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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Monsa Nitoto:  
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Lisa Rubens  
in 2008

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Interview #1: July 22, 2008

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01-00:00:29

Rubens:

I have several questions I'd like to start asking: how you became involved in WOCAG [West Oakland Community Advisory Group], and what you personally, if you want to make a distinction between the West Oakland community and you, would like to see that army base property become. Let's start there.

01-00:00:57

Nitoto:

Well, coming to the front, I would like to see it be a workforce product that is a product that employs 1,000 from the community, particularly from West Oakland. An industrial development that produces something to China, or to—instead of importing everything into United States, something we produce here that we could manufacture and sell to China and to India, places that's sending everything into United States. Everything's coming into the port. And/or a distribution center that broke out the things that are coming in, so that people could get jobs breaking out the materials and sending them throughout the country. That would be my end product, at least in part. Some working product that allowed some—I won't say retail, but some kind of commercial development—activity would be ideal as well. So something along that line, that would employ several hundred people. The community in West Oakland has been deprived, and now pushed out, it deserves some resurrection and some historical presence within the history of this city of Oakland. I don't see that that's forthcoming, and so I stay at the podium and try to continue to organize and do a few things, although I'm a little bit older, a little bit sick now, I still try to participate as much as I possibly can. Yes, but to see a product that is a real economic engine for jobs, and to put people to work is what I've always hoped for, and it's the one area of Oakland where there's automatic industry with the ships and so forth coming in, that it always was a product that could produce jobs at a mass level to put a lot of people to work. And so I'll fight for it, more than any other product in Oakland, that's the one that I felt should be the job producer for a lot of people now.

01-00:03:25

Rubens:

And Mr. Nitoto, you have been involved with this, as far as I know, since 1996 when WOCAG was formed, and my guess is you probably were a community activist before that. Could I just ask you—when WOCAG is formed, what are you doing that you come to join it? How do you—?

01-00:03:45

Nitoto:

The Cypress Freeway had collapsed in 1989, and I was in an organization we formed called the Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization, CWOR. And it was an organization that was trying to get some things from the freeway and from some economic revitalization in West Oakland, though the army base was just a natural byproduct of, the freeway. We got a few jobs out of it, not

as much as we had liked, but let's just move on to the army base as a natural byproduct.

01-00:04:26

Rubens: So even before the demilitarization, and the creation of BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure Commission] and OBRA [Oakland Base Reuse Authority], even before that, you were already thinking about the military base?

01-00:04:36

Nitoto: Oh, no, no. I'm sorry. If you go back that far before '89, I used to work on the army base.

01-00:04:42

Rubens: Oh, do tell. What did you do?

01-00:04:45

Nitoto: I was a supply person. When I got out of the military, my MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was supply, and so I went right into supply with Mr. West and other people at the army base, working out there to try to—you know, I was organizing. I've been organizing. I helped organize a little union. It was not much of a union, but it was American Industrial Union, I think. AFG, or something like that. I forget the name of it. You know, we were trying to get some jobs for African American and other people at that time. And that was, before the base closed. You know, when the base closed, then—

01-00:05:26

Rubens: Was that your primary job?

01-00:05:28

Nitoto: Principally, yeah.

01-00:05:29

Rubens: So you were in the Vietnam War?

01-00:05:32

Nitoto: I was in Vietnam, you know, but I was only there for a short stint, because I had a family member that was also there, so I got to come home and my—

01-00:05:41

Rubens: Now, where was home? Where were you born and raised?

01-00:05:44

Nitoto: Oakland, CA. However, I was partially raised in the San Joaquin Valley, so, you know, between the Valley and here, I've been back and forth between the two areas most of my life. I'm a Californian, naturally.

01-00:05:58

Rubens:

Tell me just a little bit more about what it meant to be a supply person. We'll get to WOCAG, but we don't have interviews with a lot of people who worked on the base. So maybe '75, '74, you were—?

01-00:06:11

Nitoto:

'75, '74, '76. I was a forklift driver. I was a warehouse distribution center person that helped set up the warehouse, and in the military, we set up field supply services. I was in the {553} Field Supply Service out of Houston, Texas Fort Hood after overseas, Visit and this was a similar process here, setting up a supply system, converting the base from military use into civilian uses. And I got into that process. I think that's why they hired me, because I already had a supply background.

01-00:06:51

Rubens:

Were you hired as a civil servant or as a person in the military?

01-00:06:55

Nitoto:

No, I was a civil servant. I was hired to work civilian after the military.

01-00:06:58

Rubens:

Okay. And how big was the workforce, about, then, when you're—?

01-00:07:01

Nitoto:

Ooh, Jesus!

01-00:07:03

Rubens:

Sizable.

01-00:07:04

Nitoto:

Yes. It was thousands of people on the base. I mean, that was the livelihood of West Oakland in particular, and Oakland in general. Between the naval supply, which was the army base, and the army base proper, and then the post office and the port, that was all the jobs. All the economy was there, unless you worked early on the shipyards or something, but that was the real economic engine for West Oakland during these times.

At any rate, CWOR, after the Cypress Freeway collapse, and then we organized to go onto the base with the group that is here in this building, the Workforce Collaborative. We were a part of the Base Collective. We helped form the Workforce Collaborative.

01-00:07:56

Rubens:

It came out of CWOR?

01-00:07:57

Nitoto:

I won't say it came out of CWOR. It's a byproduct of CWOR and other groups, the Homeless Collaborative, and we formed a large collaborative that fought for us, and we won, which I'll get into a little bit later. We won at the base. We won the first round. We were designated that the base should go to

the things that we had set up, and it was going to be an eco-park. And it was—when you win in Oakland, you don't necessarily win. The politics here are quite volatile, in terms of whose constituency likes you and who do not like you. There's a lot of things that determine what happens. But at any rate, the first round, we more or less won.

01-00:08:45

Rubens:

And when you say "first round," you mean as WOCAG, the first plan that was created?

01-00:08:49

Nitoto:

Yes, WOCAG, we were—the Collaborative was a part of WOCAG. If I'm skipping around, do draw me back to the source, but we help through linkages to WOCAG

01-00:08:57

Rubens:

Well let's talk about what you remember of the first WOCAG meeting. My understanding is there had been a call. I've never understood clearly. Ron Dellums came out, maybe when he announced the base closure, but then there was a second meeting where about sixty people were, and they elected you—

01-00:09:15

Nitoto:

160 people were the forming group of the WOCAG, which was formed by let me tell you. We were beginning to pull the process together as the Collaborative working base closures, and my feelings are—I'm going to give you my honest feelings. My feelings are the city officials saw what we were pulling a Collaborative together to start working on the base, and kind of determining what was happening, and positioning things, and a call came out from the city for 160 people board that they would have, would be an advisory board. The city has a history of, in its wisdom, setting up advisory boards that can be disbanded and/or supplemented with what they call a selection committee to actually determine what's going to happen to happen with your project.

