


Spring 2010

Interview with Clarice Durham

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Recommended Citation

Alexander, Lauren Ashley. "Interview with Clarice Durham" (Spring 2010). Oral Histories, Chicago Anti-Apartheid Collection, College Archives & Special Collections, Columbia College Chicago. http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/cadc_caam_oralhistories/10

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1 Lauren Alexander
2 Clarice Durham
3 Oral History
4 Transcription

5
6 LAUREN ALEXANDER: this is so high tech (laughs)

7
8
9 LA: ok so today's date is Tuesday March 30, my name is Lauren Alexander and this is
10 Clarice Durham were in her apartment at 2625 S. Michigan. (umm) How long were you
11 active in the Anti-Apartheid movement Clarice?

12
13 CLARICE DURHAM: I say maybe, maybe ten years.

14
15
16 LA: ten years ok, and you started in?

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18
19 CD: in the early 70'

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21
22 LA: ok, the early 70'

23
24
25 LA: um, and you were born in?

26
27
28 CD: Mobile, Alabama

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30
31 LA: in Mobile, Alabama and where you father and mother born there?

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33
34 CD: yes

35
36
37 LA: and you told me you moved to Tennessee when you were eleven?

38
39
40 CD: No, I moved to Tennessee when I was about four, four or five, I moved to
41 Chattanooga Tennessee, and we moved there because my father gotten a job as manager
42 as an insurance company, branch of the insurance company—

43
44
45 LA: ok, alright so like I said I'm just going to start with some biographical questions,
46 then (umm) a narrative, and then your activism work with the Anti-Apartheid

47 movement--

48 LA: what is your earliest memory of your parents Clarice?

49

50

51 CD: when I was a child in mobile, we lived (umm) in a house that still stands, and I can
52 remember going to church with my parents, I can remember Christmas celebrations and
53 so I have had very early memories of them—

54

55

56 LA: Right and it was you and your brother?

57

58

59 CD: Well two brothers, and a sister

60

61

62 LA: Was Christmas your favorite holiday growing up?

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64

65 CD: As with all children (laughs)

66

67

68 LA: (laughs) right, do you remember what your favorite toy was growing up?

69

70

71 CD: Dolls, yes and I can remember my mother going to great lengths to try find some
72 black dolls Christmas time.

73 And I didn't say that I had a third brother who was born in Chattanooga.

74

75

76 LA: so, are you the oldest, so who is the oldest out of your siblings?

77

78

79 CD: a brother, I'm the middle

80

81

82 LA: ok and you are the only girl—

83

84

85 CD: no I have a sister

86

87

88 LA: what kind of rules did your parents have?

89

90

91 CD: they weren't strict I mean they gave us freedom, freedom you know to play and to
92 have friends, but they did have rules I guess like the ten commandants. To be kind to one

93 another, and they really stressed family loyalty. They also were very proud of who they
94 were as black people and taught us about people in our race that accomplished things,
95 (uh...) I think instilled that in us a feeling of belonging to a proud group of people.

96 LA: who did you consider to be the disciplinarian growing up (laughs)?

97

98

99 CD: (laughs) my mother, my father he might have been called a workaholic (laughs) the
100 work took him out of the home a lot (uh) she would sometimes defer to him but she was
101 with us all the time so she was the disciplinarian.

102

103

104 LA: how were you expected to behave as a child?

105

106

107 CD: to be honest, to be kind, to respect elders, and uh to do as well as possible in school,
108 education was quite important to them—

109

110

111 LA: --did your dad and mom both go to college or graduate from--?

112

113

114 CD: my dad did he went to Bradley University I don't know if he got a degree, but I
115 know he attended my mother just went through high school but she had a lot of training
116 in music and domestic science because she was a wonderful seamstress.

117

118

119 LA: what was your memory of Mobile from your youth?

120

121

122 CD: it was a place where we had the freedom on our own, in our own home; I was small
123 so there wasn't a lot I remember going about in town. I remember going to church, going
124 to visit some cousins who lived close by, to visits a great aunt who her sister was my
125 great grandmother, my great grandmother had moved to some of the family to Chicago
126 but her sister stayed in Mobile, so we visited her.

127

128

129 LA: was your neighborhood segregated in Mobile?

130

131

132 CD: oh yes—

133

134

135 LA: -- what was that like?

136

137

138 CD: in fact I didn't realize it we went back to visit several times, and our house was not

139 too far from the city dump. (Laughs)

140 LA: (laughs) (uh) was there certain neighborhoods your parents told you not to visit or--

141 CD: no because we didn't go unescorted expect for these visits I talked about because
142 they were close by but as far as going to the main part of town we would go for Mardi
143 Gras, I remember the Mardi Gras parade. And we may have gone downtown section to
144 shop but I was always accompanied by my mother.

145

146

147 LA: what was the hardest thing to get used to like from moving to Mobile to Tennessee
148 was there a difference?

149

150

151 CD: yes, because we were able to be more independent we had more school friends
152 because we went to school in Chattanooga. My older brother had started in mobile, but
153 my sister and I and my younger brother started in Chattanooga. (Uh) we were enrolled in
154 a program YWCA so we made friends there, and in church we went regularly to Sunday
155 school.

156

157

158 LA: Do you remember some of your dreams growing up as a child?

159

160

161 CD: it's funny I thought I liked a dancer (laughs) we had a playground instructor who at
162 the end of every season would have some type of program and she taught us some simple
163 dances, and then we had a friend who was really beautiful dancer and I liked the way she
164 moved, also liked music, but I wasn't too serious about it, that I regret to this day.

