been a part of the training.

02-00:01:59

Meeker: When people did ask you about race relations in the United States, do you remember how you responded? Did you eventually sort of come up with, you know, particular stories that you would tell or a way that you could communicate the complexity of the situation?

02-00:02:18
Brandon:

By that time, I was pretty much aware. And in fact, just after I came back, I was preparing to start this NAACP chapter on campus, because by that time, you know, I had a lot of self-knowledge. I, you know, lived in the community and now I'd become aware of what was going on. I was reading the papers. You know, before the Army, I didn't read much. Well, I can't say that. I always read the paper and that sort of thing. But then I learned how to read more broadly. And so I had a lot more knowledge by the time I got there. And I did want to straighten out the information. I did want to straighten out the issue. My basic statement was that if you came to the United States, you'd be very discouraged by signals of discrimination that would be very hard to take and you'd find it very difficult to understand how a democracy could tolerate this and allow it to happen, and it certainly is a stain on our country. But then I would say the good parts, you know, that we had housing, we had homes, we own 1/3 of our homes, we had people in very successful positions in the United States, that we were achieving— our democracy allowed us to have hope that we have the power to make things better and that we value the constitution. You know, that we wanted that constitution to live. And I also talked about my service in the army, my brothers had served, my father had served. I said, "You know, we've served this country as much as any other American and we believe that we have just as much a place, and we will achieve that place." And we'll do it the constitutional way. But the main thing is that we are a far more improved image than you probably have had in their information, because they thought we were virtually all recent slaves and blah, blah, blah, picking cotton, and that was still the nature of our lives.

02-00:04:33
Meeker:

Well, India also had a peculiar place in the bipolar world between the Soviet Union and the United States, because they were more, I guess, aligned with the Soviet Union at this point in time?

02-00:04:43
Brandon:

It was a big issue. It was a big issue. The fact that we bombed Hiroshima was a huge issue in the Asian world. That was very much a point of distaste, and wariness about the United States. If there was any [major concern] at that time, it was about our use of the atomic bomb. That was really a supreme issue that sort of permeated throughout most of India. For some reason, that was the image that people had, yes.

02-00:05:17
Meeker:

You know, there's a term that's widely used now, which is the term 'people of color,' which really kind of attempts to, I guess, bring together the commonalities of people from very different backgrounds, whether they're Asian or Latino or African American, and to some extent, Indians, sub continental Indians. I'm wondering, when you were there in 1955— And I don't really know how to ask this, but did you— did you feel like the Indians were more similar to you or more similar to the white students that you were traveling with, or very different from both?

02-00:06:09

Brandon:

In the beginning, it seemed like an easy question. I'd say, absolutely, we identified with each other. One of the most common surprises that my group always had is why everybody was everybody speaking to me. I mean, all over the world— Any black— any person of color in 1955, you're going— you know, people weren't traveling as much as they do now— but we were in Rome, or we landed in Cairo. We landed in Cairo, and blacks were just, "Oh, hello, brother." And the people in my group were just shocked. "Did you know him? Why'd they— why'd they say hello to you?" Yes, that happened in those days. I'm sure it probably still happens. Maybe less now because, you know— so many people around the world. But in those days, no, you saw a person of color, you almost always spoke— they almost always greeted you and spoke, especially me with the school. We were always a sight because it was this group of UCLA students, arriving from UCLA. We were proud of it and the whole thing. I used to wear a Kappa Alpha Psi cap, my red and white fraternity cap.

But it's difficult in the sense that in India, I was a kind of a novelty, because I was the first black they'd ever seen in many parts of the country. But my hair was more of a novelty than anything else. They probably hadn't seen my hair before. I had a lot of easy rapport with Indians just on the basis of the color, very quickly, that others didn't have. But it very quickly vanished, after a minute or two. You know, they were treating me just like everybody. And people saw me more as an American than anything else. But the color thing... People of color do, in those days, at least, anyway, do sort of connect with each other. Yes, make a connection, yes. Especially black or brown people. Yes.

02-00:08:36

Meeker:

So when you returned to the United States after this summer trip is there anything else you wanted to tell me about the trip to India before we move on?

02-00:08:44

Brandon:

Just that part about just connecting what we were just saying is that it kind of brought us together because we were all in India and now we're just Americans and there isn't this wide society support. In fact, at the Taj Majal hotel in Bombay there was a big sign outside saying, "No dogs nor South Africans allowed." We were in a brown country, so there were all of those things that support the racially-divided system. This whole government and police system that supports this divisive system. So then it becomes a whole different kind of osmosis going on, and so you just become this unit that you're in— like a family. You've sort of entered the unit and everybody's got to do their share to make it all work. So coming out of that, for all of us, I think that one of the most valuable parts of India is that experience, is that that happened, that kind of coming together, and us becoming this one unit that lasts today. You know, we're still all the closest of friends, including Rosemary Wooldridge and Ruth Taketaya and the other group. The minute we

see each other— we see each other maybe every five years, but when we see each other, it's very tight and close. So that was a big experience, and also learning about India. So I came back out of that wanting to learn more about that world and about that life, I started taking more political science courses and broader-based courses, and eventually just sort of switched out of pre-med. So I got my degree in political science.

02-00:10:44

Meeker:

And you also founded a chapter of the NAACP at UCLA?

02-00:10:48

Brandon:

Right, right.

02-00:10:49

Meeker:

How did you do that? Did you, I guess, gather a bunch of other students together and, you know, posted it on campus? I mean, what was the mechanism by which you established the chapter?

02-00:11:00

Brandon:

Well, one of the things I learned in India was that I learned to speak. I was scared as heck to get on the stage and frightened. So one of the things I learned— to communicate, speak. So I came back as an orator. Yes. To use our voices and do more— there's so much to do. We had to do things— there was the NAACP president in Los Angeles, an attorney named Tom Newsome. Anyway, we invited him to campus. We told him what we wanted to do. We wanted to become a chapter. We'd heard about NAACP college chapters and we wanted to form one on campus. My friends in thought and mission were named Willard Johnson and Bennett Johnson, Willard's current wife is Vivian Johnson. Willard became the second black student-body president at UCLA, and Bennett Johnson now owns a press in Chicago. We decided to form this NAACP chapter. Willard was the president, I was the vice-president. So we brought this guy to campus and he gave us a big speech and from then on we said yes. So we formed, we elected officers, we got chartered, and we began to do things. One of the most courageous things we did was to sponsor W.E.B. Dubois. There was all this negative stuff going on about him and the university was afraid of him and they wouldn't let him speak on campus, so we sponsored him at the YWCA across the street to come in and speak. We were very innocent and new, and, you know, weren't committed to any kind of ideologies, but we wanted to be our own leaders, and you know, make our own direction and path, so...

02-00:13:19

Meeker:

Why did UCLA not allow him to speak on campus?

02-00:13:25

Brandon:

Because he was supposed to be a communist and UCLA at that time was supposedly known for bringing in chancellors to stomp out communism on campus.

- 02-00:13:40
Meeker: Yes. This is the era of the loyalty oath and everything.
- 02-00:13:41
Brandon: Yes, right. Exactly, exactly. So it was during that time, yes.
- 02-00:13:46
Meeker: Do you recall what he spoke about?
- 02-00:13:48
Brandon: Dubois?
- 02-00:13:50
Meeker: Yes.
- 02-00:13:50
Brandon: I think I was mostly about Africa, the changing world. I think he could almost predict this globalization—when nations will be much tighter, there will be much more interaction, more interchange, more understanding, more appreciation, and more richness as a result of this, you know, or awareness of other people's needs and wants and desires and hopes and that sort of thing, and how that— you know, we need to free ourselves to be able to lead. And, you know, it was very much making us aware that we had unusual advantages and opportunities being at UCLA, but also a lot of challenges, a lot of responsibilities, to take advantage of our opportunities, you know, that we had, you know, at that time being a UCLA student. Was like, wow, yes. “You're really going to lead the world. You're going to be the future, guys”— that sort of stuff.
- 02-00:15:02
Meeker: Well, to a certain extent, that has come true. I mean, the way in which you've talked about your friends there.
- 02-00:15:07
Brandon: Yes, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Exactly, yes. Yes, exactly. Dynamic, yes. Dynamic group. Yes, we've all gone on to do really great things. Yes.
- 02-00:15:20
Meeker: So what kind of work did the chapter do once it was established?
- 02-00:15:25
Brandon: We took on a lot of things. You know, the student union didn't hire black, the cafeteria didn't hire any blacks there. We took that on. There was discrimination in the restaurants in Westwood Village. They would advertise for attractive colored women, you know, and those kinds of things, and we took on crap like that. Or we took on housing. You know, there was a lot of housing discrimination in Westwood and on campus. We took that on, too.
- 02-00:16:05
Meeker: Were the dorms integrated?

02-00:16:09

Brandon:

Well, they were prejudiced. They were integrated. They didn't say they were not integrated. I mean, maybe they had one person there or something like that. They didn't have a lot of dorms anyway at UCLA, and so a lot of the homes would take in students and stuff like that. But UCLA only had one or two dorms, you know— in the dorms and stuff, there were almost no black students. The private NGOs of the day, of those times, had some housing. The Stevens House. There was always discrimination in housing for the black students. Until I moved on campus, too, in one of those co-op houses, you know, we mostly lived in Los Angeles and commuted because you wouldn't get housing in Westwood, and UCLA didn't have much housing then, and the only [black] people who got into UCLA housing were the black women, if they did get it. So discrimination was there. You know, more of a “we'll let one or two in,” you know. That's the way we'll do it. And that was their kind of an unwritten policy. This is how it was administered, that sort of thing. We were challenging the administration in a lot of things, you know, for not doing more— for not getting more students in. Those kinds of issues that were brought up as a result of our experiences and also a need to be a spokesperson, to speak on different things, to take on, you know, incidents that came up, you know, at that time.

02-00:18:03

Meeker:

Did the administration seem at all responsive to you or were they really just sort of dragging their feet about, for instance, the housing issue?

02-00:18:14

Brandon:

No, they were not at all responsive on this— something like Dubois came up, then they became responsive. But, you know, their best thing was to ignore you and then they just watched us from afar. We weren't totally powerless. We were just a handful, less than 30. They said that when I was there, that there were may be a couple hundred, but I never saw that. Maybe 30, 40 students, yes.

02-00:18:44

Meeker:

Well, this was certainly before the Unruh Act, as well, the Rumford Act.

02-00:18:56

Brandon:

Well, this was just after the Brown versus [Board of Education]... I mean, it hadn't even swept across the country yet, so it hadn't even taken effect in anything— in any kind of reality.

02-00:19:09

Meeker:

So when you were dealing with housing discrimination, for instance, did you appeal to a law or was it really just sort of like a moral authority or moral power you were appealing to?

02-00:19:20

Brandon:

Moral power. Moral power, yes. Moral power, yes. Yes, we had no laws, yes.

02-00:19:24

Meeker:

Because I know in San Francisco after the Rumford Act actually went into power, the NAACP would basically, you know, send out like a black couple to rent a home, and invariably, there would be the landlord saying, "Sorry, it's already been rented," and then they would send out a white couple and they would offer the place to the white couple. Did you guys engage in that kind of work?

02-00:19:49

Brandon:

No, we didn't have the laws then.

02-00:19:52

Meeker:

OK.

02-00:19:52

Brandon:

We didn't have the laws then, and you know, police could arrest you, you know, in a moment. In fact, they didn't even let you walk in the white areas. Even in Westwood. You know, if we were to walk in the housing areas after dark, and you used to have to do it if you were dating a girl who lived in a home in Westwood. Boy, the police would be on your neck tailing you the whole time that you're there. So no, they felt that segregation was the law of the land. Yes. So they enforced it with impunity. So you only had a moral stand. And a lot of people had that. You know, I think it's amazing how that has been a feature of black people. Moral stand. We always feel it's fucking immoral. Damn, it's immoral. And you get that moral stand out of, you know, different kinds of experiences, you know, different kinds of background.

02-00:21:00

Meeker:

Well, speaking of that, were you active in a church? Was church life important to you and your family?

02-00:21:08

Brandon:

Super important in Panama. In Panama.

02-00:21:10

Meeker:

In Panama.

02-00:21:11

Brandon:

And in the States for a while. In Gary, Indiana. Overwhelmingly important. Our life began and ended with the First Baptist Church. But in Panama, I was an Episcopalian. I was an acolyte. My mother thought I would be a priest. Actually. I was so involved in the Episcopal Church of England in Panama. But then I was a member of different churches. In Los Angeles, when I lived there, Episcopalian, and Baptist with my aunt in Gary and Episcopalian background.

02-00:22:03

Meeker:

What was your social life like in college? Were you dating girls and everything?

02-00:22:10

Brandon: Yes, yes. I had a great social life, especially with the fraternity. I became the president of my fraternity.

02-00:22:15

Meeker: And what fraternity was that?

