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Interview with Danny Davis

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Terence Sims: My name is Terence Sims and your name sir for the record.

Danny Davis: Danny middle initial K Davis.

TS: It is May 10th, 2010, the interview is being conducted at the Chicago office of Danny Davis. What is your occupation sir?

DD: I am a member of the United States House of Representatives, so I guess if I had to list an occupation technically, it would be politician. And if I wanted to try to dress it up a little bit I'd probably say I was an elected official. But the reality is you don't get to be elected officials if you don't do politics. So they kinda like love and marriage, they go together like a horse and carriage.

TS: (laughs)

DD: And you can't have one without the other. I'm amazed, quite frankly, when I hear people say well I'm not a politician, I'm an elected official, which is an indication that they think there is something wrong with being a politician, and I feel quite sorry for them because it means they don't really understand. We have one of the most civilized approaches to making public decisions that exists on the face of the earth. And the fact that we can argue, and debate, and discuss, and still make public decisions, and not kill each other and shoot each other, and denigrate each other anymore than what we do, I think, is a real testament to our system of politics and public policy decision making. So my colleagues who try to shy away from calling themselves politicians—

TS: (laughs)

DD:—I, quite frankly, feel sorry for them. So I'm a politician—

TS: All right

DD: —and that's what I do

TS: Okay, how long have you held this position?

DD: I have been elected official now for 30 years. I first got elected in 1979, when I ran for Chicago city council and was fortunate enough to bring my opponent, who was an incumbent, to a run off. And then in the runoff election I got elected, and I've been elected to something ever since.

TS: Okay

DD: Although, I've won offices, I've lost them, I've campaigned, I've spent a lot of money, I've spent a lot of time, energy, and effort. I've neglected a lot of people that I love, I've neglected a lot of people that I like and would love to have spent more time with them. But the necessities of

politics and the desire to do it kind of forced me to do what I do. So for the last 40 years I've basically worked 60-70 hours a week. Uh, (phone rings) I don't know what an eight hour day is, haven't known what that was in a long time.

TS: (laughs; phone rings)

DD: There's no such thing as an eight hour day in my life. I usually work from about eight o'clock in the morning to nine or ten o'clock at night. And that's six, seven days a week every week.

TS: Wow. And when did your activism begin?

DD: It really started in a real heavy way about 1968. I actually took a job, uh when I finished my masters degree, as executive director of something called the Greater Lawndale Conservation Commission, which was a community organization. From there one thing led to another, and so it's been kind of a continuous merry go-round ever since.

TS: And how many years were you an, uh, anti-Apartheid activist?

DD: Well I'm still in anti-apartheid activism. We don't see apartheid being as pronounced as we did, especially in relationship to south Africa. But South Africa wasn't the only place where (phone rings) certain forms of apartheid existed. As a matter of fact, they exist in Chicago, they exist in Illinois, they exist in Cook County, they exist in a pronounced way all over the unites states of America. I mean, if you would consider the fact that we 100 members of the united states senate, only one African American or black person, and at the end of the year we won't have any. We will not have a single one. Or if you will consider the fact that Illinois is the only state that has been able to elect a person to the most prestigious position except that of president in the country, since the 1950's, I mean, that is a form of apartheid as far as I'm concerned. When the senate meets and there a hundred people there, not a single solitary one of them will be black. I think that's a system of apartheid. Or if you have Fortune (phone rings) 500 companies and don't have a single black one (phone rings; both laugh) there. Or when you have some of the many meetings and hearings and things that I go to (phone rings) on a daily basis, and sometimes I'm the only black person there. Or if there 200, 300 people in the room, maybe five are African American and the rest are white—

TS: Hmmm

DD:—umm, that is a form of apartheid. If I go to the black schools around here, where all of the kids are black and most of the teachers are white, young, white people, I think that is a form of apartheid. So if I go to (bumps the table) the banking institute, (phone rings) don't see any African Americans there controlling any of the resources. (phone rings) Or I go to the hedge funds to borrow some money, or I go to the motion (phone rings) picture industry to see who's

going to be—acting or in a movie or how much they gonna get. (phone rings) And I notice that black people pretty much come like an old man's teeth, few and far apart—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —or they have certain kinds of roles, then all of that to me is apartheid. And so the apartheid movement still exists, and the anti-apartheid movement does not exist to the extent that is should (phone rings) and need to, because the most basic of all human desires known to mankind, or womankind, is the desire to be equal, to be treated, crea—treated equal. To have equal protection under the law, equal opportunity, equal shot at the resources, and that of course does not exist in the united states of America. Nor does it exist practically any place else in the world. I mean, I've been to lots of places, not only have I been to South Africa, I've been to east Africa, I've been to west Africa, I've been to the Middle East, I've been to the Far East, I've been to Europe, I've been to a lot of places and I find (phone rings) that conditions are pretty much the same, especially as it relates to people of color.