165

166 LA: -- not being involved in music?

167

168

169 CD: yes, Piano lessons because I didn't practice which is absolutely necessary. (Laughs)

170

171

172 LA: well did you take any dance classes?

173

174

175 CD: no

176

177

178 LA: so you would say that religion is an important part of your life what religion did you
179 guys follow?

180

181

182 CD: it was Methodist Zion

183

184

185 LA: what role did it play in your life; it was very significant you guys went to church—

186

187

188 CD: well it was a part of our life, a part of our routine. Until we came to Chicago I
189 continued a church but not at AME Zion at Good Sheppard Congregational it's the
190 Church of Christ now, there we became involved in a young person's discussion group
191 that met after church services and I met a lot of my real long friends there but at some
192 point I stopped going to church and I don't have a church affiliation now but I feel like I
193 live a Christian life.

194

195

196 LA: what would you guys discuss at these discussion groups?

197

198

199 CD: current issues, yes not religion but community issues and-

200

201

202 LA: --and this is when you were in Chicago?

203

204

205 CD: yes, in Chicago

206

207

208 LA: why do you think when you came to Chicago you weren't into religion
209 as much?

210

211

212 CD: well, because we came to Chicago because the death of both of my parents and we
213 came to live with my maternal grandfather and his family and at that time it was
214 depression and families lived together and in this one house there were I guess four or
215 five different branches of the family. One was a minister he actually was a worker in the
216 packing house industry but got the call to the ministry I don't know what kind of training
217 he had for it but he founded a church and that was an AME Zion church which still exist
218 today ST. Mark AME Zion church. We had to go to church service every Sunday,
219 morning service, evening service; weekend services (laughs) because we were the
220 congregation. (laughs) so I think I had my fill of church.

221

222

223 LA: (laughs) I understand what was your favorite thing to do with your friends growing
224 up you know any games?

225

226

227 CD: (um) we play softball, we never did skate I never learned to skate nor ride a bike
228 till I was a teenager, we would just go to the beach, go to the park, go on walks anything
229 that didn't cost money if we had money we go see movies.

230

231

232 LA: what was your worse childhood memory?

233

234

235 CD: I guess the death of my parents, in fact I'm sure and then the death of my youngest
236 brother once we come to Chicago both sad memories—

237

238

239 LA: -- do you mind me asking how did your parents die?

240

241

242 CD: they both had turbulous, my father died first and my mother died a year later.

243 LA: and how old were you?

244

245

246 CD: I was eleven when she died eleven when I came to Chicago.

247

248

249 LA: ok with your brother?

250

251

252 CD: yes

253

254

255 LA: and how did your younger brother die?

256

257

258 CD: I'm not sure but he had always been a sickly child I remember when he was born the
259 first time I heard a specialist for you know children the physician you know who took
260 care of him so he was always fragile and I don't know if it was meningitis I'm really not
261 sure.

262

263

264 LA: it's ok, how did you feel it was such a young age was it hard for you and your
265 brother moving to Chicago and trying to move on?

266

267

268 CD: it was hard because of the atmosphere my parents created for us was quite different
269 what we experienced when we came to Chicago in fact we referred to the uncles and
270 aunts to being old fashioned. You know, They had stricter rules, and were I guess more
271 church-orientated then my parents, you know it was like a culture shock come to live
272 with them although they were good people, kind people but just different.

273

274

275 LA: who were some of your role models growing up?

276

277

278 CD: I guess I would say my brother, my oldest brother, in fact think he had the most
279 influence on my life as an activist, he was quite bright and he had met friends who lived
280 in a settlement house, Lincoln Center which is know the center for intercity studies, but it
281 was settlement house where a lot of social workers and artist people who had very
282 progressive ideas lived and talked. He made that connection and brought me and my
283 sister and then my brother along with him and we became interested in the same kind of
284 organizations and events that he was interested in, he became our family leader I guess
285 you would say.

286

287

288 LA: ok, what were as a teenager you would be attending high school in Chicago what
289 were some of your expectations of high school, were you nervous?

290

291

292 CD: not particularly because, I went to Doolittle Elementary school in sixth grade and I
293 was there just for a semester really, then I went to Wendell Phillips for supposedly
294 seventh and eighth grade, and I expected to graduate and go into to Wendell Phillips High
295 school but there was a transfer made so there was no graduation of my class, so I just
296 went to gasohol but being in the High school building there was no fright. And again
297 my brother paved the way for us he would let the teachers know. (laughs)

298

299

300 LA: (laughs) so you had a connection did you like high school?

301

302

303 CD: I did (laughs)

304

305

306 LA: what was your favorite subject?

307

308

309 CD: I liked Zoology, and a one time I thought I would be a zoology teacher but that was
310 before they combined botany and zoology and it may have been because the teacher,
311 another thing I liked was extra circular and that was working on the school newspaper
312 and I liked the two sponsors of the paper and that was again following the footsteps of
313 my brother who was the editor of the paper.

314

315

316 LA: was there any other clubs you were involved in?

317

318

319 CD: well there was one kind of a hostess club where we would set up the lunch room
320 with center pieces and acted sort of as hostess for the groups that came in for lunch which
321 made lunch time a pleasant time. And I also belonged to the student council that had
322 input into activities and issues around the school.