So what they tend to do is they pull the selection committee together at the end. This also happened on the freeway, and for the army base the same thing, and I've seen it several times. I don't want to go into all of them, but the point is they set up an advisory body that has quasi-powers, and then at the time of decision making, they'll pull together a selection committee that will actually determine what's going to happen a committee made up of whoever they'd like to be on there, plus they'll bring a few of the advisory people onto the selection committee, the most active ones were put on it, to clam the waters. Like, in this cast, George Bolton and myself were chosen to be on the selection committee; however, I didn't go for it and stayed back.

But the point is that the selection committee always supplements and overrides the advisory body that has been working for the last ten years and has more sense and understanding. But this supplemental body that's put

together will end up making the decision that fundamentally gets the nod in terms of what's going to actually happen, and this is a process in the damn city of Oakland it works every time, and it always—when I was on the Cypress Freeway, for instance, I was on the CMAC affirmative action committee, the Mandela Cypress Advisory Committee, I think it was, the Affirmative Action Advisory Committee at that time. Prop 209 hadn't come in. And I was the vice chair. David Glover was the chair, from OCCUR [Oakland Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal]. At some point, we had an election, and I outvoted David. He's my friend. We didn't make that big a deal of it, but when I became the chairperson, the city got in an uproar, and shortly after, pulled a selection body together, made the determination about the freeway, independent of us as the Cypress Mandela Advisory Committee, made a determination about us, and then put a freeway agreement together, and moved forward, and they gave them out all the contracts, and we fought but the decision made. What could you do? They sent me a letter and told me, "Thank you for participating for the last eight years on this committee. We know we never paid you any money, but you did a valiant job, and we support that."

Same thing more or less, is going on right now with the WOCAG. I don't want to get to it too fast, but the selection committee that just made some through the WOCAG Com. decisions about the projects, the products, is not the process that we went through earlier when we were part of one of the committees that were going for a product on the base for everyone in West Oakland.

01-00:12:59

Rubens:

You had gotten just to that point. You had said, "We actually had a plan that we like, that was going to produce jobs, that came out of the community," and that that first plan seemed it was going to go through, and then a selection—

01-00:13:10

Nitoto:

We had a plan it won. It won by the OBRA and board—what was it? I'm sorry, I've got to get all the titles straight. Stop. Stop. Can we hold it for one second? You can add it yourself, I guess.

01-00:13:23

Rubens:

Absolutely. One is OBRA.

01-00:13:25

Nitoto:

OBRA. Yeah, yeah, yeah. The OBRA was the body that we were appealing to, and we won. We won the votes, and we carried the day—

01-00:13:34

Rubens:

Who was the head of OBRA at that time? Do you remember? He was an attorney?

01-00:13:38

Nitoto:

Not—let me see. OBRA, OBRA, OBRA, OBRA, Jesus Christ.

01-00:13:42

Rubens: I know.

01-00:13:44

Nitoto: The name Paul Nam, but I know them all very well. The union guy that ended up getting some property on the army base—What's his name? Heavy-set union guy who came out of the military named Paul Nam

01-00:14:04

Rubens: All right. Well, we can fill these in, too.

01-00:14:06

Nitoto: Yes.

01-00:14:06

Rubens: We can edit this and fill this in.

01-00:14:08

Nitoto: Yeah. He was the head of it, but the head of the city, the mayors from several cities, the county officials from several cities were on it, and it was making all the decisions on the base while it was being braced, and so we won in this process. We won the votes, and the eco-park won, and we were moving forward with Opus West, and John Grier and we were in a position—John Grier was the Opus West chief, which we made a partnership with Jim Levine, Jim Levine from Levine Fricke And he brought in John Grier of Opus West in to participate and lead the process. We had a major community partnership with the Opus West, Levine Fricke team, and we were setting our part up to function and move forward on how the training program to go on the base. We had won everything from Building 640 the old gym, which is up on the Seventh Street side, down to approximately the north end warehouses on the end of the base. And so we were moving forward with what we were going to do—

01-00:15:17

Rubens: And who's "we," just for one minute?

01-00:15:28

Nitoto: The Army Base Collaborative and the for-profit entity of Opus West and Levine Fricke We did a joint venture, the community and for profit. And between the two groups, spent approximately \$6-700,000 on the ENA to move the process forward. And the WOCAG now—I want to separate the WOCAG from the Army Base Collaborative in the process. When I said there were 160 people, which was the formation of the WOCAG. The WOCAG was a legal body that I had become the president of, but I knew that the city did not want me as a quote "radical" they had already been struggling with us inside of the Seventh Street Corridor Initiative and with the freeway previous to that, so I mean, I've decided, why don't you just compromise with these guys ahead of time? You know how they like to work. Let's bring somebody in that they like.

So I grabbed George Bolton I grabbed him. I don't care what anybody says. He lost the election to me, and I grabbed him and said, "You want to be a co-chair?" And we worked it out. He became the co-chair. And I knew that would make the city somewhat convenient to work with. Because I try to struggle for what the poor people need, more or less, historically. And I know that's not going to make them happy, so if I did the compromise up front, perhaps we could work, you know, and make something out of it. So that WOCAG process moved forward, and we went through the WOCAG at the same time the Army Base Collaborative is forming its process. So there's a dual process with comments going on.

Inside of the WOCAG, I am a functioning member, and they had a consulting firm called EDAW, architectural and environmental consultants; it was a group that Henry Gardener, who was a city manager at the time, brought in and his little partner from EDAW they paid \$600,000 to \$1 million for them to do a survey with the community to determine what goes on the base. Not that they were going to follow it, but we were the advisory committee, so they got from us all of our recommendations and what way we wanted to go.

01-00:17:46  
Rubens:

"We," WOCAG?

01-00:17:47  
Nitoto:

Yeah, we, WOCAG, yes. I'm sorry. We, WOCAG. Now, side by side with that process, we're involved in something to determine what we wanted to see out there to actually be a part of it, you know?

01-00:18:01  
Rubens:

And that's the Collaborative?

01-00:18:02  
Nitoto:

That's the Collaborative. But we were not really running the project. It was really the Levine Fricke and Opus West. I mean, we were trying to get some things in it, and it was determined—I guess by Elihu, the mayor at that time, the friendliest mayor that we've had with some of the community concerns, that this thing needs to be fashioned by a community process. They live out there, and so they should be the people deciding what happens. So we had some say so, although an advisory body. And once you go through the OBRA, you then go to the city. And that's where we're going to get waylaid a but in terms of the OBRA, we won. We were negotiating with the city as the Collaborative. I don't want to get the pieces lost here.

At any rate, the WOCAG was moving along, and along the way, we had all kind of city forums with this glorious body. The EDAW came in and helped us determine what we were going to put on the base, they brought all kind of consultants in, paid them \$3 and 400,000 to help us come up with a plan, and we came up with an industrial plan that more or less said we want a green product that doesn't produce pollution, and stop all these trucks from running,

and do something that was really wholesome for the neighborhood, and put people to work. And so we were happy and moving forward with it, and we thought we had got on the table, and in fact, when the Collaborative, and the Levine Fricke and the Opus West came in with their product, the two things kind of like meshed, more or less, and we got a product out of it that we thought was rather nice. Everybody was not happy inside of WOCAG. I'm not saying we made everybody happy. There were some people that wanted the historical buildings retained, which we didn't have a problem with. It was the city that didn't want to see them retained. But we came up with something that would put people to work, and it seemed like it was a good idea.