TS: Hmmm

DD: I thought the biggest housing projects that existed were in Chicago, Robert Taylor, Henry Horner. I was in Amsterdam, and low and behold, damn, it was the biggest one I had ever seen, (both laugh) so big that it went around.

TS: Wow.

DD: I've been to Europe where black communities have the same conversations, the same issues, same concerns as black people do in the united states. The only difference is that these are black people, or people of color, who migrated from Africa. Whereas you come to Chicago and most of the people of color migrated from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, wherever they came from other than being anchored here, so the only difference is that rather than being afro-Americans, or African Americans, they are actually European Africans, or people of African heritage who live in Europe. And all the stuff is pretty much the same.

TS: Wow. So where would you say the majority of your activism has taken place?

DD: Oh, it, it, I mean I've spent more time in Chicago than I have any place else, so obviously Chicago would have been the, the (phone rings) lynching pad, or the core place. Uh, (phone rings) but I've been arrested in Washington [D.C.] for demonstrating (phone rings) out in front of embassies and things like that. And (phone rings) I've been locked up, I remember we were locked up in the South African consulate downtown. We went down there and wouldn't leave, me and a fellow named Allen Streeter, Charlie Hayes, Buzz Palmer, people I can think of who were there at the time. So, um—it kinda becomes a way of life. It, I'm saying, there different degrees, and, and, and there times when you do more, and there are times when you do less. But once it becomes a part of you, then it is a part of who you are. It's a part of what you do (phone

rings) and you don't need anything special to do it, or anything like that, you just (phone rings) do it. (both laugh) And, and— and, and, and you, you know, we may never get back to, you know, the glory days of free Nelson Mandela. You know, re—revenge Steve Biko, or do whatever, but, you know, long as you know that you're on the track and you are pursuing equality, equal justice, equal opportunity, equal protection, then you have a reason to live, there's a—you have a reason to be. If you're not fighting for freedom and equality then I don't know, what's the point of being here, you know what I mean? You're taking up the air, you're breathing air that somebody else could have, and quite honestly there's no practical purpose for your existence. (both laugh) Cause, I mean, if you are not trying make the world a better place in which to live, I mean to me that's the purpose for living.

TS: So let's go back a little bit. In what year were you born?

DD: 1941

TS: And where were you born?

DD: Park Dale, Arkansas.

TS: Is that where you were raised?

DD: That's where I was raised, um-hm.

TS: Where was our mother born?

DD: Uh, Alabama

TS: And what about your father?

DD: Alabama. They and their families actually migrated from Alabama in the early 1900's, because they too were farmers and where they lived the land had been over worked and worn out. So they went to Arkansas looking for new ground, new land to, to cultivate. Uh, so they were part of a migration from Alabama, which was the old southeast, to the southwest were they, they, they—land was more fertile and had not been over used. And , uh, I that's how they all came, and I guess they all settled in the same little town, and eventually, you know, my folks grew up and all of that.

TS: Okay.

DD: Um-hm

TS: So what is your marital status?

DD: 40 years, Vera Davis.

TS: And do you have any children?

DD: Hold on a minute let me see I got (phone rings)—[interview stopped due to a disturbance outside of the conference room where interview was taking place]

TS: All right, So how many children do you all have?

DD: Well I have, uh, two sons, (audio interference) Jonathan and Stacy, I have three grandchildren, and a host of godchildren. Eons—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —more than I can name.

TS: Okay. What is your earliest memory?

DD: My earliest memories, probably would be, and, and some of it is kinda vague, and I would imagine that some of it really has to do with conversation, but I do kinda remember my mother (audio interference) turning around with a tea kettle of hot water. I was a little crawling baby, and when she turned around I was right there and the water scalded me right here. (rubs forehead) And, um, of course, uh, my grandmother was also living with us at that time, and so there was just a big commotion in the house. Now, maybe I remember that— (both laugh) and maybe I remember the conversation about it. Understand?