323

324

325 LA: what was your role in the student council?

326

327

328 CD: just as a member I didn't hold office.

329

330

331 LA: ok, ok what was your first job Clarice?

332

333

334 CD: it was in high school the NYA under Franklin Roosevelt National Youth
335 Administration and I worked in the office of the school psychologist just helping with
336 clerical work. I think my pay was six dollars a week, not a week a month. (laughs)

337

338

339 LA: (laughs) as a teenager how would you say you were affected by the civil rights
340 movement?

341

342

343 CD: I was very much aware of the inequalities that existed the segregation I can
344 remember passing leaflets related to the Scottsboro case, these were young men who
345 were arrested they were hob being from Chattanooga to some other place and there were
346 some girls on the train and the girls claimed that they have been raped by these young
347 men and so they were arrested and sentenced to dies and there was quite an outcry and
348 campaign to save their lives and to get freedom for them and so I can remember that as
349 being one the first cases I was involved in. before that I can remember there was a
350 discussion group that met in Ellis park which was close by to where I was living and they
351 were called reds, well at that time people were being evicted from their homes because
352 they couldn't pay the rent so when these guys would hear about it. They would go put
353 these people back into their living quarters and almost dare anybody to come and put
354 them out again. So my folks you know kind of looked down at them with distain. But
355 they were heroic as far as I was concerned and I met these older relatives I had.

356

357

358 LA: describe the time; you said you and your husband met in high school—

359

360

361 CD: no, it was much later it I had finished junior college when I met him, again my
362 brother (laughs)

363

364

365 I didn't realize how much my brother was in involved (laughs) I met him through my
366 brothers because they were both writers and they were in some kind of writing group.

367 LA: describe the time when you guys first met?

368

369

370 CD: it was at the office African National Congress I had decided to do something you
371 know related to the Civil rights movement and so I thought I could type and do some type
372 of office work, and so I had gone to the office to offer my services and it was just
373 coincidence that the two of them my brother and my husband to be came into the office
374 and we met there.

375 And I might say there is another person who was influential in my life and he was
376 in charge of the office and his name was Ishmael Flurry.

377

378

379 LA: what was the name, do you remember the name of the writing center or group?

380

381

382 LA: you were involved?—

383

384

385 CD: no my brother and my husband.

386

387

388 LA: what was the writing for?

389

390

391 CD: they were writing poetry

392

393

394 LA: ok ,why did you decide to go to the college you chose?

395

396

397 CD: I went to Junior college because it didn't cost as much as a regular school; I had
398 gotten a scholarship to Fisk University. But I wasn't able to go the scholarship didn't
399 cover all of the expenses at that time I was living with an aunt.

400 And I didn't mention that the fact my grandfather died soon after we came to
401 Chicago and so we went to go live with my mother's sister and she had been able through
402 the people at Lincoln Center to get some aid for us it was called Children and Family
403 services, so she was able to get assistance. And we were just in poor circumstances, you
404 know we were never hungry or without clothing anything like that, but extras were out of
405 the question. She just couldn't afford the expense of me going away to school, so I
406 went to Wilson Junior College.

407

408

409 LA: how did going to Pestazolli Forbel teachers college influence your academic and
410 social life?

411

412

413 CD: I went there for evening school and I had always wanted to be a teacher I had in the
414 meantime gotten a job with the state of Illinois unemployment compensation office and I

415 knew I didn't want that kind of job. So I decided I better get into school and be trained
416 for what I want to do. And a friend of mine was interested in early childhood education
417 so the both of us ended up in Pestazolli Forbel College.

418 LA: so why did you decide to become a teacher?

419

420

421 CD: I had in Chattanooga I had a teacher that I had admired very much and in high
422 school there was a chemistry teacher I wasn't that proficient in chemistry but he was just
423 good person he seemed down to earth and really supported children and encouraged so
424 I liked that.

425

426

427 LA: I was going to say that's my next question who was the teacher you learned the most
428 from?

429

430

431 CD: well the teacher in Mobile and that was when I was in the primary grades I think
432 she taught me in the third grade and her name was Barnette and she was from a family
433 that was very close to my family in fact we kept in touch with some of the younger
434 members of the family who moved to Chicago and were still in touch and they were the
435 last family we were with before we left Chattanooga. So we had a connection not only in
436 school but in our social life as well.

437

438

439 LA: why did you decide to go to Roosevelt University for your masters?

440

441

442 CD: Roosevelt had a reputation of being a liberal school that encouraged African
443 Americans students again I was earning more and could afford to pay the tuition. Just I
444 could not afford to go to Northwestern nor the University of Chicago, I had gone to
445 Northwestern for a seminar and I like that but I couldn't continue graduate school. So I
446 went to Roosevelt and a lot of friends have gone there.

447

448

449 LA: so you taught nursery school, what was your favorite part of nursery school?

450

451

452 CD: well I liked the openness of the children who were receptive for the most part there
453 were some trouble makers (laughs) even in nursery school but for the most part they were
454 opened to you know whatever you had to offer and really honest in their reactions and
455 relation with you.

456

457

458 LA: did you teach anywhere else?

459

460

461 CD: yea, I taught at Crispus Atticus that is at 39 th and state st. its subsequently closed
462 now but that was the first job I had at public school and that was a traumatic experience.