The OBRA again said yes to it, and so we begin negotiating with the city in terms of how to build this thing. When I say "we," I was not necessarily inside of it, now. This is John Green, and Levine Fricke and Zigler and other people like this that were actually negotiating with the city.

01-00:20:27  
Rubens:

Who's Zigler

01-00:20:28  
Nitoto:

Michael Zigler is a friend of then new mayor Jerry Brown, who had transitioned in when Elihu transitioned out, Jerry Brown. Zigler is his friend was is in the corporate process and had some kind of a brick making machine that he wanted to set in operation. He was just an associate of brown that brown imposed on us in the ECO Park—

01-00:20:46  
Rubens:

Collaborative?

01-00:20:47  
Nitoto:

—Collaborative, and so—Again, the Collaborative was not the boss of this thing. That was Opus West, a billion-dollar company with had twenty-four subsets of itself all around the country: Opus West, Opus East, Opus Southwest and so on. They had them all over the place. And Levine Fricke was a company out of Emeryville that had developed an environmental product, later on moved a lot of stuff down from the port, down to their landing in Sonoma County somewhere. But that company was running this thing, and was in negotiation with the city.

Now, the city ultimately dumped John Grier and Opus West, and Levine Fricke. Ultimately, they're going out of picture they had money to do the base project but their friends from the community not liked by the powers that be. So what they did is they break us up and go into negotiation with us as the Collaborative for money not a training program as we wanted with Fricke. They're going to end up giving us some money that we allow us to lease this building .

01-00:21:52  
Rubens:

Literally the building we are in?

01-00:21:53

Nitoto:

The one we're in right now. 1433 Webster. And that's how we got here, and how a number of our organizations got a little capital, so forth. But it was not what we had wanted. We wanted a real product—at least I know I did—and we were hoping that it was going to be a training program inside of an economic process out there where people were getting jobs, and getting trained, and really be able to go to work. You know. Now, I'm skipping some pieces, but I'm trying to make it as complete as I can.

Now, if you follow the history, the thing was formed with the large body coming together. The city seeing the Collaborative was moving already, they supplemented our process with their own, because we had started before them. And the city put a whole new process together so the Collaborative wouldn't get a toe hold on the process or get to deep—the WOCAG is now formed, but the Collaborative kept meeting. And then we met, as I said, Opus West, and later on John Grier from the Opus West process. So throughout the whole period, we were trying to get this eco-park set up. And when we won, we were really happy, elated, and our victory lasted for about a year in negotiation with the city, but I think they were actually trying to get rid of the OBRA, and as they got rid of the OBRA, the city itself was the leading factor—through the Redevelopment Agency, which is nothing but the city taking off one hat and putting on another—the city itself took over. Made some decisions that we don't want John Grier. And that's how we end up in this building.

01-00:23:41

Rubens:

When you say “the city,” can you point to—? Maybe you don't want to—

01-00:23:45

Nitoto:

I don't mind. I've been doing this so long. That's one reason I think I stay broke. They make sure that if you're aggressive, you don't end up making a good living in the city. It reminds me of a fellow named Henry Robinson. He used to fight all the time for different things he believed in, and they managed to push him down. He died of cancer, but they named a building after him, the Henry Robinson Center, so maybe they'll name some building after Monsa, after I'm gone. They manage to keep you out of economic—

01-00:24:16

Rubens:

And when you say “they,” though, do you want to say—? You know, is that certain council people? Is it—?

01-00:24:20

Nitoto:

No. No, no, no, it's the De La Fuentes of the principle of the last—since I've been here, it's been he that has led the charge, but all of the council people, with the exception of Miss Nadel and before her Wilson Riles with the exception of that particular group of folks and, perhaps, Jane Brunner. You know, the council has been broken out so that —each district wants to get something for itself. And the army base should be naturally a product of

Nancy Nadel getting what she wants to see in West Oakland, but you really get to see that the whole city council will wield together when it needs to make decisions to avoid giving a particular district what it needs, even though that's the way it's set up. You know, what I get for my district, what I get for my district. You'll find that there's more favors going toward the Hills and/or the Piedmont areas of the city, you know, whereas the tax base is stronger there.

01-00:25:34

Rubens:

So, I'm asking if you think there were some other developers they wanted to bring in there, did they have a different vision, and finally, one other question, was the *port* a player in this? Was the port able to undermine—?

01-00:25:45

Nitoto:

The port has always been a player, but we wrestled the port successfully, I would think, the first time around. The port probably is more of a player now than it was then. But the port was trying to get all of the lands. Financially, I'm not so sure how well off they are right now, but they have always tried to get all of the lands to determine the product that went out there.

01-00:26:15

Rubens:

See, I never understood. Apparently, one of the claims when your first plan was turned down was that BCDC [Bay Conservation and Development Commission] had come up with something, and they wanted a throughout plan? And they were—?

01-00:26:33

Nitoto:

Through put? They wanted to make sure—

01-00:26:34

Rubens:

Through put!

01-00:26:35

Nitoto:

Yes. Yeah, BCDC

01-00:26:37

Rubens:

And they wanted to then flip what property the port had versus—Could you clarify that?

01-00:26:43

Nitoto:

The mechanism, you remind me, perhaps if I had set up the resources and prepared for it, I could have had the history at my tongue, but the methodologies that the city uses, and/or the combination of the city and the port is very clear. Earlier the mechanism in the case of the Cypress Freeway, the city just put another supplemental committee in the Selections Com, to make some determinations. In the case of the army base, they had the WOCAG and EDAW so they had a problem supplementing the WOCAG, so they had to figure a way to do it. So the BCDC became the body that, since it has boundaries around the ocean, I think its a hundred feet, a hundred yards in, they have the boundaries, and it's set up with all the governors and people

from throughout the state, and officials. Jim Levine was a member of it, but you had to be a city, county, state, or governors official, or a developer, or somebody that they felt had some wherewithal in environment that should sit on that body. So that body was new to us, and over our heads in details and functions. We didn't even know—I mean, it was one thing to wrestle with the county, and the city, and even the state, but to wrestle with BCDC, we had to get to know who BCDC was, what its powers were. And so it was a supplemental decision maker that we didn't really appreciate nor understand.

So between the port and the city, the port got a little bit of what it wanted to see. They didn't like our plan. So BCDC was the first group that shot the plan in the foot, that helped the port get back in the state that it wouldn't be a product out there that wouldn't be what they wanted. So that was the—

01-00:28:32

Rubens: The mechanism.