TS: Um-hm

DD: But, but that seems to be—and then quite frankly, I remember things like walking to school, I was like five years old with my sisters (audio interference) because we lived quite a ways from the school and there was only one way to get there and of course that was to walk. And they started to take me (phone rings) when I was that age, and I can remember us walking down the road and different things happening, uh, (phone rings) that was just part of the conversation.

TS: Okay. How many siblings do you have?

DD: I have ten brothers and sisters.

TS: Okay. And, so, what was growing up in your—

DD: It was—

TS:—what was it like growing up?

DD: —it was fun, lots of fun. We (audio interference) had a big family, big, big rambling house, we worked hard. Uh, we were disciplined, we went to church we went to school (phone rings) we had a lot of hope. We (phone rings) didn't have any money, but we had the idea that life was going to be better than what it was. And so we grew up (phone rings) with that kinda feeling, as a matter of fact, seven of us I think went to University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff. Let me see,

Elmarine went, Chris didn't go she got married, then I went, Ceola, Barbara Ann, Floretta, Jesse, Willie, my two nephews who actually lived with us a while, so there were actually nine of us—

TS: Wow.

DD:—out of, out of my immediate family who went to University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff.

TS: Wow. So what was he neighborhood like?

DD: Neighborhood wasn't a neighborhood, we lived on a farm, which means that the closest neighbors were half a mile, a mile away. But we lived in a community. The town was closely knit, we went to church, uh, the little town had about 250 people in it, and that was the town. (phone rings) And so you always looked forward to seeing kids when you were at school (phone rings) cause you didn't see anybody if you didn't.

TS: (laughs)

DD: And you looked forward on the weekend, especially during the working season, because you wouldn't—you would often go the whole week, or part of the week, and wouldn't come in contact with anybody other (phone rings) than members of your family unless somebody came by to borrow something or came to visit. But it was fine.(phone rings) I mean we thought it wasn't at the time—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —but as it turned out it was fine. I had a pretty decent childhood, didn't get too many lickings, nothing, and pretty much always was fairly reasonable.

TS: Okay. What kinda games did you and your siblings play?

DD: Everything. (audio interference) Different people played different things. I liked baseball, basketball, softball, and those were the main things. My sister was a star, one of them, basketball star. None of my brothers, we played, but none of us were superstars or anything. We, you know, people went hunting and fishing, all that, and we were younger we played things like hide and seek, honey and the bee ball I can't see y'all, (unintelligible)—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —so we, we were pretty normal.

TS: Okay

DD: Church, school (phone rings), community, those were the essence of our being. (phone rings)

TS: What were some of your interests during your elementary years?

DD: Reading, I've always been interested in history, I've always been interested in knowing things, and I've always been interested in the why of things. Uh, growing up as a kid I read every moment that I could get. (phone rings) I read hundreds of books, we didn't even have books, (phone rings) we wasn't reading books I'd read the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Esther, Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Songs of Solomon, anything that I could get my hands on, newspapers. I used to work for a guy really because he would save me his newspapers. And quite frankly, he didn't have to pay me I'd go clean his yard and stuff like that, but the discovered that I liked to read and he'd save me his newspapers. Uh, so I'd have a stack of newspapers to take home with me when I finished with his yard. Biggest fight I ever had was a couple guys who lived not far from me, decided that they would tear up my newspapers one Saturday when we were walking home. And quite frankly, I beat the hell out of both of them, and on was actually bigger than I was and the other was my size.

TS: Hm

DD: I just became irate that they would tear up my newspapers, I couldn't believe it. But what they were doing, they really called themselves attacking my value system. And it wasn't so much just the newspaper, but I knew that they were attacking something that I believed in. And I believed in reading and having knowledge, (phone rings) and knowing, and knowing what was going on in the world beyond (phone rings) where we were. So reading has always been, you know, (phone rings) the real deal with me. Music, you know, hey it's cool but (phone rings) reading has really been the thing.

TS: All right. Uh, let's see , what path, uh, did you see yourself following once you graduated high school?

DD: I knew I was going to college. I mean there wasn't much else for me to do at that particular time except go to college. I went to college on my 16th birthday, so I couldn't go to the military, I couldn't, I wasn't old enough, my mother wouldn't sign. (phone rings) I wasn't going to just stick around doing nothing, doing farm work where I lived, so I knew I was going to college.

TS: So what kinda value did your parents place on formal education during your upbringing?