463 LA: how was that?

464

465

466 CD: I think there were about 75 children in the class and what happened is that the
467 principal assigned two teachers per class in order to keep some type of control to teach
468 whatever we could but it was such a change from preschool where the class load is
469 limited and you get to know all of the children very well but this was terrible. (laughs)

470

471

472 LA: (laughs) how long did you teach there before?

473

474

475 CD: I taught there from 58, yea I didn't realize it was that long from 58 to about 65
476 and things got better yes, I must say.

477

478

479 LA: what happened?

480

481

482 CD: just better children in the classroom. And I guess I made an impression on the
483 principal because when the Board of Education decided to open some head start
484 classrooms she recommended that I be one of the head start teachers and I was, one at
485 Dodge school, and one at (uh) Drake elementary school, and one at Dugella School but
486 I was at Drake School and that was in 1965.—

487

488

489 LA:-- and that was better?

490

491

492 CD: oh, yes

493

494

495 LA: tell me about your most profound or evident academic achievement you have or
496 what do you feel like has been your most rewarding academic achievement?

497

498

499 CD: well I was valdectiroian of my high school class and I did well and subsequent
500 classes again as a head start teacher I was recommended for this seminar at Northwestern
501 University, and it was a seminar about teaching in urban areas, and I enjoyed that very
502 much we were connected to communities we would go out to visit organization in
503 communities. Just to get a feel of what was happening in various locations so that was
504 quite of an achievement.

505

506

507 LA: how has your education help you become aware of the Anti-Apartheid movement?

508

509

510 CD: there was a teacher in high school who name was Mary Herrick she was a civic
511 teacher and she was an activist in fact I think she was on the founders of the Teachers
512 Union and also the League of Women's Voters but she exposed all her students to
513 government and how government functions, and field trips were made to court rooms
514 although I never went on one of those field trips, those were things she did, she had a
515 tremendous memory you can see her years later and you might see her and she would
516 remember your name. and I don't know if you've heard of Tim Black but she took a
517 special liking for him and made it possible for him to teach at Dosbal High School and he
518 has gone on to do greater things but she was just a wonderful influence.

519

520

521 LA: she helped you become aware of the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa?

522

523

524 CD: no because that was back in 1937 when I graduated so that was not an issue at that
525 time.

526 LA: ok, we'll tell me about your first time dealing with racism?

527

528

529 CD: indirectly in Chattanooga because the schools were separated and just upfront we
530 had to pass some couple of the schools white children went to and they were in much
531 better conditions than the one we had, but we had wonderful teachers that tried to give us
532 everything we could and tried to help us along the way. But I can remember that feeling
533 of put down.

534

535

536 LA: when did you first become aware of the Apartheid movement?

537

538

539 CD: it was the early 70's, because I became a member of NAMSAL maybe around 1974
540 or 5 and there was movements to give sanctions against South Africa there were
541 movements against the (don't know what the interviewee is saying) based on the policies
542 of south African government. There were certain things going on that I was aware of,
543 and I don't think in fact I know I wasn't in any particular group at the time I worked in
544 the NAACP and concerned then was around segregation here in Chicago and nationwide,
545 but the Chicago branch was worried about what was going on in Chicago. So I was
546 always aware of what was going on in terms of civil rights.

547

548

549 LA: what other activist work did you participate in before 1980?

550

551

552 CD: NAMSAL I guess that was it.

553

554

555 LA: what was your first reaction to the Anti-Apartheid movement, what were some of
556 your feeling and emotions that came up?

557

558

559 CD: well I was applaud and I felt you know that this was something that should just not
560 happen, I think when the students protested and some were killed and that was in 1976,
561 and these students in the Soweto Community and might say I was aware of the fact that
562 black people were being uprooted from their homes and made to move into these
563 communities for strictly south African blacks. These students were protesting that they
564 had to learn the language of the Dutch. What was that language? (long pause) anyhow
565 they wanted to learn in their own language or English but not in Dutch language, so they
566 protested and several of them were killed and then that just aroused feelings of really
567 feelings of enragement that something like this can go and the feeling that something had
568 to be done to stop it, I might say also that I began to see the connections I felt that if
569 Africa became free it would mean a lot for the black people here in the united states and
570 vice versa if we were able to reach equality it would mean a lot people in Africa so I saw
571 an international connection.

572

573

574 LA: what interested you the most about this movement compared to the civil rights
575 movement versus any other movement?

576

577

578 CD: well I seen changes you know in both places I was thrilled when Nelson Mandela
579 was free from prison and was able to become you know president of the South African
580 government I was thrilled when Ghana gained its freedom and all of the other nations, I
581 had visited Africa at the time the country was called Zaire and it was where Muhmmhead
582 Ali fought George Foreman and so I went there for the fight and the reason I went was
583 because my husband was following a lead around the information so he could help
584 him write his autobiography, so I went along as a part of an entourage. (laughs) just the
585 feeling I got when I got off the plane and stepped on the ground—

586

587

588 LA:--yea I was going to ask you about that

589

590

591 CD: it was something that was just hard to describe, but I also saw the conditions that
592 people were living under there.

593

594

595 LA: why did you decide to become an activist?

596

597

598 CD: I always felt like I had a responsibility that if I knew that there were wrongs being

599 done that it's just wasn't an option to be quiet about it and I just wanted to be involved
600 and develop any changes, and I don't know how I developed that feeling but that is the
601 way I felt.