02-00:22:18

Brandon: Kappa Alpha Psi. The minute I joined my fraternity, my social life went sky high. That's been the genesis of my social life, my fraternity. And I flourished. Some of my great friends came out of my fraternity. I was as much a fraternity guy as any other, one of those guys out there who are always rah, rah and stuff. I loved the fraternity life, loved my friends, and loved our life. A lot of the great guys who came out of the army, a lot of the veterans that came out of World War II went back to school, were our fraternity big brothers. We learned a lot from them. They were just tremendous role models. L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley was a close mentor of mine. Was the president of our graduate chapter and then became the national president, you know, down the line. Especially when he took my pledge club under his wing, his umbrella. So we were very, very close to him, at his home all the time. So he considers us his mentees. Very close. People like that. So you got exposed to these wonderful, wonderful, crème of the crop kind of people in L.A. You know, from Tom Bradley on down. Tom Newsome, NAACP president— I think I told you he came out to meet with us. Guys like that. And a guy who was very, very important in L.A.— very big in the NAACP— Dr. H. Loren Miller. [He was] one of my inspirations to get into the NAACP— he won the first case that shut down restricted covenants in California, and then did it for the rest of the country. So all those guys were just right there, immediately available, all my fraternity brothers and friends— You know, moving on to make a big mark in Los Angeles— they were all around during that time. Mervyn Dymally was one of the close big brothers then, before becoming Lt. Governor of California.

02-00:24:41

Meeker: So socially, were there sororities that Kappa's kind of did events with and everything?

02-00:24:47

Brandon: Yes, yes, oh, yes. It was a big Greek group. Yes. Traditionally, it was there before we came along and it still continues to this day in different forms and still flourishes. But we were at a very high point. Like I say, Yvonne Braithwaite Burke was around in that time in one of the sororities, and Congresswoman Diane Watson— they were just big sorority people. Sorority life and fraternity life was the key to a type of L.A. black society. Almost everyone who was a college graduate, who had gone to college, belonged to a fraternity or sorority, and their events were the social life of the times. And then on campus, it also got me involved in my first political kind of life, because as the head of my fraternity, I was the interfraternity council

representative from my fraternity, so I began to meet with the other fraternity guys, and began to know them, and began to interact, plan some things together. We did a lot of joint things and exchanged things and that sort of thing. So that began to give me, you know, some— some exposure, yes.

02-00:26:11

Meeker:

Did you ever get involved in any like city council campaigns or anything like that at this point?

02-00:26:19

Brandon:

No, not in L.A. Not in L.A. But I tell you, 1952, when Eisenhower was running against Adlai Stevenson, that was my first ever campaign and I got involved in that. I was on the streets with a megaphone, on a truck. You know, vote for Adlai Stevenson, dah, dah, dah. You know, that was my first ever election. And a lot of that was because I felt that army experience so greatly. I wanted change. I didn't think Eisenhower had done enough in his leadership in the army and, you know, I wanted a different kind of leader. So I was out there on the streets in Watts, in my area. I forgot how I got into it. At the school, maybe, or something like that. You know, some campaign guy grabbed me and asked me would I volunteer. I says, "Yeah, I want to." So that was my very first— first involvement in political [action]. I didn't get back involved until 1969 when Tom Bradley first ran for mayor of Los Angeles. Didn't make it that first time. But I went down there and got involved for that.

02-00:27:44

Meeker:

What year did you graduate UCLA?

02-00:27:48

Brandon:

'57 was my last year there.

02-00:27:52

Meeker:

And with a degree in politics, right?

02-00:27:56

Brandon:

Political science.

02-00:27:56

Meeker:

Political science. What did you hope to do once you graduated? And what did you do?

02-00:28:02

Brandon:

I became a CORO Fellow in San Francisco. The CORO— I don't know if you know the CORO Foundation. CORO Foundation was a graduate internship in public affairs, and it's still going on, very big today. Senator Dianne Feinstein is one of the more notable graduates, and Jerry Lewis, Congressman Jerry Lewis preceded me, and he's the guy that recommended me for CORO. So I tried out for CORO. It was a big statewide thing. They only select 12 students throughout the entire state, every college student I political science is applying for it. And here I get selected out of this whole phenomenon of people. Always a big surprise to me, because the process is so rigorous and you had to

come up here to San Francisco to go through this all day rigmarole and running around and taking exams, doing these mind games and stuff. Really big into the game theory. So I didn't know a lot about what I wanted to do. I mean, I knew I wanted to qualify myself as something. I needed a job because I was now married and had my son Keith on the way. Needed to work and get some money and so I tried out for that. Jerry asked me. Jerry says, "Why don't you try for this." I'm sure he put in a big plug— anyway, I was chosen. So I came to San Francisco. Now they have the program in many parts of the country. They expanded to L.A. after a few years, but, at the time, San Francisco was the only program. There were only twelve of us selected from the entire state. So for a full year, you come up here and you learn to— how the city functions and what are the prevailing forces that makes the city function? Business, labor, government, communications, politics, finance, blah, blah, blah. So then you try to find out how these different sectors work by being assigned to a prominent organization or a company in that area, in that niche. You're also assigned to somebody in government, like a board supervisor or the head of the Department of Public Health, where I was. I was assigned to Gene Francis McCarthy, who was the chairman of the Board of Supervisors, and was the guy that really brought the Giants baseball team to San Francisco. So I participated with him.

02-00:30:44

Meeker:

He was the president of the board of supervisors at this point?

02-00:30:48

Brandon:

Yes. And in 1957 he was negotiating to bring the Giants out to San Francisco. He was the lead guy. Mayor Christopher gets the credit for bringing the Giants out but it was really Gene McCarthy who was from New York, who knew all those guys, and who put it together. And I was right there working with him as a CORO intern when all this was happening.

02-00:31:09

Meeker:

So you basically sort of worked with him in his office and just observed about how politics worked from his vantage point?

02-00:31:16

Brandon:

Right. This was one of my assignments. You know, you're getting about five, six, seven, eight, nine different assignments.

02-00:31:20

Meeker:

What were some of the other assignments that you had?

02-00:31:22

Brandon:

I was with Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. And you go in from the top down. I was with Justin Herman at the Redevelopment Agency.

02-00:31:31

Meeker:

Oh, really?

02-00:31:32

Brandon:

Worked with him. Was at Department of Public Health and met with the top director there, worked with him.

02-00:31:39

Meeker:

What were some of the issues in the Department of Public Health that you were exposed to? As best as you can recall.

02-00:31:52

Brandon:

I think there was some concern about juvenile health there, where they had to take the kids there and it wasn't working. They had to wait in the waiting rooms and all that kind of stuff. And it was a big health issue because there was some epidemic going on. So that was one of the issues. I know there was a public health issue around some sort of disease control that was going on around then— that was kind of interesting to see the grids that they put together, you know, and how they try to predict the spread of communicable disease, that sort of thing. I sat in on numerous budget meetings. So I remember seeing stuff like that. It sort of just depends on the top guys to whom you are assigned. Hopefully it was the top— the very, very top guy, but sometimes they assigned you to the vice-president, someone like that. You just sort of tag along and you'll see how they operate, how they function. So very— But to be able to be with a guy like Justin Herman, you know, he took you around personally.

02-00:32:59

Meeker:

Sure.

02-00:32:59

Brandon:

And to see how he operated, how he functions, conversations, you know, that kind of stuff.

02-00:33:04

Meeker:

Well, he's a notorious person in San Francisco history.

02-00:33:07

Brandon:

Yes, yes. Very notorious.

02-00:33:09

Meeker:

What was your experience of him? How did he operate?

02-00:33:11

Brandon:

He's a super bureaucrat. The guys that you really come across occasionally— Dick Sklar, for example, with George Moscone— you know, people like that who were just super minds, super strong, super strong stamina. You know, minds are just [revving sound.] You know, just strong minds, always on it. They maximize their time so efficiently and they just know... You know, just have a knowingness about their operation and they're really strong forces in the places they occupy. They really fill it up.

02-00:34:04

Meeker:

Did he give you a sense of what his agenda was? Because he's been really reviled in San Francisco history for removing and tearing down homes.

02-00:34:15

Brandon:

Well, I knew him before he even went into redevelopment. I knew him before... There was an agency called HHFA, Housing Home Finance Agency, and he was a lead guy there. That's how they got him. So when they started, this redevelopment agency in San Francisco, they got him out of the federal government. So he came from a federal government background. He was one of those guys that helped formulate the ideas for redevelopment. He had a clear notion of what was wanted by the government, what they wanted to do. I think where he got caught in the flack was in the toll in human costs, which wasn't a part of the equation when the government was sort of putting the problem together. I mean, they just saw it as a kind of physical thing. You know, you clear it out, you put people in other places, you put in something more feasible for the community. In the meantime, you think you're helping people, but you don't really see the human cost to minorities. If you know Washington, you can do all these things without having to go through locally. And that's what they knew. He got it done anyway, he got the money for it. So that's one of the reasons why he was able to be so successful but so reviled.

02-00:36:15

Meeker:

Interesting. That's really helpful. I've never heard him described in that way. So at the end of this year-long fellowship, did you have a sense that you wanted to— what you wanted to do or did an opportunity open up for you?

02-00:36:30

Brandon:

Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. What happened was when I finished, they were trying to get me several jobs and one was to be the secretary to a university president in the South someplace. Yes, Donald Fletcher, who had started CORO, was going to put me in this great new place. So anyway, he also wanted me to be Ralph Bunch's secretary— assistant— something. Go on his staff. And where I wanted to go was to go to Dean Witter. I wanted to learn the stock business and find out what that was all about. Then there was a job in Seaside. They were starting a redevelopment company and the redevelopment director got sick and they wanted me to come in and take it over until he came back and then stay on as his assistant. And that's one of the jobs I almost took. My wife wanted me to take that. Well, she supported me in whatever I wanted to do, and that's a job that was very appealing. I was really interested in that.

02-00:37:50

Meeker:

Seaside is in Southern California?

02-00:37:52

Brandon:

In Monterey. Next door to Monterey.

02-00:37:53

Meeker:

Oh, OK.

02-00:37:55

Brandon:

The job I took, though, was a job I really wanted, and that was to work for the NAACP. I did a study for Frank Williams, the West Coast Regional Director, who was just a magnificent guy. He's dead now, but he was a supreme guy. Supreme. He's one of those guys like Justin Herman— we were talking about— really just the Tiger Woods or Michael Jordan of their time.

02-00:38:22

Meeker:

OK. And what was his field of expertise?

02-00:38:24

Brandon:

He was a lawyer from back East and he was— he was the regional director of the West Coast region.

02-00:38:29

Meeker:

Of the Western states?

02-00:38:30

Brandon:

Yes, of the eight Western states. He was the NAACP director. So for my last study at CORO, I did a study for him, for the NAACP. It was a kind of a study of voting patterns in San Francisco and the Bay Area— it was around fair employment issues and some of those kind of issues that the NAACP was really taking a leadership in trying to get legislated. And so we were trying to figure out where the votes were and comparing it. And they were looking at voting patterns in other parts of the state where we had people who were in opposition to the FEPC and the fair housing law that they had been trying to push through the legislature for a few years. So I was pinpointing all those guys and we were looking at voting patterns for those guys. I did so in my CORO report. So when I finished that, Frank asked me to work for him. I thought it was great. I mean, just to be asked by a guy like this in the first place, you know. But the pay was so lousy. Pay was only like \$400 a month or something like that, yes. And I thought, and I thought, and I talked to my wife and the whole bit, you know. Anyway, it was the greatest time in my life. You know, I worked for two, three years for the NAACP. It was probably one of the greatest times I've ever had.

02-00:40:10

Meeker:

And the job description was?

02-00:40:13

Brandon:

I was a field secretary. Frank Williams was secretary at that time, but that's because Roy Wilkins called himself executive secretary. So the guys were regional field secretaries. But he was a regional director and I was like the regional assistant, the field— I was the field assistant, the field director, the field assistant. So I took care of all the branches in the eight western states and kept in contact with them. Knew who their officers were, was able to communicate and go down there personally, get them what they needed, get information, publicize stuff, you know, incidents that were happening. We were like the control center of all the branches in the eight western regions.

Mostly in California, Seattle and Portland, Reno, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, and Tucson. Then a large number of branches in California.

02-00:41:18

Meeker:

So you said you were in the position for three years? Is that correct?

02-00:41:22

Brandon:

Yes, just over two years. Between two and three years, yes.

02-00:41:25

Meeker:

Do you recall some of the big projects that you worked on?

02-00:41:29

Brandon:

Well, the biggest project I worked on was getting FEPC— getting Fair Employment Practices and the Fair Housing Law passed in the state legislature. When I came on, this was going on. The NAACP was leading the fight to get this legislation out of committee and passed. Previous legislation was being beaten down. It wasn't getting out of committees.

02-00:41:50

Meeker:

The Unruh legislation?

02-00:41:53

Brandon:

Well, the Unruh bill came on later. Fair Employment was the big one and Fair Housing was second. The Unruh Civil Rights bill was already in place. It penalized for discrimination in public accommodations, but the maximum penalty was only \$500. So when Unruh came along, we expanded that to a larger amount and expanded the penalties and gave the bill some teeth. That's what Unruh did with that public accommodations bill. So my job was to organize and coordinate our support through our branches. We had bills going on in a lot of different states, in Washington, Oregon, Utah, and so my job, beyond other organizational stuff, was to organize that, set up our communications piece, let people know what's happening, get them the bill information directly, then meet with the authors of the bill and the legislative committees. Then I began to testify before committees. I did it in Salt Lake, I did it in Portland, and then in Sacramento— then in Sacramento for legislative committees on our bills.