01-00:28:33

Nitoto: —the mechanism that allowed that to really—

01-00:28:35

Rubens: So, what did you do? What kept you going? How'd you pick yourself up and come up with yet a second plan? By the way, did anyone come out from Dellums' office, or from the army, or anything like that, and say, "This plan—" Was there—? I'm only asking—

01-00:28:50

Nitoto: Roberta Brooks was the most informative and prosperous person from the Dellums' office at that time, which he was then in—

01-00:29:00

Rubens: Still in the Congress.

01-00:29:01

Nitoto: In the Congress. Kept us somewhat in state with what was going on, and played along with us to a certain degree, and that kept us alive. However, it is that—with all these moving parts, you've got—think about it now. You've got the Redevelopment Agency, which is sitting back waiting on the decision to be made by OBRA, so they can more or less decide whether they want it or not, or grab it, or just—how they're going to play with it. And then you've got the port that has a BCDC process, you know, and the city's interacting in that, trying to determine what they're getting—

01-00:29:38

Rubens: And then you said there were these other districts in the city council that didn't want to—

01-00:29:43

Nitoto: The Redevelopment Agency is made up of the seven districts. I don't count the eighth one, that's the mayor. But the seven districts *are* the

Redevelopment Agency, but they take the hat off as the city council and become the Redevelopment Agency. That body has a certain degree of power ultimately to determine what's going to happen on the base, but BCDC could tell them, "No, you can't do this with this piece of land; you can't do that with this piece of land," and it goes into a legal fight between them and Caltrans, and then and BCDC, but it's kind of like out of our hands. Expect for our protest and reactions and phases.

01-00:30:18

Rubens: So that was shot? That plan was shot?

01-00:30:20

Nitoto: More or less. But that was—I didn't mention that, but that was the mechanism that they used to override it, and—

01-00:30:28

Rubens: So what happens next? Do you come up with another plan?

01-00:30:32

Nitoto: Well, the Collaborative got out of the business of the army base. Came here and started putting people to work, and we started dealing with—you know, unemployment, homeless, and trying to get people—we've been doing that ever since, you know.

01-00:30:47

Rubens: And did that become your job? Did you come to work here?

01-00:30:50

Nitoto: No, I've never really worked here. I'm a board member of the Collaborative, right? That has always been like our problems. We had some resources. We got some money from the army base that allowed us to get here, and all the organizations within the Collaborative got a certain portion of money, but nothing that was going to sustain it for over the years. And it was clear that the Collaborative had its own job and was trying to do that, and I was a board member of that, so I was principally participating in that. However, I'm a West Oakland resident. Most of the Collaborative folks are not. So once the Collaborative gets some resources and gets set up here, it goes to work. You know, it had the food bank, is a part of the Collaborative; BOSS [Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency] is a part of the Collaborative; the Homeless Collaborative is a part of the Collaborative; the Trade Women; you know CWOR.

01-00:31:57

Rubens: Is the Indian Nation something separate?

01-00:31:58

Nitoto: Yes. The United Nation was a part of it. The United Nation yes but I don't want to say the Indian Nation. The United Indian Nation was a part of it our process but their no nation. And there is a Safe Place, a strong women's group that was a part of it, and there were several other groups that were working

with the Collaborative. I don't remember them all, and I'm remiss on that, but you know. The point, though, is that all of these things, after a year of thinking we were going to get what we wanted; BCDC starts its process or game, the Redevelopment Agency starts to move in and take over everything, and the OBRA's dying out, so that when the OBRA dies out, all of the money—now, mind you. I would say to pay the staff of OBRA, I would say that all the monies that were coming in from all of the rental properties on the base, everybody was leasing property out there; all that money went to run OBRA rent money millions and millions.

01-00:33:07

Rubens: So OBRA's not just the appointee? There's also a staff that is—?

01-00:33:11

Nitoto: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Ms. Gallo Alicia Gallo she was the economic development person from the city that was an appointee of Mr. De La Fuente, and she was kind of like running the stuff, and would report to the gentleman Paul Nahm, he ran the OBRA. He was the head of the OBRA. And so when the WOCAG started—

01-00:33:50

Rubens: So WOCAG continued after that plan was shot down?

01-00:33:52

Nitoto: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, WOCAG, we—myself and a couple other people—struggled. We come up with a program in the eco-park process, called the West Oakland Community Fund, and it was supposed to be \$4 million. They'd gave us a verbal agreement sometime ago approved when they supported our issues but no action would be forth coming no time soon. We never received one red penny, but it's always been there and we're going to get it; the developer's going to give it to us. I'm sure they'll figure out a way to give it to us. You know, when the city gives you something, they gave it to groups or indigenous people. But they don't want to give it to the community. The same community that led the struggle before they got involved or the group that really needs it. They figured a way to stall and stall and stall. I don't want to talk too fast, though, because it hasn't happened.

01-00:34:36

Rubens: They approved—? This was an idea that WOCAG was—?

01-00:34:40

Nitoto: That *I*. That's my baby. The Community Fund is my baby. We developed it within the Collaborative. It was my idea everybody knew that it was something I was pushing. Now it's becomes a part of the city process, but that was my baby. Although I must say I'm glad they included it so the community will get something.

01-00:34:54

Rubens:

Do at least if I understand correctly that the concept of the fund is still there, but they're waiting for the *developer* to actually fund it?

01-00:35:01

Nitoto:

Yes, half would come from the city you would say, but the city never wants to put up any money itself. They should pay and then we could force the port to pay. Now, they can spend money. They can spend on the Fox money comes up for that, they can give money to the Rotunda and they gave money to Forest City, and they can give money to this Ninth Street product. They can give dollars in the millions, but they're not giving any money to a neighborhood group, or to a body that has some legitimist differences, the question is who would receive it, and who would get it, and what's going to happen to it, and is it something that this guy's going to like, or this city's going to like, how is it going to get dispersed, and what are you going to do with it? Are you going to let somebody in the office that's going to go against us? There are a lot of things going through these guys' heads about how that money's going to get spent, and so it never really gets moves. You know, it never really gets pushed to the front. You know, it's going to happen, though. we'll fight for it. We'll make it happen.

01-00:35:51

Rubens:

So this is '98, '99, when you've come up with this idea?

01-00:35:57

Nitoto:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. [Laughter]

01-00:35:58

Rubens:

So you had the idea, but what then—? The WOCAG keeps going for another run around process.

01-00:36:03

Nitoto:

Yeah, that's the problem. Now, see, CWOR [Coalition for West Oakland Revitalization] was moving inside the collaborative.

01-00:35:06

Rubens:

Did they come up with another plan? Was there a second plan, or did it all just remain in limbo?

01-00:36:11

Nitoto:

It remained in limbo. The WOCAG kept going despite the lack of support and resources, and we functioned off of our old plans, our old thinking. But they watered things down more and more. So that the old thinking kind of like disappeared. If I could skip up to now, and then I'll go back—what you see going on is that there is no community process to determine what goes on the base. All the money spent and processes it's *gone*. Although John Grier and Michael Baines and all these different developers such as RLW, or whatever, that they had products that were coming forward, you know, trying to get the land but during that time—all these groups had to follow the community advisory to a certain degree. If they didn't have the community involved in it,

they weren't going to win. That was a part of the process back then under Elihu [Harris, Mayor of Oakland]. Now, that was an Elihu process. When that mayor left and Jerry Brown came in, it watered down a little bit more, but it still stayed alive. He didn't get rid of it until the final year of Jerry Brown. The De La Fuentes's the president of the council, so they more or less got rid of the WOCAG. It really didn't exist for a while.