602 LA: was your husband ever involved in your activist work?

603

604

605 CD: he was involved but in a different way, he was a writer and he was a feature writer
606 for the Chicago defender newspaper and he was on staff there, until staff decided they
607 wanted a union and the administration at Dosbal wasn't for that so he was fired from that
608 job but he had training with the WPA Works Progress Administration under Franklin
609 Roosevelt, he had training as a writer there but prior to that he had written poetry and I
610 had mentioned that he and my brother had been in this poetry group and he had poems
611 published in newspapers and magazines, so his work was not on the streets you know but
612 in his writing he was very much involved.

613

614

615 LA: I know you say your brother influenced you the most, who influenced you the most
616 to become involved in the Apartheid movement?

617

618

619 CD: I think it was Ishmael Flurry(??) because after my son was born and he was a
620 premature baby, and I had devoted a lot of time to take care of him and I fallen out of
621 political and activism and I guess he, Ishmael Flurry(??) was someone who was always
622 encouraging people to get involved, and so we talked and I didn't know what group I
623 wanted to be associated with so he introduced me to NAMSAL so I attended a couple of
624 meetings and I liked what I heard and saw and decided I wanted to become a member.

625 LA: what would they talk about at the meetings?

626 CD: they would talk about the police sanctions against South Africa and we also put on
627 several meetings and forums and events where representatives from the ANC African
628 National Congress would come to speak before the group we were also concerned about
629 what was going on Rhodesia that is now Zimbabwe so we had several annual dinners
630 where these speakers would come to inform people about what was going on and
631 in-between these different discussions we would show some films about what was
632 going on, I can remember one but I can't remember the title of it but it dealt with the
633 infant mortality rate in South Africa or Africa in general.

634

635

636 LA: how did that make you feel?

637

638

639 CD: just terrible

640

641

642 LA: I can imagine describe the structure of NAMSAL it was the Nationalist—

643

644

645 CD: -- Anti-imperialist movement in Solidarity of African Liberation and so that's why
646 the acronym is NAMSAL (laughs)

647

648

649 LA: (laughs) that was long—

650

651

652 CD: (laughs) that was long too

653

654

655 LA: yes, did you guys just refer to it as NAMSAL

656

657

658 CD: yes,

659

660

661 LA: what was the structure like at NAMSAL?

662

663

664 CD: well there was the usual president, secretary, treasurer, I can't remember if we had
665 particular standing committees but we have various committees that would plan the
666 meetings and dinners, and fortunately I held onto three of those programs, but
667 unfortunately there are a lot of things I did not keep and I realize now how important it is
668 to keep those papers and make them available for future generations.

669 [CD begins to show dinner programs]

670 CD: this was one and the speaker at this dinner was a man by the name of Criopus
671 Inobolo (??) well you might look at if you want to see the spelling and also a
672 congresswoman from Chicago, but he was from Rhodesia and was one of the people
673 fighting there for the freedom of Rhodesia and that was in 1976 I think. And this one was
674 the 5th annual, and this one I kept some notes on I was the mistress of ceremonies so I
675 kept some notes on what I had to say, and this one the people who were honored were
676 Wesley South (??) who was a newspaper and radio journalist, and Karen Mosley Brown
677 (??) who eventually became senator, and at that particular dinner Harold Washington
678 spoke and Gus Savage and at the time both of them were running for congress,--

679

680

681 LA: so the dinners were very informative?

682

683

684 CD: yes, and they were fund-raisers as well

685

686

687 LA: so would you guys ask to make donations?

688

689

690 CD: yes well we charged for the dinner and then would ask for donations as well. And

691 this one, I was in charge of the committee and there was some misunderstanding because
692 we had expected William Hatcher who was the mayor of Gary, we expected him to be
693 one the speakers but for some reason he wasn't able to make it but at that meeting
694 Barbara Masckela (??) who was connected to the UN I believe she was the main speaker
695 and the people who we honored then I don't think are as quite as well known as Wesley
696 South (??)(and Karen Mosley Brown (??) but one was a man by the name of Eugene Ford
697 he doesn't give enough credit for the things that he's done but he was president of the
698 Dosbal Museum board when they moved from Margret burrows house to the facilities
699 they have now in Washington Park, so he has always been active in the civil rights
700 movement but a very unassuming man.

701

702

703 LA: so you have a lot of the dinner stuff?

704

705

706 CD: just three

707

708

709 [LA/ CD ruffle through dinner programs]

710 LA: so you did the press releases?

711

712

713 CD: no it was a young woman by the name of Leona Kemmens (??) I think her name was
714 given as the contact on the press releases

715

716

717 LA: yes, well yours is the contact

718

719

720 CD: mine

721

722

723 LA: yes

724

725

726 CD: that must have be the one where Masckela (??) spoke, ok so I was on that one but
727 Leona on a couple of others.