02-00:43:14

Meeker:

So the content of your testimony would focus on, I guess, the rationale for the bill and then what the bill was supposed to accomplish?

02-00:43:22

Brandon:

Well, when they got into that, I always had people doing it. I was the one organizing it. And if no one was there, then I would— you know, because I wasn't the context guy. I was this little guy supporting everybody. I was like the little support system, making things happen and being Frank's key guy, his right-hand guy. But learning everything and having this great background and being able to make things happen and that sort of thing. So I would write. I mean, if there was a need for somebody to write in something, you know, I

could do all that and get back to people. I could call NAACP attorney Nathaniel Colley, who was our big lawyer up in Sacramento. And he was the guy who wrote the NAACP bill. And then Byron Rumford and Gus Hawkins were the two assembly legislators pushing the bill. So I was working— I wasn't— that's where I lived, actually, in their offices, working on this. It was a day-to-day thing. You know, getting the right words with the legislative offices and getting it written well. You know, getting it— circling all the girls who were going to sponsor, joining sponsors, moving the bill from committee, from subcommittee to other committees. So I'm the one that's tracking all that and making that happen, and contacting the right people at the right time, to get things going.

02-00:44:44
Meeker:

So in essence, you'd be taking the bill to a legislator from Southern Cal— San Diego or something, let's just say, and having him then read the bill and say, "Oh, this is great except you have to change the language here," and then you would bring that kind of information back to Rumford's office, where he's the one that's sponsoring the bill?

02-00:45:01
Brandon:

I was a part of that process, but they would kind of do that themselves. I'm a part of the discussion. I mean, if I recognize when I'm in too deep—that's my talent—when I'm beyond my bounds. You know, whenever I need the right people to come together. I'm not trying to take authorship of this thing. I don't want to write anything, actually. I'm just trying to get the right people to make it happen. So if that was going to happen, I may bring the two guys together. I may be the guy that sets up the contact, the call. I'm going to say, "Well, let's go over there and do it." I'm the guy that just facilitates everything to make it happen. Sometimes the secretaries do it, so I'll tell the secretaries, well, do this and get that going. Because sometimes it's just not important, but it has to be done and the secretaries know when it's important. In fact, when I hung out in the offices, I really hung out with the secretaries because that's really where all the stuff is that moves out of there. So I was in Sacramento a lot. I'd go up there every day. I was having my daughter Kimberly then, so I was up there, coming back every day, that sort of thing. And then also taking care of branch affairs.

We had to do a lot of going to certain branch meetings around the state whenever there's some sort of issue. Often they would ask us to come and speak. If they were having a special meeting or that sort of thing, they often needed someone from the regional office. Our presence was always a big thing, and Frank was huge, huge, huge, so just being a part of his team made me a part of that circle. They saw me as a guy who brought the region to the branch. So that, as well. Then a part of my role: updating them about where we were. It was a big part of my thing and if they wanted information, they'd ask me to come down, to just come and speak on the status of the bills, where they were, what we needed to be doing, who was doing what, the importance

of it, you know, what this means, what we're trying to do. I talked about the commissions, sitting on the commission, making discrimination illegal in California, that sort of thing.

02-00:47:26

Meeker: You were living in San Francisco then?

02-00:47:29

Brandon: Yes, yes.

02-00:47:31

Meeker: Where in San Francisco were you living? Do you recall?

02-00:47:33

Brandon: I was living in the Oceanside area during that time. I took on Mayor Christopher once. That was my first press release. I was bringing it to Frank's attention that this discrimination was going on, and it was a big issue when all this was happening. He said, "Write it up. Send a press release."

02-00:48:03

Meeker: What was the press release about regarding Christopher?

02-00:48:06

Brandon: Oh, I'm trying to remember what the mayor did. But it made front page. I wrote that press release and it was the front page of the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*— whatever the morning paper at that time. First time I'd ever did anything like that, and there it was. It just showed the power of the NAACP. The NAACP was very powerful in the media. Super powerful, beyond its— not so much beyond its reality. Until Martin Luther King, the NAACP's name was magic, and it would bring out the press for most anything. So that's when I began to realize the power of the NAACP joined with the power of the press.

02-00:48:59

Meeker: This was also the time, the late '50s, when the Democratic Party in California becomes powerful again with the election of Brown, and the California Democratic Committee becomes like a new sort of power structure in California, and no one loses, and then you start to have the beginning of the Burton machine in San Francisco and everything. What role did the NAACP, from your vantage point, play in this reemergence of Democratic politics in California?

02-00:49:45

Brandon: A huge role, huge role. I think a lot of the players came together. A lot of that ambience and relationship came together around the Fair Employment Practices Law because all those guys were joined in and supportive. That's where our base was, from that progressive new group. Phil Burton, primarily, was one of the guys whose office I worked out. He was big on civil rights. And later Secretary of Defense and Assemblyman Casper Weinberg was a Republican, but are the guys I'm working with. We were part of putting all of this together— and even Casper Weinberg had a Young Republicans group in

San Francisco, which was very powerful, and even they were liberal, you know, kind of. They were supporting our Fair Employment Practices and Fair Housing Bills. So that was really an organizing piece that brought a lot of these guys together really early in the gestation of what was supposed to come later on. This is how Willie Brown got into office when the CDC began to take on the existing structure that Phil was building. So those were the younger guys that were pushing our common agenda. Old-time guys like Ed Gaffney were supporting our bill because he was out of San Francisco, but other guys like him from other counties were the ones who were opposing us. So our mission was to get guys like that out of legislature, because they had been trying to pass an FEP and Fair Housing bill for every recent legislative term but wouldn't come out of the Ways and Means and other committees because those conservatives who were the chairs wouldn't let the bills out of committee.

02-00:51:27

Meeker: Do you remember who that was?

02-00:51:30

Brandon: I'm sure it's in the record there.

02-00:51:31

Meeker: Yes, sure.

02-00:51:31

Brandon: Somewhere, you know.

02-00:51:33

Meeker: Was he a Democrat or a Republican?

02-00:51:34

Brandon: He was a Democrat, but he's one of the old guard. He just stuck there. You know, committee chair from a Northern county. He was there forever in the old legislature, and his word was law, and if he didn't want it, it wasn't going to come out. So it never came out. So it goes there— that's the way it happened. It wasn't until Unruh came along and changed that whole system. But he was there when I was there, too. So I was working with Unruh on these— and this is how the Unruh Public Accommodations bill came along, because I was doing these other bills and he says, "I want a bill, too." And he took this Public Accommodations bill and became a player in that package. So— but you're right. See, Governor Pat Brown came in and began to influence the whole legislative playing field and gave Unruh more power. Unruh then began to become strong and powerful, and he began to be able to tell the committee chairmen what they had to do. So we began to have more support and all of a sudden, Assemblyman Gus Hawkins and Byron Rumford have a chance to get their bills passed. Now, they'd been switching authorship of the bills each year. One would do Fair Housing one year, one would do Fair Employment one year. So this year, ironically, the Fair Employment bill was Rumford's, and Gus Hawkins had originally introduced the Fair Employment

bill. It was really his first agenda. But anyway, Hawkins got the Fair Housing bill. So those were the two bills. Then there was the Unruh Public Accommodations bill, and then there was a bill that Senator Eugene McAteer did, which was the anti-miscegenation bill, because the ban on inter-racial marriages was still on the books, even though it was unconstitutional. Gene McAteer wanted the bill, so that was his bill. So we had this package of four bills going through. And so I was a part of putting all this kind of stuff together. So, yes, I think the politics of San Francisco was greatly influenced around that, because that coalition that was really moving this agenda really strongly out of San Francisco more so than L.A. The base was really there. A guy from the Jewish Labor Committee named Bill Becker, who a major part of this inner clique, played a big part making all of this happen.

.2-00:53:53

Meeker:

Can you describe him?

02-00:53:57

Brandon:

I guess he's Irish and he's a Labor guy. So I guess he's one of those types that just loves the labor movement. You know, it was just his whole life. He just loved to be around people of race. His friends were like Frank and the San Francisco leadership. That was his thing. He was very much at home, very much jovial, very—very—very unusual guy who was just free of all those kinds of racial hang-ups. And who brought a lot of organizing and charting skills to what he did. He gets in there and he makes things happen. He pulls the pieces together. So he was a part of it. We had Paul Jacobs to the left and the right as well—it was all those guys of which the NAACP mission was a part. Also people were writing on it, and names of prominent supporters were used to get [more people] involved. And organizations were having banquets all over the state on FEP and you'd always have these people coming to speak. Even people like McAteer were there speaking. So we were trying to build up a whole operation to make this happen. So I think that that was a part of what made this group come together. And Phil Burton made it happen around politics, these legislative and other issues, and made this his issue also. You know, the issues of equal rights, fair employment and fair housing, and civil rights for minorities in San Francisco. So the NAACP agenda was a nucleus, among others, preceded the formation of the new Democratic politics—the cloud before the star began to form, that I can think of.

02-00:56:11

Meeker:

Yes, because it's interesting. Looking back to the 1950s just before these changes started to happen. And you kind of look at the characteristics of people in the different parties—I guess Milton Marks probably came along a little bit later, but some of the Republicans—

02-00:56:29

Brandon:

No, he was there. Milton—yes, right there.

02-00:56:31

Meeker:

OK. You know, some of the Republicans like him were kind of liberal and also think like Earl Warren right? And then you have a lot of the Democrats who are like the old school Democrats, who are much more conservative on social issues. And so, I mean, it seems to me what you're saying is that one of the defining characteristics of this new generation of Democrats was their racial liberalism?

02-00:56:57

Brandon:

Um-hmm, um-hmm. Um-hmm.

02-00:56:59

Meeker:

Interesting. And you were really there to witness it all. That's great. It looks like we're about to run out of time on this tape and so, obviously, I'm going to want to come back if that's all right with you.

02-00:57:14

Brandon:

Yes, sure. Yes, sure.

02-00:57:17

Meeker:

And then we can really start to get into the EEOC stuff.

02-00:57:21

Brandon:

OK. Right, right. Right.

02-00:57:23

Meeker:

You never know what's going to happen—obviously meeting a new person is like going to a new country and there's sometimes a lot of landscape you don't know. Is that all right with you that we do this?

02-00:57:36

Brandon:

Absolutely, absolutely.

02-00:57:39

Meeker:

OK.

[End of Interview]

Interview #2: 02-15-2008

Begin Audio File 3 02-15-2008.wav

03-00:00:00

Meeker: Today is the 15th of February 2008. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Everett Brandon for the Politics, Law, and Human Rights Oral History Project, and this is our second interview. So we basically ended up last time, last Friday, and you were telling me about the work that you were doing for the NAACP in Sacramento. And that work ended in 1960, is that correct?

03-00:00:36

Brandon: Right.

03-00:00:40

Meeker: And then you didn't start with the EOC until 1964.

03-00:00:45

Brandon: Right.

03-00:00:46

Meeker: So I'm wondering if you can fill in the gap for me and talk a little bit about why it was that you ended your work with the NAACP in Sacramento and then what you went onto and what sort of work you did over the next four years.

03-00:00:59

Brandon: Yes. In 1959, we passed some—you know, some of the major legislation that the NAACP was working on. You know, a lot of the successes had been reached, which is kind of unfortunate for things happening that way. You reach a success, then you let it go. And there should have been a follow through to make those programs work more effectively. Frank Williams, who was the director, left to go with Stanley Mosk, who was attorney general then. Frank went to set up a constitutional law department for that office.

03-00:01:46

Meeker: A constitutional law department meaning within the state government?

03-00:01:50

Brandon: Within the state attorney general's office.

03-00:01:51

Meeker: OK, all right.

03-00:01:54

Brandon: So I was looking for something else and wanted to go into the stock business and went to work for United Mutual Funds, and then I also went with a new stock firm. A group of young guys were starting a new firm called Schaefer, Lowe and McCamant.

03-00:02:23

Meeker: Can you repeat that?

03-00:02:24

Brandon: Schaefer, Lowe and McCamant which was a new start-up. So I went with them and I was doing that and sort of enjoying that, and during the course of doing that, I was downtown and a friend of mine—Dr. Henry Lucas, he was one of my clients. He used to come down and always lamented the fact that there were no black people in downtown San Francisco. So we started an organization that we were going to bring black people to downtown San Francisco and we were going to try to get them employed and try to bring businesses down there. The organization was called PACT. They're still in existence today. We just celebrated our 40th anniversary a couple of years ago.

03-00:03:12

Meeker: What's it called? PAC?

03-00:03:13

Brandon: P-A-C-T.

03-00:03:16

Meeker: And what did that stand for?

03-00:03:16

Brandon: Plan of Action for Challenging Times. So we were down there trying to get people employed, and I knew a lot about the new Fair Employment law, which nobody knew about, and I was telling employers about the law and how they need to be expanding their employee base, that sort of thing. We were getting a lot of people employed and it became this huge thing to do part time.

03-00:03:43

Meeker: What were some of the companies that were actively working with you and then maybe what were some of the companies that were resistant to working with you? To the best of your memory.