DD: Strong values, uh, hard work, anything worth having is worth working for, if you believe in yourself you could accomplish whatever it is you set out to do, and that you ought to have faith in some external force, something outside of yourself. And if you did that you'd be alright.

TS: And what were your feelings on education at the time?

DD: Same thing

TS: Okay

DD: I've been heavy in education as long as I can remember.

TS: All right. Who were some of your mentors growing up?

DD: Uh, same people that I mentioned before in terms of, uh , early interactions with all these people. People at church, people at school, my uncle who was a school superintendent, my daddy who was a great story teller, great reader, my mama who was just a precious woman, my aunt who put on all the little programs at church that we used to be in, plays, I had a bunch of them .

TS: Okay. So how old were you when you first became aware of segregation in America?

DD: Um, I guess, five, two, whatever, soon as I knew white people went in one place, black people went in the other one. Black people went to one school, black people drank out of one fountain white people drank out of another one, so everything was segregated when I was kid growing up.

TS: Uh, when did you first experience racism personally?

DD: Uh, in terms of remembering it, um, it's hard to say—it's hard to say—

TS: Okay

DD: —because I've always known that it existed. So trying to pinpoint some incident or so forth is kinda hard.

TS: As a native of Arkansas how did the desegregation of Little Rock Central High affect your life at the time?

DD: Well, it was very exciting because at the time Little Rock was being decentralized I was a freshman in college. And of course I was only about 50 miles from Little Rock and so every day that was the hot thing going on in our mind. We knew what was going on in Little Rock and we could hardly wait to get to the news or to the radio or—see what was going on with Minniejean Brown, Ernie Green, all of these people that I know. I didn't know them then, but we were all — we've met and been in places together. Matter of fact, Ernie Green is a friend of mine. Minniejean Brown and I spoke down at Southern Illinois University one year, cause she went to Southern—SIU—in Carbondale—

TS: Okay.

DD: —after she left Arkansas. And I've been in places with several of the others and that kinda thing. So they were contemporaries of mine, I was just a year beyond them because I was freshman in college when they, uh, went to, uh, Little Rock Central.

TS: Wow.

DD: Um-hm.

TS: Wow. What kinda Civil Rights activism were you involved in at the time?

DD: We were just involved in (audio interference) student protests. We were, I mean, college campuses were hotbeds of protest, we were involved where we were. Matter of fact, our college president invited Rev. Martin Luther King to be our commencement speaker in 1958. And then we had turmoil on the campus because the board of trustees and legislature were constantly threatening to fire him for doing that—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —and eventually they did fire him. But we did all the regular stuff, we didn't have—our stuff wasn't nearly as hot as it was in South Carolina, and Alabama, and Mississippi. Arkansas was kind of a more moderate South.

TS: Oh okay.

DD: It was southwest, I was more fringe South then the southeast. So things weren't nearly as bad, we interacted with white people when I was a kid. Even though we were segregated and they went one way we went others, we had white people that we interacted with everyday, worked with. We had one of the little white boys would come to our house all the time, John David Gryce, who was, you know, just hung around our house all the time. His parents and my daddy were good friends, even though my father was older (phone rings) than his father. And he was kind of a mentor of types to them. So, you know, we, we, we did alright, every once in a while there would be a little racial stuff flaring up, but not often. It generally centered around—there's one black fellow in our town who didn't cotton to taking a backseat. And they kinda had dusty roads and often times white people would pass black people on the roads, so if somebody had to get dusty —

TS: (laughs)

DD:—black people (phone rings) was—Charlie would never let anybody pass him. Whether it was in his car or in his wagon—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —you did now pass Mr. Charlie Lewis. Whether you was white, black, green, purple, polka dot so once in a while there would be a little skirmish between Mr. Charlie and some white person that tried to pass him. But aside from that, every once in a while, teenage boys may kinda get into a little ruckus or something, and that would generally get talked out by our parents. And so, besides that we didn't have any of the race kinda things, really, where I lived growing up.

TS: Okay. When did you first come to Chicago?

DD: Fresh out of college 1961.

TS: And what prompted you to move to Chicago?

DD: Job opportunity, family was here, and I didn't have any money but I had two sisters who lived here and I knew I could live with them until I got a job, got some money, and that's what I did.

TS: How was Chicago different from the Arkansas town you grew up in when you first arrived?