728

729

730 LA: so what were some of your responsibilities in the organization?

731

732

733 CD: well I was treasurer for awhile and that was more than enough responsibility to have
734 (laughs)

735

736

737 LA: well what were some of your jobs, tasks?
738

739
740 CD: well to receive any contributions that came in, and deposit them into the bank and
741 keep record who gave what, how much we had, what we spent, and what little we had
742 left. (laughs)
743

744
745 LA: how did your organization work with the African National Congress?
746

747
748 CD: well, primarily by having speakers from ANC come but also supporting there exile
749 groups and there was one, we got a letter saying they were very much in need of supplies
750 for babies, and listed you know the things that they wanted among the list they call them
751 napkins but their diapers, so we had a quite successful diaper campaign and a lot of
752 people asked why are sending them diapers, well we said this is what the people asked
753 for and this is what they need, you send them what they need you know not what you
754 think they need.
755

756
757 LA: right, exactly what was your organizations main concern during the Anti- Apartheid
758 movement?
759

760
761 CD: that the laws be changed that the blacks south Africans have the same freedoms and
762 rights that any other citizens of the country have, that the political prisoners be freed, and
763 I might say that towards the end of existence NAMSAL the free south African movement
764 was organized and I think we just sort of merged with that movement and discontinued
765 any work with NAMSAL there was never a formal disbandment of the group, but
766 remembers became involved in the free south Africa movement.
767

768
769 LA: you became involved as well?
770

771
772 CD: yes
773

774
775 LA: what impact did you have on your son, your family at the time during your activist?
776

777
778 CD: well it's my son he has not join groups such as I he has always supported the
779 movement he has had a great understanding of what was going on, he makes his
780 contribution through music, he's a musician in fact he going to appear at the dinner or
781 group that I'm connected with now, with another long name which is the National
782 Alliance against racial and political oppression.

783

784

785 LA: what are you doing in this group?

786

787

788 CD: well I'm co-chairman of the group in Chicago

789 LA: well whets that about the National Alliance against Racial and Political Oppression
790 about?

791

792

793 CD: well were concerned with the criminal justice system, the organization was formed
794 around the movement of the freeing of Angela Davis so its mission is to free all political
795 prisoners, but it has extended now we are concerned with police brutality, and with
796 treatment of prisoners the fact that the system now seems like a system of punishment
797 rather than correction of I'm trying to think of the word but anyways, does nothing to
798 teach people how to better citizens, you know to give them the education and skills that
799 they need when they come out of prison ready to be contributing members of the
800 community, we are also concerned with the lack of inadequate healthcare the prisoners
801 get, and we are opposed to the death penalty.

802

803

804 LA: describe your first demonstration you participated with?

805

806

807 CD: I really can't remember (fire truck alarm)

808

809

810 LA: ok, was there any demonstrations that were given in the school or maybe when
811 working with NAMSAL?

812

813

814 CD: I can remember going to meetings being involved in 1948 in the founding of the
815 progressive party, when Henry Wallace was the candidate for President I can remember
816 going to that convention that was in Philadelphia, I didn't go as a delegate but as a
817 observer, on the heels of that there were several mass meetings held in Chicago that
818 supported that party and election and those were really exciting meetings, I know one
819 Mchagan Jackson (??) sang, and Paula Ruthson (??) and you know others, those were
820 meeting I guess you would not call them demonstrations and such but mass meetings.

821

822

823 LA: how did you stay informed? (fire truck alarm)

824

825

826 CD: through the organizations I was involved in, through reading, and I guess I read the
827 daily work the publication of the communist party, and various pamphlets I don't
828 remember the titles but through readings and discussions. (fire truck alarm)

829

830

831 LA: Have there been any other movements you have participated in besides the
832 Anti-Apartheid, and free South Africa?

833

834

835 CD: well there was the desegregation of the Chicago public schools and I worked on the
836 education committee and the NAACP and I can remember a demonstration by the
837 community where they boycotted classes at the schools, and I was a teacher then at
838 Crispus Attickus a kindergarten teacher, and I remember wishing that I could be out there
839 with the people out protesting there but I had my job to keep, and I had my fingers
840 crossed that no children would come to class that day (laughs), and they didn't it was
841 quite a successful boycott.

842

843

844 LA: what was that like being a part of the boycott the feelings and energy was it--?

845

846

847 CD: it was dramatic, I have a good friend now who actually stood in front of a bulldozer I
848 think they were trying to build a foundation for mobile unit you know rather than the
849 children going to empty classrooms in white communities they would put up these
850 mobile units, so they were getting ready to construct one and she stood in front of the
851 bulldozer to try and stop them. (Laughs) and then of course we passed out leaflets and
852 information to within the community.

853

854

855 LA: would a lot of people show up to these boycotts?

856

857

858 CD: yes, and I belonged to a group called teachers for quality education because we felt
859 that sometimes neighborhood compositions did not allow integration of school within
860 those districts without busting up some kind of thing, and so we felt wherever these
861 schools existed there should be quality education, so I was in a group like that which was
862 not really a long lived group.

863

864

865 LA: what do you think was the hardest challenge your organization faced?

866

867

868 CD: the challenge of change, of people acting change, people accepting the fact that some
869 have to give up what they have, and have on the basis of unfair practices and everybody
870 has to sacrifice if there is going to be change and that people can't be silent and can
871 expect somebody else to do that they have to become apart.

872

873

874 LA: what was the biggest contribution your organization made towards the Apartheid

875 movement?

876

877

878 CD: making people aware I think of what was going on in a small way but as they say
879 every little bit counts, so I feel like we did make a contribution we were able to attract
880 audiences to come to the events we had and hope for these stimulated people to
881 themselves to become involved.

882 LA: Were there ever tensions or conflicts that arise among anti-apartheid activists you
883 worked with or, were everyone peaceful and got along?

884

885

886 CD: in the group that I was in yes, there might have been confusions you know in broader
887 groups but I'm not aware of what those were.