03-00:03:53

Brandon: Well, the biggest impact was on banks and department stores. The banks-- Bank of America, Wells Fargo--at that time they had no black employees, and all of a sudden--they were just beginning to open up. And President Lyndon Johnson also had these "Plans for Progress" programs going on and so businesses were now coming in, and were now looking for black employees. They didn't know where they were—where they lived, didn't know how to get in touch with them. So this is what PACT did. We became the bridge, you know, between the community and the businesses. So I was doing that, trying to be a stockbroker, and the whole bit, and then PACT began to get funding. So in 1964, Dr. Lucas, who started the organization with me, and I went back to Washington to raise funds. We were trying to get some funds to start small businesses, and they had started a six-by-six loan program back in Philadelphia that was getting funded by Washington, so I took a look at that, and also went to Washington to see if we could get similar funding out here

on the West Coast. So we did that, went back there. It was very successful. Our Congressman, Phil Burton, was very helpful in opening these doors for us. So when I was back there, we were looking for business development funds. When we were back there, somebody says, "Well, why don't you go on over to OEO, because they're just starting up and they've got a section D in the law that talks about economic development." So I got an appointment over there. When I got over there, I walked, you know, right into Sargent Shriver. And they were all waiting for me and so I got there and he says, "Oh, what's going on in San Francisco?" And I told him about our little poverty pockets and the need for the program. So he says, "Well, you go out there and you tell Mayor John Shelley I said to get off the dime."

03-00:06:08
Meeker:

What did he mean by that?

03-00:06:11
Brandon:

To get into the program. Well, nobody knew about the program. It was a top down program. Nobody knew anything about OEO, you know, but they were trying to get started and got their offices going. They were just bringing new furniture in. They were just running around, trying to make a program and they had this whole country to deal with. They had no idea what was going on out there. So to see a real live person was like, "Wow." So I came back and I called Mayor Shelley and I said, "Sargent Shriver says to tell you to get off the dime and get this program started." So anyway, we got together. He asked me to meet with him, and I was telling him about the whole thing. I mean, he knew nothing. He was in Congress, but he knew nothing about this program. So he says, "Well, OK, why don't we see what we can do on this." So he asked me to help and I just started helping—start trying to put something together and get it going. In the meantime, I was doing my other work and doing this. So we finally come up with how we're going to plan for this poverty program. We selected the committee of folks representing areas all over town. And we developed these task forces to look into subjects like health, education, employment, childcare, all those basic categories. So we had a whole team of people out there coming up with ideas and this sort of thing. And in the meantime, somebody had to make it work, to make it happen. So Shelley was at the point of wanting to get that person. I wanted to get money out of it for my program. I wanted to be one of the applicants for the program, so that's why I was sticking in there, you know, trying...

03-00:08:31
Meeker:

You didn't want to be working on the inside of the program—

03-00:08:32
Brandon:

Right, right.

03-00:08:33
Meeker:

—but you wanted to benefit—you wanted your organization to benefit from it?

03-00:08:36

Brandon:

Right. I wanted my organization to be one of the clients, to be funded for the program for economic development. So that was my big interest, the economic development part. So then it came that they had to find somebody to run this thing. I didn't want to do it but my wife insisted I do it.

03-00:09:09

Meeker:

Once it was offered to you?

03-00:09:10

Brandon:

Yes, once it was offered to me. And then I didn't think anybody else could do it but me, you know, because—primarily because of my civil rights background and I thought this had to be a civil rights thing, it had to be that civil rights momentum. And I didn't think any other community could—I think the black community had to be the heart of it. It had to be totally inclusive, but at that point it had to have that civil rights drive behind it. So I sort of knew that if I didn't take it, it wasn't going to work well.

03-00:09:46

Meeker:

Meaning that Shelley would have given the job to someone who didn't have the civil rights background?

03-00:09:49

Brandon:

Right. Right, yes. And there were other individuals that I knew he was considering.

03-00:09:56

Meeker:

So—

03-00:09:56

Brandon:

And of all of them, I figured that it would be a mistake to have to bring other people in at that point.

03-00:10:12

Meeker:

Do you know—can you remember some of the names that were under consideration, just to get an idea of what kind of people he was also looking at?

03-00:10:23

Brandon:

It wasn't that--They were highly intelligent and competent, and their leadership was probably just as strong as anybody else's. So I just thought it needed a certain kind of leadership, and I'd seen such leadership. By this time, I'd worked at the NAACP. I was very close to Roy Wilkins. I knew Thurgood Marshall. So I knew what leadership was all about, and I thought that leadership was very, very important in the organization.

03-00:11:04

Meeker:

Because it was going to come under a lot of scrutiny and there was going to be a lot of people wanting different things for that?

03-00:11:11

Brandon:

Right, and it had to be formed. It was going to bringing in a whole new bureaucracy, so it had to be formed and put together. It had to have a certain thrust, you had to have a certain kind of people working for it. You had to understand what the law was so you could really implement it in the most effective way, you know, for the community. And then you had to have a sense of community and vision. And you had to have a theme. My theme was I was going to get this money into the people. So how are we going to do that? What's the avenue for doing that? And the avenue was a community action program part because that was where we just had the wide-open opportunity to develop community action in a way that seemed to work to achieve the goals of community participation.

03-00:12:11

Meeker:

So I want to ask a few follow-up questions, first about PACT. What originally sent you back to DC was seeking some grant money for economic development.

03-00:12:22

Brandon:

Right.

03-00:12:24

Meeker:

Who—what—how had PACT previously been funded before moving—going back to DC? Were they individual donors or the Ford Foundation or something like that, as far as you can recall?

03-00:12:38

Brandon:

Dr. Lucas and I just going into downtown offices and introducing ourselves and trying to talk to the highest person in the building, in the office, and trying to talk to the about hiring minorities, and offering to find minorities for the positions. We would invariably get a position, or positions, and we'd go out and find the right person for that position. Very often we'd find a person who was in one job, take that person into a higher job, and then find somebody for that job. So we were just doing this—started out doing it on Wednesdays. This was Dr. Lucas's day off, and we'd just take off Wednesdays doing this sort of thing and it just began to build up. In those days, when corporations wanted to find out what was happening about a community, they'd just call one or two or three community leaders, and Dr. Dan Collins was one of those. He was just a major community and state figure. And Dr. Lucas was definitely a partner of Dan Collins.

03-00:14:02

Meeker:

It sounds like a lot of the physicians were the leaders, because there's also Dr. Goodlett, as well.

03-00:14:03

Brandon:

Oh, yes. Well, professional people, yes. Yes. Professional black people were very scarce and all of them invariably were called upon to be leaders. And some were outstanding, very successful leaders. Yes, Dr. Collins, Dr. Goodlett

were just supreme. They were almost as significant as the poverty program, in terms of impact on the city. So PACT began to-- We got our first funding from Liz Heller. Liz was a friend of mine, and I'd met her during my CORO days. She was very interested in what we were doing and she gave us our first \$5,000. In fact, we went to Washington with some of that. But then when we began to deal with the Bank of Americas, and Wells Fargo and the department stores, the insurance companies, telephone company—well, the telephone company was the leader. Telephone companies and life insurance companies were the only people hiring blacks in downtown. We began to move them to expand and to do more and that sort of thing. So we decided it was getting beyond us, so let's open an office downtown San Francisco. So we went to this guy that—what was that address? Is it—it's where the Chamber of Commerce building sits now. 555 Market. Is that right? 555 Market Street. Building was owned by a guy named Paul Rude. We told Mr. Rude our story, so he gave us this room for \$150 a month, and so Lucas and I brought in his card table and the card table chairs and we went to the telephone company and tried to get a telephone for no deposit down, because in those days, you had to have a deposit down. So we got a no deposit down telephone and got that installed. We both put up \$75 each to get it started and that was the start of PACT.

03-00:16:29

Meeker:

And so it sounds like most of the work that you were first doing had—was on a very personal basis and had to do with creating better job opportunities for blacks in San Francisco, particularly in downtown. You mentioned economic development was something you wanted to get out of the East Coast or the DC experience. Can you define what you had envisioned by economic development at that point in time?

03-00:16:59

Brandon:

Economic development was getting money into the people. My theory was that if you can get money into the people's hands, they'll do the best job. People just didn't have money. They just didn't have access to money, didn't have access to the mainstream to get money. And that's my sense of what's happening to Black America. The squeeze—they'll squeeze us out of the money system. I've seen blacks get into the money system, they become middle class and they become free, the people who make the system work. But the underclass just don't get that access, and so if you can just get them into jobs and get some kind of way to get them into the money stream... And this is what happened. People who did get into that money stream as a result of the poverty program just jumped into the middle class and into the jobs that had sustainability, to be able to retire and have successful lives. That's one of the great contributions of the poverty program development of the management class--the people that came in that were employed in some sort of administrative level. This is where they got their first non-blue-collar start.

03-00:18:19

Meeker: So getting money into the black community was—it sounds to me like what you're saying is first and foremost getting people jobs so they would have a salary. So you're also talking about getting money to people to start small businesses and so forth?

03-00:18:38

Brandon: Yes, yes. Yes.

03-00:18:40

Meeker: OK. And so the idea is that PACT would have proposals for people to start small businesses and...

03-00:18:49

Brandon: Yes, yes. Yes. Yes.

03-00:18:51

Meeker: OK. Now, in looking at the notes, once OEO is passed, once the law that creates OEO is passed, it's a really quick period of time between that and when the office in San Francisco gets started. So you must have had a really busy couple of months going from—I mean, kind of like your description of Sargent Shriver and the OEO in DC or, you know, people are moving in furniture and they're trying to figure out what to do. From what my notes say, the law was passed in August of 1964.

03-00:19:29

Brandon: Right, right.

03-00:19:30

Meeker: And it sounds like San Francisco makes their first application for monies by October. So we're talking like two or three months. I know that you provide a little bit of description of it, but I'm wondering if maybe you can go into a little more detail for me. I know it's more than 40 years ago, but the process by which, you know, you came back and then, you know here you are sort of—I mean, I know that you've explained it somewhat already, but the process by which that application is—that initial application is written that deals with all sorts of things, including the community action programs, which is really sort of getting monies directly to the communities in San Francisco. Actually, let me back up a little bit. Had you had any interaction with Shelly, Mayor Shelley before your meetings in DC and then coming back?

03-00:20:44

Brandon: Nothing on this level. When I was a CORO intern, they were always bringing in these guests. We were meeting everybody, so I met Shelley and Casper Weinberger and all those people through CORO in the beginning. So he knew I was a CORO person and then I met him in my NAACP dealings and that sort of thing, maybe at some gathering where all of the dignitaries would be and I would be one of the NAACP people making it happen and that sort of thing. So he kind of knew me in a way. And then I was writing a column in the *Sun Reporter* on investments.

03-00:21:38

Meeker:

Oh, OK.

03-00:21:40

Brandon:

I wrote a lot after that. I think from that investment column, people remember me more for that than almost anything. So he knew me, but not on that level and we never had an extended conversation. He knew me through my associations with knowing some of the other guys that he knew.

03-00:22:02

Meeker:

OK, so maybe as an emerging leader in the black community?

03-00:22:05

Brandon:

Probably, probably, probably.

03-00:22:07

Meeker:

You know, also during this period of time in the '63, '64 period, San Francisco is really experiencing its biggest civil rights activism, probably in its history, with the protest at the Auto Row and the hotels, and so forth. And then I know that NAACP and CORE were both involved in these. So this is going to be a long question. So I guess the first question I want to ask is about NAACP and CORE. The way that historians usually talk about it is that NAACP sort of is—by this point of time, is beginning to be seen as a conservative organization whereas CORE is where all the new work is being done. From your vantage point, what were the different characteristics of the organizations?

03-00:23:07

Brandon:

That's true. I think that's very true. The real live energy that was coming up in the country was coming out of young rebels who did not want the restriction of the NAACP or taking leadership from somebody down there. They're more freelancing and they wanted to be their own spokesperson. They didn't want anybody speaking for them and they wanted power, and they wanted power from people who gave power. They didn't want intermediaries and that sort of thing. And they didn't want the organizational restrictions of president, vice-president, and all those kinds of things under which the NAACP had to function--motions and voting. You know, that was not what was happening. So they wanted to talk to the power structure. And they had their own demands. And so, yes, that was very much a part of what was the whole picture--those dynamics. PACT was started in those dynamics because we were both a part of the civil rights scene--Willie Brown and Doug Stewart--a whole bunch of us started picketing at Woolworth's. So we were picketing. I was going to start my business, and I was starting PACT. So that was our world, yes. That was the background. And then John Kennedy was killed in '63. My friend Medgar Evers was killed in '63. So that was the backdrop, with all that going on.

03-00:24:53

Meeker:

So it's interesting, the way you talk about it. You were involved both in NAACP and in CORE. You were a stockbroker and protesting on the streets. It sounds like not the way historians usually think about it. It's sort of like NAACP *versus* CORE, not NAACP *and* CORE.