01-00:37:22

Rubens:

That's what my understanding is. 2006, basically, it's dissolved. And then in 2007, CEDA says essentially, "Well, okay, we'll be a parent to you. There's no money, and there's no binding agreement, but you'll report to us."

01-00:37:39

Nitoto:

But rather than have the community in an uproar, coming at them all the time about, "Why did you get rid of WOCAG? I thought we were going to do something with the army base to help the community," they placate us, and they give us a staff person that's not really a serious staff person, but you got somebody. The last serious staff person we had was Elois Thornton, from the Redevelopment Agency. That's my opinion. Of course, I've been sick. I've probably been out some. But the process is that when the BCDC and then the OBRA disappears, Paul Nahm gets a little piece of property that the union can have. They do something with the Homeless Collaborative, they have given us a little money, and we came here to 1433 Webster St. Then several other groups got some rental property base for various proposes, but all this rental money got used up paying staff bills. Running OBRA. Next OBRA will be leaving. The Redevelopment Agency's coming into vogue now. So as the Redevelopment Agency comes into vogue, they started placating the Community fund. They say, "You guys got that. You won it." So we're happy, we're celebrating. But when the city says you won something, that doesn't mean you get it. [laughter] It's just that you—

01-00:38:58

Rubens:

It's never been funded.

01-00:38:59

Nitoto:

Right, no. It's never been funded. Not in the vaguest sense.

01-00:39:32

Rubens:

Is Elois Thornton someone that I should interview, do you think?

01-00:39:36

Nitoto:

Well, she's a city employee. I don't know. She'll give you a fair shake, though, on what she does share. I would say yes.

Interview interrupted

01-00:39:42

Rubens:

If you don't mind, I'd like to go back to your work in the supply department? How long were you there?

01-00:39:56

Nitoto: With the army

01-00:39:56

Rubens: With the army, yes. On the army base.

01-00:39:59

Nitoto: Oh, six years, something like that. Until the early eighties.

01-00:40:07

Rubens: Before the freeway, before you became so politically active.

01-00:40:10

Nitoto: Right. Right, right. You know, the Cypress Freeway really got me into being political.

01-00:40:14

Rubens: And by the way, even in those six years, were you seeing the base decline? Were you seeing the operations go down?

01-00:40:20

Nitoto: Yes. You know, slowly, slowly. And when Dellums decided to cut out the military processes, I think in my opinion: I think the Congress punished him. They said, "Okay, we'll go to your home, and we'll shut down Oakland's army base there first, so then your own constituents will suffer." In my opinion. That was just a backlash to him: you want to get rid of all this military? Let's get rid of your army base in your area. And so that was the beginning of a whole lot of us losing toehold in West Oakland, in particular.

I think, though, it is fair to say that when I worked on the base, it was full of workers from West Oakland—you could see people out there from the community working. The crime and stuff in West Oakland wasn't so bad. I mean people had jobs. I say, yeah, the kids are bad now, but they get worse when they can't work—when there's no economy, and they had to build their own underground economy, you know? You can't even rob somebody from your neighborhood cause there all brook. There's nobody to rob unless you're taking a TV or something, so when the jobs left, man, it really hurt West Oakland—I can't blame that all on the city council, because it is a country trend, but it was just sad to see the economic engine leave from West Oakland.

01-00:42:01

Rubens: There was a study that was done that said by the time the base closed—now, this is in '96, '97. I guess the last ship goes out in '99, but really it's closing in '96, '7—that most of the remaining employees lived in Pinole, or Hercules, or they lived around—but that was already ten years after *you* had left, it was—

01-00:42:23

Nitoto:

Yes, no, but a lot of us—a lot of people lived in the neighborhood. I could see people out there when I worked there. I could see people I knew, that lived in West Oakland. There were a number of people working there that were from this neighborhood.

01-00:42:39

Rubens:

They worked in the PX? Where did they work?

01-00:42:42

Nitoto:

What was it called? The AAFES [Army Air Force Exchange Supply] which was a PX supply center, and it lasted as long as that PX was on the base, and they supplied PXes all over the place. You know, for example Puget Sound. They got all their supplies from there, you know, and so that was probably the longest lasting. But the warehouses were still they're to send supplies all over the place, and when those warehouses shut down, man, I'm telling you, it was like an earthquake. And it was a quiet, quiet earthquake everything went wrong in the hood because a lot of jobs were gone. We were not aware of jobs leaving it was creeping. I mean we didn't have a process to fight back at that time or identify what was going on. The base closing process came *after* the base closed. It was not here in front of the base closing to try to say, "No, don't do it," and that type of thing. It came as an ending result. You know, some nonprofits came up and did some substantial stuff around the base funded by San Francisco Foundation.

01-00:44:09

Rubens:

I just want to clarify - Paul Nahm, you said he got some property on the base?

01-00:44:15

Nitoto:

Yes, for the union. For the Painters' Union.

01-00:44:17

Rubens:

Oh, I see. Okay. That's where he came out of?

01-00:44:20

Nitoto:

Apparently, he was associated with the painters but earlier he was the executive director of the OBRA.

I have to tell you the truth. I'm an activist, and if you're an activist, you can't expect to get work. The only way I'm would get work is if I set up an organization and I help some poor people, and those poor people in turn hire me or give me a chance to make some money—other than that, my biggest problem is getting funding. And then, if you get the funding it not for admin, administratively you've got to run it and still do your work of the program, while still being an activist. It becomes a complication of getting caught up in not being able to administer the dollars that you do have, and trying to figure out how to get more monies to keep a battle going. You can't fight the people that are funding you.

01-00:45:10

Rubens: So are you saying that you then began to step back from WOCAG in a certain sense?

01-00:45:15

Nitoto: I'm talking here about CWOR my organization. I sorry I changed up on you I wasn't talking about WOCAG, but CWOR, the activist organization. I began to drift the last thing we did in CWOR is put on this festival out here around my kidneys. We did a transplant festival, and we spent most of the money that was left from the base distribution putting on that festival.

01-00:45:35

Rubens: When was that?

01-00:45:36

Nitoto: That was in 2006. We put on a large festival at the park, at the port. The port allowed us to use the park out there.

01-00:45:48

Rubens: Is that the Port View Park?

01-00:45:49

Nitoto: Yes. It was a park that had been built earlier by Clement Ohco. That was the last thing we did with our share of the little base money, and it kind of depleted the funds that CWOR had. But I was also trying to do something for people that were on transplants list with me, I mean people who were on the list but were not getting transplants. They were on dialysis with me, but I didn't mean to skip that far ahead in this story.

Let me back up now to the WOCAG itself. I kept having meetings as the leadership of the process.