888

889

890 LA: do you remember the last project your organization worked on against the Apartheid
891 movement?

892

893

894 CD: I think the last, was the last dinner that we had where we had Barbara
895 Masekla(??)and she was quite a dynamic speaker and we were proud that she was able to
896 be with us, but we had a speaker at another meeting and he had come to the united states
897 to work at the united nations and his responsibility was to make people aware of what
898 was going on and to create support for the sanctions against the government and I jotted
899 down his name let's see. [CD ruffles through his paper to find name]

900 LA: you're so prepared (laughs)

901

902

903 CD: (laughs) his name was J-o-h-n-n-y M-a-k-a-t-n-i and he spoke at one of our forums
904 but I'm not sure which one, another speaker we had was Dennis Brutiss(??) he did speak
905 and so we felt we were making a contribution by introducing these people to the Chicago
906 community.

907

908

909 LA: how did you participate in divestment?

910

911

912 CD: I don't think I had any direct, it was just general divestment movement but as far as
913 calling on particular originations institutions I supported whatever was being proposed
914 but I had no outstanding role in that.

915

916

917 LA: how did you react to Reagan's election in 1980?

918

919

920 CD: ohh gosh I thought it was the worst thing that could have happened, he went to

921 Philadelphia, Mississippi, to announce his candidacy and Philadelphia, Mississippi was
922 where three young freedom writers were killed Sherna Goodman (??) and Shanie (??)
923 those might not be the exact names but they were involved in a campaign to get voting
924 rights for people in the South and in Mississippi particular they were killed, and for
925 Reagan to go there which meant he was appealing to people with this outlook was just
926 outrageous and I felt like he betrayed what he once was, and I know my brother was an
927 actor in Hollywood, and Reagan at one time was president of the Actors Guild and they
928 were a progressive group so he betrayed that.

929

930

931 LA: how did you feel about Reagan's administration policies towards South Africa?

932

933

934 CD: wrong, he was absolutely wrong because he was willing to go along with what was
935 happening there not to raise any protest against it, and I think that's when the free South
936 African movement really came into being an opposition to his policies.

937

938

939 LA: how did you react to the election of Harold Washington?

940

941

942 CD: great, just wonderful (laughs) in fact I guess he actually came to the McCormick
943 place after the election and McCormick place then is not where it was located it was on
944 the lakefront and my sister and I remember we trekked over there to be with the crowd
945 to greet him and celebrate his election, and I was able to go to his inauguration and hear
946 his inaugural address it was just fascinating, uplifting.

947 LA: how did you react to the end of the Apartheid?

948

949

950 CD: with joy, my brother not my older brother but my brother next to him organized
951 groups travel groups and we would go to different countries in Africa to learn about our
952 backgrounds, and we would always avoid South Africa but once—

953

954

955 LA:-- why?

956

957

958 CD: why because of their policies, yea and but once Mandela was freed and elected
959 President that was one of our first trips you know, back to Africa we went to Cape town,
960 Victoria (??), Johannesburg and the feeling was just great just wonderful and a lot of
961 hope that things would change.

962

963

964 LA: yea I was going to ask you how did you feel about the release of Mandela?

965

966

967 CD: to see him walk out of that prison you just glowed in happiness and the realization
968 that had it not been the protest, action, and the voices of a lot of people it never would
969 have happened so it was a lesson in being involved.

970

971

972 LA: so why did you decide to go to South Africa?

973

974

975 CD: to see how things were, and it had always been a place described as place of beauty
976 and of course we wanted to see that and we went to a settlement when were in Cape town
977 I can't remember name of the settlement but there was a preschool there we made a
978 donation and kept in touch with them you know individually for sometimes afterwards,
979 but to see the contrast in the settlement of blacks and to see the adjacent of where white
980 lived was like the difference between black and white you know (laughs) in the literal
981 sense of the word (laughs) but to talk to the people there who were just thrilled that this
982 had happened and with a lot of hope that things would change. We went to Durban where
983 we saw people living in shacks improvised shelters and even as bad as they looked they
984 were trying to educate their children, so you know there was still a lot of hope and still a
985 lot of activity around making that a better country for everyone, we were able to go to a
986 school there that had become integrated after apartheid, and there the children seemed to
987 be happily involved and the instructors were open and seemed relieved that there have
988 been a change in polices.

989 LA: how did going to South Africa Change your perception of the anti-apartheid
990 movement actually being there and seeing like you said the working conditions how did
991 help change your whole mindset of what you had in your head?

992

993

994 CD: well I think the realization that it was going to take some time for changes to be
995 noticed the realization that not everybody was for the change and there would be some
996 resistance, and I think there is a comparison that can be made in the United States with
997 President Obama he is not going to be the sole savior, the sole solver of the problems that
998 everybody has a responsibility if any difference is going to be made, and the
999 responsibility to let him know whets wanted and to support him, and do to whatever we
1000 can and I think that's a lesson for everybody who is fighting for progressive changes that
1001 they can't sit back it's a constant, constant, kind of struggle.

1002

1003

1004 LA: describe what it was like to be in South Africa during the election were you at the
1005 election?—

1006

1007

1008 CD: -- no but I watched on television the long lines of people waiting to vote and we had
1009 a friend Harold Rogers who had been in south Africa and had connections there and he
1010 was involved with the election campaign and he bought some examples of the ballads
1011 would look like you know a lot of people were literate instead of words illustration were
1012 used to help people with their voting, it was just very thrilling.