03-00:25:14

Brandon:

I was not a member of CORE. I was not a member of CORE. NAACP was strong at that time, and there was just a history of people joining, some because of family ties, for one thing. But, you know, NAACP had its own draw and appeal. But the new young generation was just in a different mode and CORE appealed to them and CORE had a national structure, so that gave people something to tie into. And to have national connections, and to be able to get together nationally. Of course, that was a big part of it. There were a lot of little insurgences coming up all the time. But what you needed was a network and CORE offered that network without a lot of controls. Well, it didn't seem that way, so the guys could do a lot. But—yes, but it was a fight for who sits at the table. Who sits at the table and these guys wanted to be a part of that. And so the divisions-- I knew James Farmer well. And James Farmer came out of the NAACP and there was—maybe there was—maybe a tension existed the whole way. Maybe they saw CORO as James starting another thing. So that may have been a part of the whole history, because there wasn't a lot of-- Except for at the top level when Farmer used to come to the NAACP meetings and national conventions at the other levels. You didn't see CORE and NAACP meeting and working, that sort of thing. The CORO guys developed this part. But most of them probably had history in the NAACP because, before organizations like CORO, the NAACP was everything. Young guys came out and wanted more. They wanted something done differently. Because the guys that were out there being the new activists were guys who had some kind of exposure in the effort to fight in the fight.

03-00:27:48

Meeker:

So the picture you're drawing, it sounds like, from your perspective, CORE was complimentary to, although different from NAACP.

03-00:27:57

Brandon:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

03-00:27:58

Meeker:

As opposed to kind of being in conflict with NAACP?

03-00:28:06

Brandon:

I can't think of anything that stands out that would make a mark to actually say that. I think on an individual level, that may be the case, but once you had national powers necessarily, you had cooperation. So at some levels, maybe where the power structure wasn't doing what people wanted, there were some animosities. And some—and there were—and animosities are very, very strong. I'm not sure it was necessarily CORO, NAACP, or NAACP this or

that. People had strong animosities in those days and it could be for, you know, different reasons.

03-00:28:52

Meeker:

From what I understand, in response to the protest at Auto Row and so forth, Shelley established the Human Rights Commission in San Francisco. Did you have any role in that?

03-00:29:06

Brandon:

Yes, a little. Yes, yes, some. That came out of the Council for Civic Unity and Ed Howden I think, was the guy who was at the Council for Civic Unity. And the Council for Civic Unity were the guys who were really pushing it. They were the guys who were really leading it. The mayor always gets the credit for all these things. Yes, the Council for Civic Unity was made up of community leadership with a downtown base. Dan Koshland from Levi Strauss was a super leader, the best man in San Francisco. He was the leader—the force behind the Council for Civil Unity. He also gave it soul, you know, through him. His total support. So the council was a very viable organization at the time because the City of San Francisco didn't have a Human Rights Council that served that purpose, whatever the Human Rights Commission tries to do now. This is what the Council for Civil Unity was all about, bringing different groups together and solving problems through dialogue and through proactiveness and dealing with the issues and advising the proper people. So as I said, Dan Koshland played a big role involving the business community. And it was at that time prestigious to be on the Council. And I was on the Council for Civic Unity. And I got to know Dan Koshland very well. But when I eventually became exec director [of the EOC], he was one of the guys that was supporting my doing so. I think the mayor called him. So yes, it came out, it emerged, you know, the whole idea, the whole Human Rights Commission and the whole drive for it. Human Rights Commissions were being formed in different parts of the country. LA had done it and Portland had it, and New York and Denver. So this was our argument and our research, bringing all of this stuff together to the mayor's office. So he did that. I think he appointed this guy that was the secretary—former secretary of labor, James Mitchell. I don't know if you've come across his name.

03-00:31:57

Meeker:

Becker?

03-00:31:59

Brandon:

No. I'll probably remember his name. I think he had been a very big name, and he was at Crown Zellerbach. He was a vice president at Crown Zellerbach, so they brought him in. So Shelley gave him the task of bringing this all together and forming the commission and that sort of thing. And he did so with the Council for Civil Unity and coming to the black community, the black leadership there. Then he made his recommendation and Shelley appointed the Human Rights Commission, and delegated it, and whatever

authority it was given, that sort of thing. That's how that got that started. That's my recollection of that, how it went.

03-00:32:46

Meeker:

One of the things that you expressed regret about was that after you had passed the laws in Sacramento, it sort of seemed like people thought the task had been achieved when in reality there was a lot of work to be done to ensure implementation of these new laws. Did it seem to you like the Human Rights Commission was being established to accomplish that task or was it something else?

03-00:33:13

Brandon:

No, that went on sort of individually. And it did a more effective job than I think people thought—because people didn't see it as a solution. I mean, that was what the majority of the public wanted. This is not what the black community—they didn't see it as any major answer. So I think in that sense it performed better than people's expectation, solely because of its leadership. Solely because Ed Howden and Frank—what was Frank's name? Guy who came after him were the leaders in this whole field of...

03-00:33:59

Meeker:

Frank Quinn?

03-00:34:00

Brandon:

Frank Quinn. And they—Frank—Ed Howden became the head of fair employment commission at the statewide level and Frank Quinn just moved right on after him. So they—it was because of their leadership that the earlier commissions were very successful, did an effective job. You know, had a big role in the community. Became a big credit to Shelley, because of him having established it. So they were, I think, as successful as any other organization. I was speaking primarily in terms of the black community, because—and I feel this way about *Brown v. Board of Education*. If we had had a plan. After that, we just sort of let it go and—I was just thinking about all of the major laws and how we sort of reach it and then we kind of exhale. And what it needs is just the same kind of continuation to really put it into place and make it happen, make it work.

03-00:35:11

Meeker:

Back to the establishment of the EOC in San Francisco. So the law is passed in August and, you know, Shelley's got to do something and it sounds like he's not doing anything and then you meet with him and then there begins to be some movement toward submitting the San Francisco application. Could you describe to the best of your knowledge the way in which that application was written? Your particular sense of—you know, was it—what kind of people were involved in the writing of it? I mean, you had mentioned something about various committees and stuff.

03-00:36:02
Brandon:

Yes. Just want to correct something: When Shriver told me to tell Shelley, he said it in jest. They were buddies in the Congress and so he was just saying it as a friend, you know, talking to a friend. It wasn't as if San Francisco was behind because nobody was—nobody was started. I mean, we were like—like you're saying, we were one of the first in the whole country. Well, I was the key in all of this, from between that period and the application. That was my time. And so once Shelley appointed me, the first thing I did was to get back to Washington and find out how much money I had to work with. What could I do, and this sort of thing. And so they advanced me some money, and so I have to go in there to City Hall and start that whole process, go to the controller's office and see how we can receive monies and that whole thing and work that out. In the meantime, I moved into Shelley's office. I was like in the corridor right next to him. The reason I moved there is because I needed a typewriter and office stuff. I needed to be able to have an office and I didn't have an office. The Human Rights guy actually was occupying that office. Whoever it was was occupying an office and then he moved and I moved right into his office, in that little suite there, right there. But I talked to them in Washington. I figured what I had to do--just get some initial money, to get some planning money. I needed to tell them what I wanted to do. So I did go back there. I'm not sure how soon I went back there. I went back there and they gave me just \$35,000 or some amount to get started.

03-00:38:55
Meeker:

To open up an office?

03-00:38:56
Brandon:

To open up my office, yes, and to do whatever, you know, we needed to get done. So my next avenue then was to write this proposal for the planning grant and so I brought in a guy named Joe Bailey, black guy who was a, you know, brilliant guy, brilliant writer. And in the meantime, the communities were beginning to build up and beginning to have meetings in the community. You know, all of a sudden people are beginning to say, "Hey, hey." "The maximum feasible participation." You know, this ground swell is beginning to build.

03-00:39:47
Meeker:

So that was happening independent of the work you were doing?

03-00:39:48
Brandon:

Yes, yes.

03-00:39:50
Meeker:

So like the folks in Western Addition would start having meetings saying, "Oh, there's going to be money coming over?"

03-00:39:54
Brandon:

Yes, yes. Exactly. Yes.

03-00:39:58

Meeker: Which was kind of the idea, right?

03-00:39:59

Brandon: Yes, right.

03-00:40:00

Meeker: I mean, it was like grassroots community organizing.

03-00:40:02

Brandon: Exactly. Community activist—yes, they'd heard about this theme. "Maximum feasible participation"—that was their slogan.

03-00:40:10

Meeker: But then it also might cause some friction, I guess, between what they were asking for and then what you guys were trying to plan in the central office? Or not?

03-00:40:25

Brandon: Well, that's where the tension was. That's where the tension was because they couldn't get everything they wanted, we couldn't get everything we wanted. So there was that tension where—and how independent—there was also a tension for independence and that grew out of wanting autonomy. Once we established the groups, everybody wanted autonomy, complete fiefdom. So that was the tension. Those were the areas of the tension. I called Joe Bailey and then we had all of these task force reports and all of this other stuff. And so we then scoped out a planning grant. We just scoped out what our intent was, what we had. And so I remember taking a red eye back to Washington with that proposal that we had written. And there may be some other people involved in the writing--I may be not getting things in sequence, because there was another time-- Before I went back for the big proposal, I rented some rooms at the motel across from City Hall in the Del Webb Townhouses. And so then brought in all these writers and then some of my other people who had been on staff and who were like the community organizers. Will Ussery and Ken Simmons and guys like that. And they came in and they would write their parts. And then I had these two writers coordinate—so it was just a writing marathon It's stuff I'd learned at the NAACP, putting out stuff, staying up all night and taking stuff from here to there and that sort of thing. So we came up with a proposal and this was from—I was going back for a larger planning grant for \$35,000. The money I got initially just came before I went back there. So now I was going back for the planning grant, for the initial grant to begin to hire staff and to make a presentation as to where we were. And so we wrote the proposal and took it back there on the red eye and had to make this presentation that morning. I was terrible. It was horrible. Wow! Anyway, I told them I needed to come back. I went to go take a nap and come back in the afternoon, and then I'd show them exactly what the plan was. And they were, "Really? Wow!" You know, I was totally different. But basically I was showing them the target areas, how the target areas would be independent, how each target area would have its own authority, have its own board of

directors, its own staff. They might decide its own programs, within its own budget. You know, they'd bring it up to us at the central office. We had four target areas, Hunter's Point, Western Addition, Mission, and Chinatown. So that was the idea, and those target areas would be budgeted pretty much proportionally. Maybe some variations. And then we'd have a bundle for citywide programs and major programs like the education programs, the OR Bail project programs, the Head Start programs, the CETA Programs, all those programs that were citywide that were managed by my staff at the top level.

03-00:44:27

Meeker:

So the target areas would have been the CAP programs? Those were the community action programs?

03-00:44:33

Brandon:

Those were the community action programs, yes.

03-00:44:34

Meeker:

OK. And the citywide programs were under a different section of the law?

03-00:44:40

Brandon:

Well, some of them were. Yes, some of them. The elementary—ESEA—Elementary and Secondary Education Act was on a different section of the law. Head Start and Child Development, that was specified. But other than that, there was no division per se—that was our doing. In fact, you could go to certain poverty programs, and there was no allocation for community action programs at all. You know, didn't have that sort of thing, whereas, a big part of our budget was in that direction. But when I say in that direction, they also were funding programs. You know, they also had programs within their own choices.

03-00:45:29

Meeker:

But the basis of the community action was community participation?

03-00:45:33

Brandon:

Right.

03-00:45:34

Meeker:

You mentioned the target area idea, which from I understand, is sort of unique to San Francisco. Who came up with it and how'd they come up with that?

03-00:45:44

Brandon:

Well, in San Francisco, it was pretty much well-defined. You know, it was just an understanding as to where the two black communities were. The Latino community was in Mission, the Asian community was in the Chinatown area. So that was just a natural configuration. And, I mean, if you read Herb Caen, if you read the press, you thought that was a natural reference. And so it was pretty much established in the minds, I think, of public San Franciscans that these were the poverty target areas. So I think it just came into the nomenclature. It was something that we just absorbed and there was nobody saying this is that. I think we just, in the process of

identifying urban target areas, that's how we defined it. I think it just was something that we naturally felt was the right nomenclature for identifying our places.

03-00:46:49

Meeker:

So it was basically that it was well understood what neighborhoods were minority populations or centers? And so then there was also an understanding that the minority areas were also the impoverished areas?

03-00:47:09

Brandon:

Right.

03-00:47:09

Meeker:

OK. And I know that you used a lot of census statistics and everything to back this up. But there were also some other parts of town that were—also had high poverty levels but weren't initially included?

03-00:47:28

Brandon:

Right. Well, yes, the Tenderloin Project. Yes.

03-00:47:30

Meeker:

Yes.

03-00:47:32

Brandon:

Yes. And they came later and asked me to include them. I was very willing. I was very happy to do so. So I presented to the board and, you know, scoped them into it. The other areas were afraid that this may divide—this may get into their division but we worked it out and sort of reconfigured the amounts and that sort of thing and they began to get their own organization together. And it was part of the process. You know, organizing the people to participate in the process. So they had to go out and organize people, set up a structure, electing representation, and then appointing its officers. And then that local director out there that was also on my staff. So he carried a double-edged sword.

03-00:48:33

Meeker:

Who was that?