01-00:46:20

Rubens: Where did you literally have the meetings?

01-00:46:23

Nitoto: The WOCAG had meetings in the West Oakland Senior Citizens Center. Previous to that, we had them in the library. Oh yes, I forgot to say that I was elected chair of the WOCAG at Taylor Memorial Church and I brought George Bolton on as co-chair to keep the city happy. When the city moved a remedial program to the library, they pushed CWOR out of the library. CWOR had had a home in the library for fifteen years. They pushed us out of the library, and pushed us onto the army base, and that's how we got with the Collaborative. And then when we were forming WOCAG, we had to have the meetings at the Senior Citizens Center now. Mind you, when we're having these meetings, they're not really sanctioned—the city doesn't count them as real official meetings, because although we've got one person coming from the Redevelopment Agency, it's not a sanctioned body that they're following and taking advice from. We're still giving reports and stuff, but they just—you know. You've got your report. You're not really moving anything.

There's nothing going on. The question remains, "What's the next step on the base, and who's going to come out here?"

Who we were really working with is people leasing property and pulling all the people together to build WOCAG. So we were dealing with the lessees who were in line to get the property, or so we thought, and we were tracking what was happening to the money, and where was it going to OBRA, and now when OBRA's stopped, what are you going to do with the money of the leases? We hoped the money could fund the WOCAG process but that didn't happen. So we didn't have any product that we were trying to determine on the base once the eco-park didn't work, and so forth. WOCAG was meeting, and we were struggling with the city about the community fund the only product we wanted at that point. "When are you going to fund the Community Fund we asked?" So they passed and approved it, but it never really came to us. They blamed that on the fact that there were no developers to help pay it. But we kept asking "what about the money from the leases use, you got 2 million that you're supposed to pay" -but no again. We argued that the developers should match funds to pay 2 million and "you pay two. Why can't you front us your 2 million?" We were hoping that funding would allow us to function better. And they're saying no. We know why. They don't want us to have finances to run the group, and make it go, so we could actually do something.

So we ran the WOCAG; CWOR was doing most of the processes at that time with no money for, I'd say, two years. *No money at all*. The question is how do we even put an agenda together, or anything like that. We had one staff person that would come. Elois Thornton would come to the meetings, but there was no there there in terms of our really accomplishing something—you know, we couldn't hire a lawyer, we couldn't put an economic director to the process. Not economic, but an ED, an executive director, with know-how, to run the process -someone that was getting a salary. We couldn't have a staff. So there was no research going on to talk about what we could do.

01-00:48:51

Rubens: No alternatives. There was no—

01-00:48:52

Nitoto: That's right. So we didn't have a plan that we could follow up on and work with. So our biggest contribution was keeping the community fund alive during those years. The reason they're funding it and trying to get it funded now is because we fought to keep that alive from 2002 to 2006. We were fighting to keep the community fund alive, and meanwhile there's a lot of other things we're doing, but that was our biggest contribution, just keeping that fund alive, and keeping WOCAG going.

01-00:49:26

Rubens:

Well, that was exactly my question: how could you keep WOCAG going? I mean, does it become dispirited? Do people start falling away?

01-00:49:34

Nitoto:

We had to go out in the community and grab people, and bring them in, and recruit them into the WOCAG process. To keep the process going.

01-00:49:39

Rubens:

Are some of those people on the report? The last three names on the recent report, the 2008 report, maybe the one that you have turned over, the one just to your—on your left hand. Oh, there! The top three names—

01-00:49:55

Nitoto:

Richard Nevlin stayed with us. And George Bolton was there sometimes around, you know, vaguely. But I was the chair really running it. George came sometimes, you know. We never knew when he was going to be there, but the other folks came back into it as the new processes came together.

01-00:50:19

Rubens:

That's my understanding. The last three names listed on WOCAG's latest report to CEDA for sure are all fairly new people.

01-00:50:24

Nitoto:

Right. Right. Steve Lowe was off and on there, too, so he was a person that was off and on there. But it—

01-00:50:33

Rubens:

Who is someone like Ellen Wyrick-Parkinson? She's a—

01-00:50:38

Nitoto:

She is a land owner—

01-00:50:39

Rubens:

—community member.

01-00:50:40

Nitoto:

Yes she's is a land owner in West Oakland that owns quite a bit of property on Ninth Street and is concerned about what happens to West Oakland, and she's been a historical person in the Oak Center, the Oak Center Redevelopment Area unto itself. She helped to pull that together, her, and Queen, and Paul Cobb, and other people like, and Bill Love, and some other folks. And that was their process, creating that Oak Center. And it still meets. I don't know what the chairperson's name is now. I go to those meetings sometimes. But Ellen came out of Oak Center. She was the president, at that time, of Oak Center. She was also a member of CWOR. She and Queen were part of CWOR.

01-00:51:28

You *certainly* should interview the Queen.

## Exchange of contact information deleted

01-00:51:49

Rubens:

Okay. That's good. The reason I asked you who are some of these people, is because they seem to be the backbone of at least your meetings. I don't know if they're doing the actual work, but that—when you say “Who's WOCAG?” that's what I'm asking. Surely it dwindled from 160 people who came out to the first meeting.

01-00:52:10

Nitoto:

The hundred and 60 people were only there for the first meeting and after that it went down fast. We've already talked about that with EDAW. This is long past that period.

Today these folks now have gotten excited about the new potential developments. But even that has gotten supplemented by the —what do they call it, the selection committee process that just recently came together over the request for proposals for development. And I walked out of a WOCAG meeting, because I came in the meeting expecting to hear a report back from George Bolton one of the few members who attended the selection committee. Now, the selection committee's what the city put in the process when they get ready to really make a decision. They bring that selection body out. They grab so-called important people from WOCAG, and put them in the selection process. Take a couple off of WOCAG so that you can't argue. Perhaps the most aggressive ones, myself and the chairperson, grab some union members, some large CBO's. But so that selection committee recently came together because they have an immediate job to do—I don't know all the names of the groups, and I'm—

01-00:52:58

Rubens:

They had fifteen different plans, and then they cut it down to four?

01-00:53:00

Nitoto:

Right. A, and B, and what is the name of the Federal—the Catellus or Union Pacific —anyway, MSC Trucking, a film company many others I can't name.

At any rate I just left a WOCAG meeting not long ago. The chairperson would not share what he got out of the selection committee. The people on the committee joined when they see that there's now a process for somebody to end up getting the land and in a hurry; they want to be in the mix to make sure it goes to someone they like. However they're new to the process and not West Oakland stakeholders who have spent years in the process. But what they don't realize is that WOCAG is not going to have the same kind of say it had before. Before, we were determining what kind of development would happen, what kind of product was going to come out of it, what kind of jobs for West Oakland poor, what kind of environmental stuff. None of that has

been used in this new process, except what the city wanted to use themselves through staff who they would include. But when the selection committee was chosen, I didn't go to the selection committee. I was chosen to be on it, but I didn't go, because I didn't want to be—

01-00:54:00

Rubens: Just recently?