1013 LA: I know you said the shacks, what were other problems you saw in South Africa?
1014 CD: in Johannesburg which is a quite a large urban community there were problems of
1015 crimes warning not to go certain places, certain places alone, because desperate people
1016 and you just can't deny the fact there are just people who aren't good people (laughs) and
1017 who take advantage of others, and I think that living conditions have a lot to do with
1018 making them that way just like in Chicago you have to be careful.

1019
1020

1021 LA: what was the most rewarding experience you had while being in South Africa?

1022
1023

1024 CD: meeting well shaking the hand of Wendy Mandela we had gone to the apartment
1025 building in Capet won and had a discussion by one of the representatives, and for some
1026 reason my brother had run out into the hall and came running back saying guess who out
1027 here, and we all went in to go see Wendy Mandela and she was very charming and
1028 greeted us and thanked us for being there, and what had been done to help them so that
1029 was quite thrilling and then we went to Soweto and we saw Mandela's home and we also
1030 saw her home which was a newer structure neither were there at the time. We went to
1031 Victoria (??) hoping that's the seats of government we were hoping that Mandela himself
1032 would be there but he was out of the country at the time and we sat on the steps of the
1033 building and took pictures that kind of opening overlooking a park and this is where
1034 Mandela made his acceptance speech so we took pictures of someone standing in that
1035 opening and again just being a place with that historic significance was very good.

1036
1037

1038 LA: did you do any work while you were in South Africa?

1039
1040

1041 CD: No

1042
1043

1044 LA: tell me about your post like after the apartheid movement and your activity work?

1045
1046

1047 CD: well I know the NARRPR is the group I worked with since then and in between I
1048 wasn't a part of an organized group but kept up to date on what was going on, and I met a
1049 friend on the bus they looking for a place to have a brunch for NAMSAL and I said they
1050 can come to my house they did and of course I was hooked in (laughs) and agreed you
1051 know to co-chair the organization do so as long as I had the energy to do so because I'm
1052 up there in age.

1053
1054

1055 LA: how has being active in the movement changed your life?

1056
1057

1058 CD: I don't know what my life would be like I feel like a part of it is personal because

1059 feel without connections with people who are doing significant things or with friends you
1060 just wither away and I don't what that to happen.

1061

1062

1063 LA: what are you most proud of in general, just life?

1064

1065

1066 CD: of producing a son who gives me great pride, he is an administrative at Chicago
1067 State University in charge of Alumni Affairs he is a wonderful musician, he is a great
1068 husband, father and grandfather and there is nothing more I can ask for.

1069

1070

1071 LA: is there anything you would go back and change?

1072

1073

1074 CD: probably (laughs) but I can't think of what it would be right now but I know there
1075 are things I would change.

1076

1077

1078 LA: what was the biggest sacrifice you made while being an activist?

1079

1080

1081 CD: time

1082

1083

1084 LA: time with the family, or time in general, or you devoted a lot of time into being an
1085 activist?

1086

1087

1088 CD: yes it takes a lot of time and concentration for things to do the things that need to be
1089 done, And I guess the things that I would go back and change would be that I would not
1090 take on more than I feel could deliver, so that drives you to the point sometimes there
1091 sleepless nights.

1092

1093

1094 LA: how has being an activist made you feel about life?

1095

1096

1097 CD: hopeful, optimistic, sometimes discouraged something always happens it seems to
1098 boost up your optimism and your belief that what you do makes a difference and bringing
1099 about the kind of changes you are working for.

1100

1101

1102 LA: what was the most difficult time you endured during the Apartheid movement?

1103

1104

1105 CD: I can't remember any particular difficult time.

1106

1107

1108 LA: ok , during the Apartheid was there any time you lost hope?

1109

1110

1111 CD: No

1112

1113

1114 LA: no, you always felt—

1115

1116

1117 CD: I always felt and you look back on history, slavery I'm sure it looked like that
1118 system would never be ended but you had people like Frederick Douglass, Harriet
1119 Tubman, Mournner Truth, and Cripus Attickus and you know all those people who
1120 sacrificed and in the case of Attickus took his life, who did not live to see all the changes
1121 I know Douglass lived to see the end of Slavery I'm not sure about Sourjuner and
1122 Tubman when they died but realizing the fact they have been struggling for years and
1123 eventually changes came looking at the establishment of the NAACP and all of this being
1124 referred to the Civil rights movement which has been going on for years, it just takes
1125 time, time, patience and persistence and things cant continue, at some point something is
1126 going to happen to make things better or worse, hopefully for the better.

1127

1128

1129 LA: what advice would you give to other activist who is fighting for injustice
1130 inequalities?

1131 CD: the same thing to stay informed and involved.

1132

1133

1134 LA: what problems do you think South Africa still faces today?

1135

1136

1137 CD: from what I hear housing is still problem, land distribution, employment, health and
1138 there have been disappointments on how these things were handled, like the deny of the
1139 aids epidemic but always there are people there who have to fight their own battles and
1140 are doing so.

1141

1142

1143 LA: what problems do you think America still faces today?

1144

1145

1146 CD: racism, and the end of the economic disparity that exists, it's just obscene that other
1147 people can make millions and millions of money of what other people do and moneys
1148 that they never in their lifetime can use, but at the same time people who are homeless
1149 without jobs those are things that need to be changed in this country, and this whole
1150 battle about healthcare was as much of a battle with Obama's presidency and I think we

1151 got to be careful like groups like the Tea parties take over the minds of many people.

1152

1153

1154 LA: well that's all I got thank you for conducting the interview (laughs)

1155