03-00:48:34

Brandon:

Whoever my director in the poverty—in the target areas were. They worked for their board out there, but they also worked for me and my staff. So that was a tension area, also. Who worked for who and who took orders from who and that sort of thing. It's just part of the nature of the process, of the structure, you know.

03-00:49:06

Meeker:

Yes. I mean, the poverty program was sort of famous for having some famous conflicts, I guess.

03-00:49:15

Brandon: Right, right. Right.

03-00:49:17

Meeker: It's interesting. I mean, there's a lot of factors that—it seems to me went into it: one of them is all of a sudden there's money available and a lot of people have different ideas about how that money can be distributed, so naturally there will be some arguments about that. And then also what happens, of course, is that very quickly, the money that's available begins to shrink, you know, by 1966 or thereabout, right?

03-00:49:44

Brandon: Yes, yes. Yes.

03-00:49:45

Meeker: So then what would automatically create some more conflict between the people?

03-00:49:49

Brandon: Right, right. Yes. Yes, yes. Yes, the conflicts were around style. Years of conflicts around style, you know—who walks the walk, talks the talk. Who has the right style. There's that. There were a lot of conflicts internally. I mean, that's the only way you could really survive at the top, because everything would be at your door step if it weren't for the wild and massive amount of tension and conflict, you know, at the local level. So one of my roles was going there and being the arbiter and being the force that brings quiet, you know, back into the equation, into the process. And people respected that. You know people liked my coming down to the neighborhood board.

03-00:51:05

Meeker: To each of the individual target boards?

03-00:51:08

Brandon: Yes, right. Right, right.

03-00:51:08

Meeker: Yes. You know, I mean, this question about—one—so one question historians are interested in is, you know, this idea of maximum feasible participation and the degree to which these programs were either from the grassroots up or from the top down. But it seems to me that sometimes historians get it all wrong by trying to say that it was either from the down or the bottom up, because, you know, in looking at the ways in which these areas were organized, it required both. It required people with, you know, expertise like yourself to help facilitate the organization, you know, of people who previously weren't organized. Do you see what I'm getting at?

03-00:52:03

Brandon: Oh, yes. Yes.

03-00:52:05

Meeker: And I'm wondering if you can kind of help shed some light on that process.

03-00:52:10

Brandon: OK.

03-00:52:11

Meeker: I mean, is my sense correct on this?

03-00:52:16

Brandon: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Oh, yes. No, no. Yes, I think it's simple in the sense that it always starts from the ground up. Once the government gets hold of it for a while, then they start pushing it down. That's when it becomes a different program and that's when it loses its organic quality. I don't think a lot of ideas originated at Washington. I think a lot of them come from someplace. They grab it, then they sort of organize it, then they start telling other people how to do it, and then that's when it changes its nature. And the same thing happened with the poverty program. You know, if we had sent them a graphic, they might have bought it, because they didn't know yet. I mean, they were just anxious to get money out. For them, success was distributing money. I mean, you really didn't have to be a rocket scientist to get funded. All you had to do was just establish yourself as a legitimate municipality organization and come up with a good program—except I went back there and made my presentation to them directly later on. Now these guys never see another proposal, because there are about ten levels down the line who are doing and looking at proposals. So they're just getting their ideas together. They're beginning to learn about the different forms of community action and how it takes place, and they're beginning to learn about geography and localities and different kind of strategies and responses. So they're learning on the run, too. So everybody is and if you don't have your independent ability locally to do your own thing—if you're waiting for instructions, directions, it doesn't happen for a long time. That's why a lot of places didn't get started. They started setting up regional offices and trying to get them closer to the local programs. But when that happens, they come up with a structure of how they're going to do the programs. So now it's all structured, and it's a whole different ballgame.

03-00:54:43

Meeker: That's a complex process. I mean, it's as complex as government is.

03-00:54:46

Brandon: Yes, yes. Yes.

[End Audio File 3]

Begin Audio File 4 02-15-2008.mp3

04-00:00:14

Meeker: So I'm thinking about how historians talk about this and the degree to which historians are on the money or whatever—the mark, which seems like

oftentimes the case is, there's this sense of trying to figure out what is the grassroots? And it seems to me like historians seem to have maybe a romantic notion of what the grassroots is. But it can be defined in different ways depending upon what the top is, you know. So did you feel like you were like a grassroots activist at this point in time when you were establishing the program or did you feel that other people would have better fit that category?

04-00:01:15
Brandon:

Well, there are a lot of different kinds of grassroots. I mean, even within the grassroots, they're suspicious of who's grassroots and who's not grassroots. You know, on one level, I'm totally grassroots, and on another level, people are trying to challenge your grassrootsness. So it's really a matter of how grassroots are you. And the problem is if you're too attached to the establishment, then you are suspected, to a degree. And so, for us, grassroots meant the neighborhood, the people on the blocks. We had a very definite configuration of the neighborhood and we were talking about the people living in the blocks. And for grassroots—the ultimate grassroots would be a captain for each block, that kind of represents the representation of the block, you know, and can speak and mobilize those folks for issues of importance to them. And to be responsive to that group is part of a grassroots mission.

04-00:02:38
Meeker:

So grassroots means, in fact, those neighborhood folks but it also can mean being responsive to their needs?

04-00:02:49
Brandon:

Yes, yes. Yes.

04-00:02:50
Meeker:

Where were you living at this point? Were you in one of the designated zones? The target areas?

04-00:03:00
Brandon:

Yes, yes, yes. Well, I lived in the Oceanside area at that time and that was a satellite to Hunter's Point. They were part of the program, but they were considered a satellite to the Hunter's Point target area. Hunter's Point was a target area, but they were close enough to be a part of the—to be there, so that's where I was living. But then I bought a house from Willie McCovey—he was living in the Forest Hill. The San Francisco *Examiner* put it on the front page, poverty director, boys' home—that was the kind of stuff that we were dealing with in those days.

04-00:03:56
Meeker:

Yes. Sort of muckraking journalism.

04-00:03:59
Brandon:

Yes, yes. Yes. Yes, and that was the nature of the coverage that we were getting in those days, yes.

04-00:04:07

Meeker:

There's so much I want to ask you here. And forgive me for jumping around a little bit. I want to go back to this question about the Tenderloin, because one of the things the report did talk about that I found was it talked about how the Tenderloin was also a very impoverished part of town but it wasn't officially recognized. And one of the things that comes up is that the Tenderloin was mostly white folks, but also, you know, like elderly people and runaway kids and all that kind of stuff. From the way that you described it, the four areas were kind of intuitively initially selected. Did the Tenderloin just not come up? Or, why wasn't it also selected at the beginning?

04-00:05:08

Brandon:

Yes. It didn't come up and because it was thought of as a kind of not traditional area—it didn't have traditional leadership. There was no spokesperson speaking for the Tenderloin, except maybe some of the religious leadership there.

04-00:05:27

Meeker:

Like with Glide or something.

04-00:05:30

Brandon:

Yes, right. Well, not even—even Glide wasn't as vocal then. Well, they were beginning to be. Yes. You know, Cecil Williams had just come to town around that time and he was beginning to mobilize the church during that time. But Episcopalians had very strong, you know, leadership at that time, especially in the gay community that was beginning to emerge and they're the ones who became the first leadership, you know, for the Tenderloin. They're the ones who came to me.

04-00:06:02

Meeker:

Do you remember some of the people that came to you?

04-00:06:04

Brandon:

Mark Forrester was one of them, an Episcopalian chaplain and another lady was there. I wouldn't remember.

04-00:06:16

Meeker:

Did you know that Forrester was gay?

04-00:06:19

Brandon:

Uh-huh.

04-00:06:21

Meeker:

I mean, one of the things that's kind of interesting is that, when the Tenderloin starts to organize, how are they organizing? Are they kind of organizing the Tenderloin as like an inner city gay community that would kind of make it similar to like the Western Addition as a black community? I mean—or was there something else going on?

04-00:06:49

Brandon:

No, the Tenderloin had real poverty. I mean, they were serious. I mean, they weren't just trying to look out for gays or nothing like that. I mean, they were looking out for the poverty that existed in that area and they were the ones just like in our area. You know, we discovered pockets of poverty that we didn't even know existed as we got into it. So they were there. I mean, that's what the whole grassroots thing is all about, people who knew what their neighborhood was doing. So the kids there that were from really poor families, Asian families were there. A lot of the international families who were in that area.

04-00:07:31

Meeker:

Recent immigrants.

04-00:07:32

Brandon:

Yes, recent immigrants. Exactly. Lot of recent immigrants. And then you had the other side of Market near downtown where you just had impoverished folks, homeless folks. You know, people living in the streets, people living at the bottom of the poverty line. And so no, they were representing them. They were trying to organize them. That's who they were trying to rally and get out. But they had the energies of leadership. You know, they had this drive to lead the area.

04-00:07:55

Meeker:

Why do you think it was the gays in the Tenderloin who were organizing the Tenderloin? I mean, why were they the ones with the leadership there, I guess?

04-00:08:10

Brandon:

I think because they were the most—like you were saying, the most American there. A lot of international folks were there and they didn't feel a part of the process of the system. So I think they, more than anything else, felt, you know, a part of the process, and they, more than anything else, felt that they could make the process come to them. And the church was a part of it. They were also participating with the church in their own programs and so I think the church was leading them in this direction, to be of service to all of these people. And I guess they were living in that area, too. I guess the gay—I know the—I forget the paper that they were putting out at that time. I know that that was being published. So they were trying to develop—and develop a community. And, you know, all the neighborhoods were in that kind of state. In San Francisco. All the neighbors weren't all there. You know, sharing the point of view that the poverty program really gave substance and protoplasm to these areas as such. But before that, they were just—like you were asking, how did it become that? You're right. They hadn't really become that. They were in the process of being formalized that way. So they may have started out on a lesser level than the others. But that had to happen with all the others, and individual leaders took the lead. That's exactly the same thing that happened there that happened in the other communities.

- 04-00:09:42
Meeker: So in other words, the existence of the poverty program promised some funds to help in poverty and that community provided a necessary impetus for these people to organize?
- 04-00:09:57
Brandon: Um-hmm, um-hmm.
- 04-00:09:59
Meeker: It's a really interesting process.
- 04-00:10:02
Brandon: That was big for the community—that's why Washington killed it. Because once they start it, they couldn't stop it. You know, it was taking off. That's exactly what was happening.
- 04-00:10:16
Meeker: What do you mean by that?
- 04-00:10:17
Brandon: Well, later on, they pulled the plug from community action programs, you know, pull all the funds out of it, you know, sort of shut it down.
- 04-00:10:29
Meeker: Why do you think that happened?
- 04-00:10:30
Brandon: Because of these dynamics. The Community Action Program began to just expand into all sorts of unintended consequences, I guess. And some folks began to organize these protest activities. You began to see people all over the place, you know, being available for this and for that, and you began to get more people downtown at City Hall shouting on issues and all these—you know, they're growing all these forces that are beginning to be a whole new phenomenon. And so I think in our area—and I guess this is happening all over the country. I think this is what was the impetus to—shortly after that—a couple of years after that, all these investigations were coming out of Congress and I think that was—and they were all investigating the community action programs, so I think that was their intent, to sort of pull the plug from under it.
- 04-00:11:26
Meeker: Yes, because the community action programs were nurturing, you know, some of the radicalism that was happening in the city.
- 04-00:11:32
Brandon: Well, so many activist people—some of the protest people—you know, people call it radicalism but it's just people getting loud and coming to the key places and making their voices heard and who get into the system and, you know, are more outspoken.

04-00:11:48

Meeker:

There is one story a lawyer told me who was one of the leaders in the Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation, and he said that they got in trouble when the federal government learned that federal government monies were funding people who were funding the draft.

04-00:12:07

Brandon:

Yes, yes.

04-00:12:07

Meeker:

So, I mean, it's kind of interesting.

04-00:12:10

Brandon:

Yes, yes. They pulled the plug—exactly. That's what happens, you know, when Washington pulls the plug. That's exactly what happens. The Neighborhood Legal Aid Program is a good example of how they just cut funding because of issues like that.

04-00:12:29

Meeker:

So this question about power in the city is also an interesting thing that comes up when looking at the EOC, because here you have the mayor who now has to deal with another power structure, somewhat well-funded, that he didn't have to deal with before. You were basically an appointee or hired by the mayor to run this program, but at the same time, he was probably beginning to see the EOC as a threat to his own power. How did you navigate that? How'd you feel about that at the time?

04-00:13:21

Brandon:

I survived only because I had a good chairman and he was the only person that could deal with me. I mean, he's the only person that could remove me.

04-00:13:31

Meeker:

Protect you, yes.

04-00:13:32

Brandon:

Or protect me, yes.

04-00:13:32

Meeker:

And that was Coleman?