01-00:54:01

Nitoto: Yes.

01-00:54:01

Rubens: Regarding these—?

01-00:54:03

Nitoto: The current developments that are going on.

01-00:54:06

Rubens: Going from fifteen to four.

01-00:54:07

Nitoto: Yes. I purposely didn't go, because I didn't want to be caught up in that process—I wanted to see where they're going and how they would bring back information to WOCAG, like we had been doing over the years. If they were going to do that, then I would go and participate in the selection committee. If they're going to do it on the next process, I'll try to get in it, because otherwise, they're going to just make some crazy decisions with nobody calling them on it.

But when I went to the new WOCAG meeting to get a report back from the selection committee, they came in and told us it was sealed. Now, this sent me to the roof. We've gone through ten years of arguing what goes on the base, of wasting our time, never getting a dime, and now you got a new group coming in with some developments, and you got rid of the Opus West, eco--park, where people that were spending money, had their own dollars. The eco park was not taking money from the city. You know? Now you've got a process where it's not clear how much money the city's going to put in, but I don't want to jump to that, because it ain't over yet. The point is WOCAG had to wait to get nothing from the members who went to the meeting. No report, and then they let WOCAG make a little report at the city meeting. You get to make this report, but—

01-00:55:20

Rubens: It's basically a reiteration of what the CEDA staff had come up with?

01-00:55:26

Nitoto: Right. So that it's not a fundamental document that's telling them what to put out there on the base from a developed group position of the WOCAG and how it should go blah, blah, blah. None of that is there. That's all gone. It's *all gone*, all of the fiasco about the community's determining what was going to

happen on the base, that developers got to interact with the community, that's all gone. Now they just ramp up with new people and go for it.

01-00:55:47

Rubens: Once Dellums came, did he make any overture toward the community?

01-00:55:50

Nitoto: He did. He put me back in the process that in process. He knew I would help stir the pot and that the chair had taken me off the WOCAG. When I got sick, they took me off the WOCAG. I was elected the chair, I put the co-chair in the leadership and then I get sick and I'm off after ten years of work and institutional history. And so he put me back on the WOCAG not that I'm the community but I have a good perspective on the history of WOCAG. Fundamentally I was involved in the army base. I mean, he's got some liaisons with political perspective so forth going into office, but I don't see him fundamentally involved in what's happening at the base. I don't know what reports he getting however.

01-00:56:19

Rubens: I'm going to have to change my tape.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 nitoto\_monsa\_2\_07-22-08.mp3

02-00:00:00

Rubens: We're on now, and you're saying all of this is to get to—you have a strong opinion about where we are now.

02-00:00:29

Nitoto: Once again, the magical selection committee has appeared, and the people that were put on it, I don't know them all, because I haven't attended one, but they are not the WOCAG. The WOCAG was disempowered, disenfranchised through the selection com—

02-00:00:46

Rubens: So even Bolton wasn't on that?

02-00:00:47

Nitoto: He was the only one. He was the only one. When he came back to make this report, when I got to the meeting last month, and I go there to sit and listen to what's happening, who did you guys start choosing, who are they, he says, "I can't tell you."

02-00:01:04

Rubens: You know, there was a reporter at the city-planning meeting where the announcement was made that four developers were selected to submit a proposal, and he was livid about this. It's an Indian name. I can't think of his name. Sanijiv—

02-00:01:20

Nitoto: Sanjiv Handa? [editor, *The East Bay News Service*]

02-00:01:22

Rubens: Yes, I think so. He is someone who just goes to every single meeting—

02-00:01:26

Nitoto: Oh, he does.

02-00:01:27

Rubens: —knows every single thing.

02-00:01:28

Nitoto: He does. He's up on things in the city, dates, times and so forth and so on. He has a great historical knowledge base—

02-00:01:33

Rubens: He was *outraged* about the sealing of that information, as are you.

02-00:01:37

Nitoto: Yes. I'm saying what the *hell* are you doing? How can you seal something from the body that's supposed to be the group that's going to determine what goes on the base, at least to—what happened to the \$600 to 1 million that you spent on the WOCAG, I mean, on the EDWA helping us determine what goes on the base.

02-00:01:53

Rubens: What is EDWA?

02-00:01:56

Nitoto: I don't know what EDWA stands for, but it was a group that was hired as a consultant to help WOCAG come up with an opinion, to direct us and give information that we needed to guide the WOCAG, you know? And how do you disembowel all of that information, all that stuff that you've done? And so what they came up with is this selection committee, and I was familiar with it from the Cypress Freeway and from the Community Building Teams of President Clinton and other processes. This selection committee or body, they put in a couple of people from the community advisory group and then they bring in people from all over the city to make up their body -some of the developers who are going after the land or have a keen interest in it and some developers' friends, or they bring in a couple of people from the unions, so you can't get too mad. You know? I think Sharon Cornus from the Alameda County Central Labor Council was on this one, so she's a good sister.

But the point I'm making is that they're dealing with a process that does not empower the community and take into consideration the community process and history at all. It does not report back to the community WOCAG. As limited as it was with no funds, and no real staff, and with one of that, we would at least go back and have supplemental meetings with the community at large through our various organizations to report back to the community what

was going on. And if no more than rumors, we would at least get the word out, “This is what’s going on, what do you think about it? This is what’s happening.” But when they went to that selection body, it went over our heads. So I didn’t go to the thing, because I didn’t want to be a two-faced person. I couldn’t—you know, I couldn’t be and criticizing. So I wanted to see where it was coming from, and when I went to hear them, they did say it was sealed! How the hell can you seal this stuff from the group that’s supposed to be determining what’s going on the base?

02-00:03:38

Rubens:

So is there some—you’re saying you have no director, no lawyers, so is anyone trying to break open that—?

02-00:03:46

Nitoto:

No, I mean—I think some of the people got appeased on the WOCAG. I’ll have to see. Some of the projects they want to see got in so well have to see if they have the finances but we’ve been fighting for so long.

02-00:03:59

Rubens:

A long time. And nothing has happened. That is the one thing that—it seems to me, other than this Collaborative.

02-00:04:05

Nitoto:

I have to kind of move on with my life and help determine what I going to be doing—if I’m going to be involved in something being out there on the base, it’s got to be something that’s going to be good—you know, I’m about to have my sixtieth birthday, that thing took ten, twelve years of my life. I don’t have an economic determination of what’s going on now. I’m virtually living off of disability, so you know, it’s pretty sad when people don’t have anything coming out of it and I can’t even get a job or help anyone get a job—the body doesn’t have any real authority or power after all these years, and now they’re going to just bring a supplemental process in there.