04-00:13:33

Brandon:

And that was Dr. Arthur Coleman, yes. No, if I didn't have him, I probably wouldn't have wanted to stay. Even if I did stay, I probably wouldn't have wanted to stay. And I didn't want to stay after he left, yes. Yes. Only because of Arthur Coleman. Yes, he gave me more than I could ever hope for, in terms of unbending confidence, yes, unconditional confidence. While he was there, I could do what I needed to do. And then I also had the strength of having my Washington contacts, so I could use that very effectively to get them to tell my people to do what I wanted them to do, if that was necessary. Or I could get anything from them, you know, that I wanted to without having to

navigate to my board, getting hung up on specifics. You know, if you brought—that would result in three, four, five board meetings before you could come to some conclusion when you can sort of have something happen by being able to communicate with your program people in Washington. So I had a lot of power and—not power, I don't want to say that. I mean, in retrospect, I had a lot of power. But all you're doing is just trying to move ahead. You know, just keep moving. You know, keep it moving. And trying to get good results. My two major strengths were having Arthur Coleman as chairman and being able to hire the staff that I wanted to around me, and once I had that--

04-00:16:06

Meeker: And that would be the staff in the central office?

04-00:16:07

Brandon: Yes, right.

04-00:16:08

Meeker: Roughly how many people were working for you there?

04-00:16:15

Brandon: I'd say maybe 15. You know, you're talking about a stronger accounting department. We had to have these five people in there because the accounting requirements were so intense.

04-00:16:46

Brandon: My program staff were program writers-- a guy for each target area. I had a program director over the director of target area. The program guy was the guy who wrote the programs, but also did the central programs for the community. So I had one of those for each area. And Ray Taliaferro was my public information guy and he was superb. I had a great Latino guy named Arturo Williams as my assistant executive director, and had this great secretary, Ida Strickland.

04-00:17:52

Meeker: Was the staff mostly black?

04-00:17:54

Brandon: Yes, yes, yes. The staff was majority black.

04-00:17:58

Meeker: Were there—

04-00:17:58

Brandon: Except Arturo was Latino.

04-00:18:00

Meeker: Oh, yes?

04-00:18:00

Brandon: And then I had another guy that came in later on, an assistant director who was white.

04-00:18:07

Meeker: Was—were there any times—thinking about the mayor and the power and the way that Coleman sort of vouched for you, it sounds like, or defended you, were there any times that you really felt the mayor sort of breathing down your neck?

04-00:18:20

Brandon: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

04-00:18:21

Meeker: Can you think of any examples of when you felt the pressure from the mayor's office on a particular issue?

04-00:18:34

Brandon: Oh, God. Specifics don't come to mind. No. It was—it came primarily from his appointees on the board.

04-00:18:57

Meeker: On the EOC board?

04-00:18:58

Brandon: On the EOC board and it came from their tone and their support of some programs and their opposition to some. Their support of recommendations, their opposition to recommendations, or if someone in one area would be having a fight with the board or me or whatever, you could see them meeting with folks on—you know, without the proper process. So there were people there that were—had a thousand agendas. And they had prejudice. What you had to realize was that with everybody there was having pressures at the neighborhood level, bringing it to my level and so sometimes they were just trying to get off being in the center of the issue and wanted to pass it on. And then some people just think that to show hostilities is a part of the process. But that wasn't the entire life of it. The life was very invigorating—just like the Peace Corps days. Just trying to save—you know, make the programs work and to make things happen. Just make the next day, and improve. Set up your planning agenda and try to meet those schedules and those programs that you're trying to get to. And the summer program was always a big program for us because we were bringing on, what, 2,500 kids, something like that. And so we had to hire staff for that. We had to set up a job placement program, we had to train that staff, be ready for that and do all that kind of stuff. So there were always target dates for different things to happen. And so you're just trying to do the administrative end just as well as the program management.

04-00:21:36

Meeker: So, for example, the summer jobs program. Was that a city wide thing or was that focused on the target areas?

04-00:21:43
Brandon:

That's a good question. They weren't exactly city-wide. We had to organize staff in the target areas, but we were trying to make that inclusive. Yes. I don't know if we turned away people from outside the target areas, but they had to come through the target areas because that's where the recruiting processes were. And the target areas were always interested in expanding as far as they could, so they would take in numbers. Everybody was trying to get—there wasn't any rush for numbers, but numbers, you know, was helpful. So the target areas weren't trying to be exclusive. They were trying to really invite as many-- And that was the mood of the program. People just didn't want to serve just themselves. In fact, it seemed any target area in San Francisco was willing to take on the whole city if you gave—everybody wanted that power. Everybody wanted to be the whole thing.

04-00:22:42
Meeker:

Well, it's interesting. I mean, you look at the maps of the target areas and 1964 was like, you know, a couple blocks in Western Edition, a couple blocks in Chinatown, and then by 1967, the five target areas included basically about half the city. I mean, it really expanded. It's like the only areas that fell outside the target area by that point were, you know, Sea cliff and the Richmond and the Sunset and... Yes, it really expands to include half the city.

04-00:23:12
Brandon:

Could be, could be, could be. I haven't seen it that way but it could be.

04-00:23:15
Meeker:

Yes, I just saw a map. I don't know if that ever actually happened or not.

04-00:23:18
Brandon:

Yes, yes, yes. Yes.

04-00:23:23
Meeker:

Well, I appreciate what you're saying because, you know, of course a lot of my knowledge about the EOC from, you know, reading articles in the San Francisco Chronicle and what historians and sociologists had to say. Of course, they focus more on the sensational things, the conflict, the...

04-00:23:45
Brandon:

Right, exactly.

04-00:23:46
Meeker:

There was this battle between the mayor and the community areas about who would have more appointees on the board.

04-00:23:53
Brandon:

Yes, right, right, right.

04-00:23:54
Meeker:

But you don't hear as much about the work that was actually being done. I mean, it sounds like what you're telling me is that, you know, all that stuff was

happening, there were all these conflicts, but what you were spending most of your time on was trying to get kids jobs in the summertime and stuff.

04-00:24:11

Brandon:

We were very successful. I think that we set out to do in terms of the community action programs, in terms of the other programs that we funded. They were some of the most successful in the country. You know, the OR Bill project started in San Francisco.

04-00:24:27

Meeker:

What project is it?

04-00:24:28

Brandon:

The OR—OR Bill, On Your Own Recognizance Bill Project.

04-00:24:33

Meeker:

What's that?

04-00:24:36

Brandon:

That was to be released from jail on your own recognizance instead of a bond. And a project where these lawyers set it up to be able to identify certain characteristics and the people would qualify and be judged under this vouching process, allow you to go without bail, on your own recognizance. And so that became a national thing. That started right here in San Francisco. We were among the first to set up the Head Start program. Some of the first Head Start programs in the country started here. They were the leaders in getting it off the ground and organizing it and making it happen. Elementary and secondary education act programs. That was funded separately but we had a big role working with the schools on that. So we were dealing with that.

04-00:25:45

Meeker:

What kind of work was entailed in that particular program?

04-00:25:48

Brandon:

Part of it was sort of like the OEO's role in trying to figure out what they wanted them to do and to work it out. So a lot of it was sort of putting people in touch with each other, trying to—so that they could get directly from them, what was expected, how it worked, how to get it implemented and sort of just making sure that whatever guidelines were established were going on. And the school pretty much handled it and took care of it, but came to us so we were always meeting on it to make sure that we were all OK with it. And pretty soon it became—I think after a while they began to get their funding directly. They didn't come through us in the long run. But so all that was part of the administration of the program, so everything was coming through us and just had to make sure that you're doing the job. I worked late nights mostly. I'd go home for dinner, come back, and always did my best work late at night.

04-00:27:17

Meeker:

You mentioned that this program, the Poverty Program, provided an avenue for, you know, blacks who were living in impoverished conditions to make

their way up to the middle class through jobs and so forth, and getting professional training. Can you think of any examples of individuals who you know who you witnesses this happen and maybe tell me about their story, if you know it?

04-00:27:56

Brandon:

Well, I think that's almost everybody in San Francisco who came through the program. I don't know of anybody who made that track, came from an impoverished surrounding. We're talking about people who had college education, for instance, but who were underemployed. Let me just say this. The black community, part of their problem was vast underemployment and the jobs that you could get were very, very limited in terms of executive-like training. So, you know, you just didn't have jobs where you could think and where you could make decisions, and where you could control your time. Where you could be available as you would like to be and where you could communicate intelligent information, and where you could wear a suit to dress up. And where you would have exposure to government, where you could see the workings of the infrastructure and the people who run the city and that sort of thing. So if you're employed in an eight-to-five labor job or unemployed, after that, you don't have access to that world. You can just kind of go home and sleep and then you come back. So that's all cut off from you. And so there were just no jobs. There were just no jobs during those times. I mean, this is why we started PACT and this is why we had the Fair Employment Practices Law because all of downtown hired—no one. There was no black person in an executive position in all of downtown San Francisco, unless they were working for some civil rights nonprofit organization. That's the only place where you had executive jobs. Nonprofit in the human rights/civil rights organizations.

04-00:30:08

Meeker:

Council for Civic Unity, that sort of thing.

04-00:30:10

Brandon:

Yes, that sort of thing. Or Urban League, Family Service Organization agency or, you know, we had black professionals, that sort of thing. So unless they were independent professionals, of course. And that was the strength of the black community.

04-00:30:25

Meeker:

Doctors and lawyers.

04-00:30:25

Brandon:

Yes. Accountants or whatever. Barbers, whoever was independent— independent income to get the time to know how city government functions, to attend a policy meeting, a commission meeting, a committee meeting, a board meeting, that sort of thing. So for the first time, this was beginning to happen. We had a whole army of people out there on our staff who are now available and who are now learning to execute during the daytime in a

working capacity. And so this grew. I mean, Will Ussery was working as a kind of an architectural technician. He became president of BART and that sort of thing. Ken Simmons was-- he's a professor at Cal. Ron Dellums became a congressman and mayor of Oakland.

04-00:31:34

Meeker: Yes, I don't know [Ken Simmons].

04-00:31:35

Brandon: Oh, you know him?

04-00:31:36

Meeker: No, I don't.

04-00:31:37

Brandon: Oh, you don't. Oh. People like that.

04-00:31:39

Meeker: Do you know what department he works in?

04-00:31:41

Brandon: Architecture.

04-00:31:43

Meeker: Oh, OK.

04-00:31:45

Brandon: Yes. Ron Dellums worked in the Poverty Program.

04-00:31:48

Meeker: In Oakland?

04-00:31:49

Brandon: In San Francisco.

04-00:31:50

Meeker: Oh, really. What did he do?

04-00:31:52

Brandon: He worked with the CETA Program. I think he helped put that together, you know, ran that. He was a certified employment training—

04-00:32:04

Meeker: So do you think in hindsight that was the big contribution of the Poverty Program, was that it kind of allowed underemployed African Americans to realize their potential?

04-00:32:17

Brandon: Yes, yes, yes. Yes. Yes.

04-00:32:25

Meeker:

Not to focus on the conflict stuff, but this question about the period—it's sort of right over there on the side. It seems like kind of a key moment in the Poverty Program when the mayor loses the majority representation on the board. Can you describe how that happened and how it was that a mayor can lose out to the community. It seems like a pretty remarkable achievement.

04-00:33:13

Brandon:

Yes. Well, by this time, I guess the issue was in the downtown board, the Economic Opportunity Council. What the mayor in effect did was form an exec committee, which really ran the whole program. But the council was made up of his appointees plus the appointees from the neighborhood. And each neighborhood elected its own appointees, so they were on the council. I mean, the first issue was whether or not the other representation would be also his appointees or whether they would come from the community. And so that was the first battle and the community won that. They were going to select their own representation.

04-00:34:04

Meeker:

How did they win that? It's a hard question.

04-00:34:10

Brandon:

Well, they refused to participate. They refused to participate and they told him they were down to his office by now and he was beginning to feel pressured, because by now there were real activists who were running down to his office on everything. Now they're activated. Now they're just requiring—demanding meetings with the mayor, beginning to infringe on his time and all that, and beginning to put some pressure directly. We also had meetings in his office where the community people would be there, I would be there, Dr. Coleman and a few people, you know, they're advocating for something. And yes, pretty much on this issue for representation. And their theme was maximum feasible participation means 51%. That was their theme. "We want 51%," and so that was just something that was adopted as the reason for existence. You know, 51% or nothing. He came to just understand that he would still have all the power, because the four neighborhoods were not necessarily as one either. You had the Latinos, the Asians, Hunter's Point, Western Addition – they had to negotiate with each other, too. And so once he began to understand that because, yes, the representation from each neighborhood had nothing much to do with the other folks. And so they all related more to the people the mayor appointed because they kind of knew them better, actually.

04-00:36:34

Meeker:

So the mayor's 49% plus, you know, the Mission equaled a majority on the board?

04-00:36:39

Brandon:

Yes, exactly. Yes.

04-00:36:42

Meeker:

Can you describe a little bit or characterize for me what the interactions between the four and then five areas were? Did it seem like Western Addition felt a common purpose with Chinatown or were there some issues that they diverged on?

04-00:37:03

Brandon:

Well, I don't think that there were any issues that they diverged on at all, and as I said before, these communities were just in the beginning of its formation, its gestation stages, so they really didn't have a sense of this—this matter over here against this and against that, you know. And people just weren't looking over the borders of each other. That interaction came more between staff. You know, if there was any advocating for this or for that, it became between the staff of the Mission against the staff of the Western Addition. Maybe the two or three top staff people were always interacting and always making allies, you know, for one thing.

04-00:37:55

Meeker:

Yes. So the target area arrangement?

04-00:37:56

Brandon:

Right, exactly.

04-00:38:00

Meeker:

Yes.

04-00:38:00

Brandon:

So that's where a lot of that was. And they had a mission. They would go back and lead their people. You know, if they thought someone was having a board on some commission meeting or something, they're the ones who were going to activate their folks to come down and do something, take a position, something like that. Yes.

04-00:38:25

Meeker:

You know, looking in the newspapers about the time that the Tenderloin gets recognized, there's this whole thing about youth street prostitutes. Do you remember that coming up in relationship to the area seeking recognition?

04-00:38:55

Brandon:

No.

04-00:38:56

Meeker:

OK. Because there was blight, I guess, and Mark Forrester was one of the authors of this, wrote this report about basically youth in the Tenderloin, saying that, you know, there are a lot of runaways and people who have been kicked out of their homes by their families and everything, and so this is one of the areas of need, that particular part of town.

04-00:39:19

Brandon:

Oh, yes. Oh, I see. As a need, you mean?

04-00:39:21

Meeker: Yes.

04-00:39:22

Brandon: Oh, yes. Oh, sure, sure.

04-00:39:24

Meeker: I mean, like these youth need services and they're not...

04-00:39:28

Brandon: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, I could see it—oh, our office is right there on Polk Street. You can just walk down two or three blocks and the young kids are all out there. Oh, no. It was there. It was very real. The Tenderloin was a very impoverished area, so that's why we had no reasons not to be willing to embrace it. As a matter of fact, the Oceanside area at some point was sort of petitioning to be an independent target area and we suspect that some of that might be developing in other areas and we thought that that may be something we may have to deal with. But no, we were not opposed to growing, especially if we can get funding for it. Yes, yes.

04-00:40:16

Meeker: Did you suspect you would be able to get additional funding once the Tenderloin was recognized as a target area?

04-00:40:29

Brandon: I thought so. I mean, that wasn't the consideration but at that point we were getting funding for everything we asked for. I mean, we were reasonable. It all fit certain categories and, you know, we had pay scales and all that. But I think when we did expand—we may have expanded with the idea that we were going to allocate resources from where we are now but we would also plan to go out and try to raise more funds. And our funding source was only one place. It wasn't that we were going all over the place trying to figure out where we were going to get funding from. We knew that OEO was where we were going to get the funding and just a matter of them saying yes or no. So in those early days—they were anxious to get a large funding base and we were—for the most part, funded for most of our requests.

04-00:41:44

Meeker: You mentioned, just in passing, that Oceanside was maybe going to seek recognition as its own area. Why would they have done that?

04-00:41:54

Brandon: Well, so they could have their own board, their own allocation of funds, their own local program, so they wouldn't have to go through the Hunter's Point area board to get their program request in. They wouldn't have to come under them. They would have representation on the central board downtown and be identified independently as an area that requires individual attention.

04-00:42:32

Meeker:

Did you ever get a sense of why they didn't mount an all out campaign for that?

04-00:42:39

Brandon:

I guess it wasn't one of their priorities. I guess if they made that a priority, we would have considered it, but it never became a big item on the agenda and... And the leadership was never that deep in almost any other area. You had to have really deep leadership to make that happen and if that hadn't taken place.

04-00:43:32

Meeker:

So kind of like Tenderloin. It was a place in the city that there was poverty but the poor were not organized to the degree that they needed to be in order to be recognized?

04-00:43:54

Brandon:

Leadership was not as organized. But leadership is ordinarily made up of people who identify with the poor but who have skills and are willing to identify from that base. You know, just make things happen. So sometimes without leadership, it just doesn't happen. And even with us, we can't go out there and create leadership. But you start somewhere. And the leadership has to feel that it has a vision, it has to know at least the people, that they can have a meeting and start bringing people out and start representing the community, and have real organic roots there. Yes. So if Oceanside had put that on the agenda, I think we would have probably had to consider. And for all I know, it may have happened since I left. I don't know. But it didn't happen. The Tenderloin had the church as their—churches were pretty good on leadership in terms of helping the poor, so I think that alliance that they were able to put together, was able to make it happen.

04-00:45:55

Meeker:

I know that in Western Addition they took the maximum feasible participation statement really seriously and I wonder like if they looked at the Tenderloin and they saw a bunch of, you know, ministers and gay activists and they thought, oh, the poor aren't participating so we shouldn't recognize them or they're different than what we're doing or they won't fit in the program. Was there some of that?

04-00:46:31

Brandon:

No. Mostly the opposite, because those guys were very skillful in making peace with the other areas. And they would be very supportive, you know, of their issues. And if there was an alliance, they could always depend upon those guys more than anybody else because they were more—in a way, more radical minded than the other guys, so they would support most of the high-energy kind of stuff that other people wanted. Also, they were very low key, in a way, in terms of making demands. They were very, very happy just to be included. They were very happy to have this opportunity they'd never had before. You know, they now could get funding, they now could set up programs, they now could hire people, they now could come—become

involved and in activating what needed to be done in their community. They could now become involved in representing that community, and getting infrastructure stuff taken care of, and you know, getting agencies and departments to be more responsive and take better care of their folk. Yes. So that's the kind of grassroots level things that they were into.

04-00:47:54

Meeker:

Yes, I mean, that's interesting looking at some of the stuff that started in the Tenderloin as still there, like Hospitality House and a couple of those other things.

04-00:48:02

Brandon:

Yes, yes. Yes.

04-00:48:04

Meeker:

It's pretty interesting.

04-00:48:05

Brandon:

Yes. And they brought new dimensions—like a lot of the areas did. Brought new dimensions into the picture. The On Lok Clinic in Chinatown was just a little tiny thing and now it's one of the biggest health facilities in the city.

04-00:48:25

Meeker:

So that was one of the things that started with the Poverty Program?

04-00:48:30

Brandon:

Um-hmm, um-hmm.

04-00:48:30

Meeker:

So you said that you weren't interested—

04-00:48:32

Brandon:

That's where Chinatown wanted to put all its money in the beginning. And this is a good example of how areas took their money and where they gave it priorities. Chinatown put a large portion of its funds in building health clinics for their people and it'd go into the On Lok Clinical health system.

04-00:48:52

Meeker:

From what I understand, Chinatown has a much different approach to community action. Does that mean that the leaders of the Chinese community in San Francisco, by providing services to those who didn't have access to them, I mean, did that fulfill community action or was that somewhat different from what was in mind? Maybe it's just the definitions of these things were kind of imprecise. So, you know, you could have the kind of neighborhood organizing that was going on in the Western Addition and you could have the sort of creation of a health services apparatus in Chinatown and it was basically—they both qualified under this notion of maximum feasible participation. Or am I wrong?

04-00:50:05
Brandon:

Exactly. Well, exactly, exactly. You know, that was my observation about all of these different uses of resources. But they're all uniquely unique to their areas and their different priorities. And it works. Latinos did more community development kind of stuff. A lot of that is still going on. I mean, the part of the program in terms of infrastructure, is more evident, if you just go around looking for it. But in Chinatown, yes. They didn't go out and do that neighbor/neighbor stuff. Yes, Western Addition was very big on neighbor-to-neighbor, block-by-block. Hunter's Point was a lot into housing because that was mostly a public housing area, so they put a lot of focus there, brought in model cities and started focusing on infrastructure. So yes. I mean, the different areas define-- And this came out of their local community boards that made those decisions where those funds would go and where to allocate it. In Chinatown, they probably said, "We need health clinics where people can feel that they're culturally treated--people we know and people who can understand our treatment and the kinds of medicine that we take." That became a great success and it made the program—the part of the program in the community, you know, very esteemed and from that, they took different directions. Their executive training also took place and they began to form non-profits that were economic-minded—they were one of the most successful economic development programs out of Chinatown—came out of the Poverty Program. Asian, Inc and organizations like that that-- Been around.

04-00:52:40
Meeker:

So you mentioned that you left the position of executive director after Arthur Coleman also left his position of chair. Why did he leave?

04-00:52:50
Brandon:

I think the mayor put him on the Port Commission, for one thing.

04-00:52:56
Meeker:

Oh, OK.

04-00:52:58
Brandon:

But I think the mayor wanted to get more control over it and I think he wanted to get a new chair. He brought in Joe--

04-00:53:13
Meeker:

Kennedy?

04-00:53:14
Brandon:

Joe Kennedy, yes. Brought in Joe Kennedy after that and after that I thought I was giving more than I was getting out of the Poverty Program.

04-00:53:25
Meeker:

Yes.

04-00:53:26

Brandon:

And by that time I was ready to go and—although I'd known Joe Kennedy from my NAACP days. He was much more interested in programs more than community action and activities, so... And that's where the mayor wanted to go. The mayor just wanted to pull away from all this community action activity and just fund like senior programs and Head Start. That's the kind of direction they wanted to go into that—without the community participation. Yes, so I kind of wanted to get away. So PACT was trying to get me back and so I went back there in '67 when I left the Poverty Program.

04-00:54:24

Meeker:

How had that organization changed in the three years that you were working with EOC?

04-00:54:33

Brandon:

They were kind of getting along. We'd become, you know, more successful in the business area. We were getting some black businesses downtown and getting them more established in the neighborhood. So we were doing a very big thing in developing black businesses. Our employment thing was still going strong. We brought in some staff. So that was moving along, but at that time there was also some difficulty we were beginning to have in Washington. So I needed to get there. So they needed me and so it kind of made my leaving more decisive, more definitive. If I'm going to do it, you know, let me do it.

04-00:55:24

Meeker:

You're leaving EOC?

04-00:55:25

Brandon:

EOC, right.

04-00:55:27

Meeker:

Yes.

04-00:55:29

Brandon:

In order to save the PACT program. So I did that and I kind of brought it back to a higher life.

04-00:55:35

Meeker:

PACT.

04-00:55:36

Brandon:

PACT. P-A-C-T.

04-00:55:37

Meeker:

And what—did you serve as the executive director?

04-00:55:40

Brandon:

Right, right. President, yes.

- 04-00:55:41
Meeker: And so did you then—you were able to use some of your DC connections to help continue funding?
- 04-00:55:46
Brandon: Right, right.
- 04-00:55:48
Meeker: Can you tell me a little bit about the work? Like maybe some of the businesses that you helped bring downtown? Are there any that you can think of?
- 04-00:55:55
Brandon: Yes. We brought a shoe business downtown. Brought some guy selling publications, newspapers, publications. Flower shop. Guy with a stationary shop, guy with a furniture—wholesale. Furniture stuff. And then we did a lot out in the neighborhoods where people were. Grocery stores and some music, record shops, music stores. A couple of music clubs we found— we got started.
- 04-00:56:50
Meeker: So was the typical thing that you provided like seed money to these groups or a loan? I mean, how was it that you helped the small businesses get started in PACT?
- 04-00:57:02
Brandon: Our primary way was, you know, business advice, you know, helping people with expertise.
- 04-00:57:12
Meeker: OK. Writing a business plan, getting a business license.
- 04-00:57:13
Brandon: Yes. Right, right. Right, right.
- 04-00:57:14
Meeker: OK.
- 04-00:57:15
Brandon: Or getting the credit arranged for them or helping them with insurance. Helping them with leases and helping them with location. Whatever a guy needed to just become more sustainable, you know, more strong I mean, whenever a guy would come in, we'd try to be responsive. When I went back to Washington that time and got up with the—met up with the OEO people—I went back there to look at a program called "Six by Six by Six" that the Small Business Administration had just started a program in Philadelphia. And this was a \$6,000 loan for six years at 6% for minorities. And so that's what I went back to Washington for and that's what I came back with. And then the Poverty Program came along. And so I was trying to get additional money from the Poverty Program, so that's how we got started. But we did have that

program with PACT, the "Six by Six by Six" that we could sign off ourselves through the Small Business Administration. So we could loan the business, you know, \$6,000 for six years at 6%, so that's what we were—that's part of the financing that we had in order to make the program work. Great program and they used to do programs like that which I call R&D programs which the agencies and the departments used to have. And that's the kind of money I would go for, the R&D funds. And that was just a great program and I wish we could have done more and I wish the government had stayed more in that sort of thing.

04-00:59:16

Meeker:

Did you feel the impact of the Nixon Administration, the change in the Administrations? Was that a profound impact or a medium or a minor in the work that you were doing?

04-00:59:31

Brandon:

Yes and no. I left the Poverty Program by then, but when Nixon came in I was running PACT and Dr. Lucas was a Republican and he knew Nixon. In fact, I went to the Nixon Inaugural with Dr. Lucas and some folks. So for the first few years, it was great. You know, for the first few years they were very business minded. In fact, I became a very, very close friend of—my goodness—Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans. And, in fact, he had offered me a job as heading up the minority business program under the Department of Commerce. The OMBE program. So I was very successful under the administration because they were more economic development minded. They were more, you know, business oriented and that was our bag.

04-00:60:44

Meeker:

Entrepreneurial.

04-00:60:45

Brandon:

Yes, entrepreneurial. I'm not too sure that that was the case for the Poverty Program. I think—I think they were trying to really reduce it to simply a program-monitoring kind of agency and not a community activist sort of thing.

[End of Interview]