02-00:04:43

Rubens:

Well, now it seems it’s another nine months. They’re calling for these four groups to give a plan, and then they’ll have to decide—

02-00:04:53

Nitoto:

Well, I’m going to organize as much as I can through WOCAG and otherwise to try to move in and see which is real, and which is not. What I find in the process, there’s no finances that I can see to sustain the development. There’s no there there. There’s no money. They don’t have the dollars to produce—this is a \$5 billion project, at least on the army base. The entire infrastructure process that needs to be done to build on the base to build it up first. So whoever comes up can’t go out and just find the money. You know, in other words, I see some people trying to win the RFQ [Request for Qualifications], so that they can go out and say, “We got the right to the development. Now we need you to come in from New York, you to come in from Texas, and help us build something.” No, no, no, no. Tell the community what you’re going to

build, and how it's going to empower them to get jobs and stay in the community, and not be pushed out by all the housing going on. Let us know what you're going to build out there ahead of time so we can train our people to go to work in this stuff so we can stay in our own neighborhoods!

02-00:05:48

Rubens:

I guess there are a couple of big issues, still: what to do about the recycling centers that are in West Oakland—

02-00:05:54

Nitoto:

Right. Bill {Abudi's?} his trucking business [OMSS], it would be good to see him go on the base, and get some of those trucking—

02-00:06:13

Rubens:

Do you want to keep the film people—Now, I don't think the film industry was part of any of these recent plans. Reps from the film groups made a plea to be considered. There were all these groups that came up before the planning meeting to plead their cause because they had been cut out of the final four; and they were saying, "Consider us, consider us," but no one on the hearing committee said a word. I don't know if they were heard.

02-00:06:28

Nitoto:

Well, remember the guy was running for President awhile ago. What's his name, Ross Perot? How do you get rid of somebody like that that has all the money in the world? Now, I would have thought that they would try to partner with somebody in the community, with a partner like Perot. You know he's got enough money to put a product out there, you know?

02-00:06:48

Rubens:

Oh, he had some interest here in Oakland?

02-00:06:50

Nitoto:

His son was out there.

02-00:06:51

Rubens:

Oh, I didn't know that.

02-00:06:52

Nitoto:

They voted that down. And so I'm just saying, where's the beef in terms of these products, in terms of their financial wherewithal?

02-00:07:01

Rubens:

Did you have a position on—is it Wayans Brothers Production Company ?

02-00:07:07

Nitoto:

I did support this body having a right to be a part of the development process. They're going to put film out there. Don't get rid of that group that has their own money. Put them in the loop, too. You taking a film group, but this film group's not from around here, and doesn't have anybody from the neighborhood in their employ. The Wayans groups at least had some people

from the neighborhood that's trying to do film stuff, so if you're going to include one film group, include both of them at least give local consideration.

You know, there's no precedent to the decision making of the bodies. I don't see where their thinking is coming from, you know? And it's still got to go through the city council. And once it goes through the city council, I just don't favor the exclusion of organized entities with finances. How are they going to choose which of the four groups, by what standards. But, I mean, I'm hoping that some outside groups that have some real finances, gets in the win. I'm hoping that this process gets waylaid *again*, like they did us. You know? I've seen it two times get knocked down and a new process come back around.

02-00:08:01

Rubens:

Let me just make sure I had the second time. What was the second time when you were knocked down? Watered down? Is that when you said it was a bit of a watered-down version—

02-00:08:10

Nitoto:

Yes. Right.

02-00:08:11

Rubens:

But it still was the plan that came up, and again, that was turned down.

02-00:08:15

Nitoto:

Yes, the first time was the eco-park with Jim Levine, John Grier Opus West turns it into a more or less business park type of thing, it's not so green, but it was at least a product that had a lot of community people in it, because that was the way they were told they had to do it. They had to work with the community. The second time was the cars, an auto park and it couldn't get pass the muster.

02-00:08:40

Rubens:

Is that when the BCDC—

02-00:08:44

Nitoto:

Yes. The BCDC followed the Opus West Winning process to help get rid of it as legal process with the governor's office on broad and various city and county officials with a mix of millionaires in environmental and water work..

Who else did we work with WOCAG on the base? Again that got knocked down but the cars on the base took up a lot of time and money. They were trying to put an auto park with no jobs for the community. And it got turned back. So because you win doesn't mean you win, you know? It's still to be determined what's going to be the outcome, I got to spend some time in this pursuit —now, I don't have the time and energy, but I'll spend *some* time putting some organization together around what's going to go on the base, what's going to work. You know? From the community left in West Oakland. I don't have all the people left around with the years participating the process, and some of us are older and don't want to be involved. I'll put some process

together to go flush it out and see who's real, and who's not. With some small focused effort I'll see who's going to partner with the community, who's going to help put people to work, and who's not going to put them to work. If they don't come up with anything, we'll buck the process as much as is necessary to get a real product on the base that's going to put people to work.

If we don't put them to work, I might as well die fighting, because it's not going to be anything real that comes out of it for our neighborhood, and it's *in* our neighborhood. We're already dying from the pollution, and the trucks, and all the bad air. You know, Margaret Gordon got put onto the Port Commission. That's something I really appreciate Ron Dellums for that gesture, you know. If we're going to all this bad air and so forth, at least we ought to be able to eat.

02-00:10:28

Rubens:

She runs the Environmental Indicators Project [EIP]?

02-00:10:32

Nitoto:

Yes, that was started inside of CWOR our personal group. But it has a life of it's own now. We did good we closed Red Stair Yeast Factory with the EIP and put out some criteria for environmental indicators. That won't be known; as of late the people in it will claim all of the work but that's ok CWOR did help some. CWOR helped start EIP with the EPA. and then as CWOR slowed down, they kept it going with the EPA help. It the group that Margaret Gordon works with in the Pacific Institute and EPA. The Pacific Institute kept it going.

02-00:11:00

Rubens:

So it sounds to me like you're saying to me is come back in a few months and wait and see what's happening.

02-00:11:33

Nitoto:

Right.

02-00:11:34

Rubens:

Something's going to happen.

02-00:11:34

Nitoto:

That's what I'm saying, one way or the other and we'll fight the out come if it's wrong in my consideration.

02-00:11:35

Rubens:

You're not taking this lying down.

02-00:11:36

Nitoto:

I'm not going to lie down on it at all, you know. I'm not *at all* thinking about laying down on it. The base is the last place that we got a chance to put some kids to work, you know, and I wasted ten, twenty years of my life between the freeway and the army base, determining what's going to happen out there so I locked in on time.

02-00:11:53  
Rubens: The freeway campaign at least came together more quickly. It wasn't exactly what you wanted, but it was—

02-00:11:59  
Nitoto: It did. It did.

02-00:12:00  
Rubens: Is this because the amount of land is greater? The money at stake is greater? The political climate changes?

02-00:12:04  
Nitoto: It's like 160 acres out there, 160 acres and more with the port land, and it's really important to set up what's happening in West Oakland—nowhere else in the Bay Area can you go get 160 acres this close to an urban area. So, you know, we're really are concerned about what's going to happen out there, and it's going to be up in the air for a while.

02-00:12:20  
Rubens: I think that's a great place to stop.

02-00:12:21  
Nitoto: Okay.

02-00:12:23  
Rubens: All right. Anything else you wanted to say?

02-00:12:25  
Nitoto: No, no, no.

02-00:12:26  
Rubens: Thank you very much for this interview..

[End of Interview]