DD: Well there were obviously more people, but for me it wasn't to different because I had a level of intelligence that I knew about (both laugh) what the big city was and how different it was, and that kinda thing. So it was no more than what I expected. Uh, I think thing I had to get used to the most was the fact that people would vamp on each other who were even—the notion of taking advantage of each other was something that I (phone rings) was not accustomed to. I'm saying where family members would take advantage (phone rings) of family members.

TS: Um-hm

DD: People who are supposed to be friends would take (phone rings) advantage of friends. And it took a little getting used to from that vantage point, that's not something that (phone rings) we did very much where I lived, it's not something that you saw. (phone rings)

TS: Okay. What was Chicago like during the Civil Rights Movement? (phone rings)

DD: Chicago was hot and heavy, heavy, it was interesting, it was exciting, you didn't want to go to sleep at night because you might think you going to miss something. I mean, you liked walking up and down the street listening to Martin Luther King's voice blaring out of the record shops, and out of the—whatevers, where people—there were meetings going on all the time. Uh, we tried to emulate speaking and talking like Dr. King, it was just a great place to be. We participated in marches and demonstrations, we used to go to the meetings with Fred Hampton, and Mark Clark, and, and, and the Panthers, and other groups that weren't as well known as the Panthers. So it was a very exciting time. It was wonderful, magnificent.

TS: Uh, what effect did the Panthers have on the black community at the time?

DD: Oh, I think the Panthers helped to raise awareness and promote sense of urgency, and of course, after Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, got killed it helped to politically organize the black community in Cook County. Because we put out of office the, uh, State's Attorney who was a Democrat, and actually elected a Republican and that was kinda like unheard of. We put Hanrahan out of office and elected a Republican, I'm trying to think of his name right now, but, that, that started, quite frankly the independent political movement in black life in Cook County.

TS: How did you hear of, uh, Fred Hampton's assassination?

DD: Uh, I was, uh—actually I knew Fred Hampton and, uh, I think it was in the winter time. And I think uh—the news, we just heard on the news. Matter of fact I went over to the house the next day. Me and a friend of mine, a fellow named Frank Lipscomb, after we got out of school. I

was teaching school at the time, and so Frank and I went over when we left school that day and walked over and looked around, and saw the tape and all that stuff, and the mattresses with the blood on them, all of that. That's—I mean, I was not a member of the Panthers but we were going to meetings and that kind of thing at the time. And so, I kinda—we all liked to hear Fred talk. Fred was a heavy rapper you know—

TS: (laughs)

DD: —and he often talked (phone rings) about the apparitionist business, greedy apparitionist business people (both laugh). So that was kinda cool.

TS: Uh (phone rings), how did the, uh, assassination of Mart—uh, Mart—uh, excuse me of Martin Luther King affect you?

DD: I couldn't believe it. Uh, we were teaching school, I was still teaching school at the time and our kids would be restless, and we, you know, uh— but we couldn't believe it in terms of it happening. It was shocking. It had a profound impact. I was uh—had mixed emotions about the riots and about people tearing up things and burning them down. And, you know, whether I wanted that to happen, or whether I wanted to try and convince people that that was not going to solve the problem (phone rings). But, uh, it was very impactful—very impactful.

TS: Uh, what were you feelings on what transpired at the Democratic National Convention in 1968?

DD: Well, only thing I have a problem I had was that I wasn't down there—

TS: (laughs)

DD:—I mean, you couldn't hardly get down there, but I really wanted to be there every day (both laugh)

TS: Can uh,—although you weren't down there can you describe uh, what your memories are of it?

DD: Well, I—I mean I remember the whole thing and uh, the—I thought it was a good thing that, that—because all of this was the way that I felt. And while there were some things that I was not as into or immediately involved in, I was really just getting into it, you understand—

TS: Uh-huh

DD:—I was a young school teacher, finishing up graduate school, that kinda thing, and working two, three jobs and all that kinda stuff all at the same time. So I didn't have as much time (audio interference) to be engaged. Actually I had three jobs and was going to graduate school (audio interference) and, but I was into what I could be into, and that was my crowd, that was my group.

TS: Uh, what subject did you teach?

DD: I taught, I've taught everything from kindergarten to graduate school. And in the Chicago Public Schools I taught Social Studies and Language Arts.

TS: Okay—of the noted assassinations of the time, such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Kennedy brothers, and Fred Hampton which assassination, uh, greatest—had the greatest affect on you personally?

DD: Quite frankly, I think that Martin Luther King's assassination had the greatest impact, and I'm gonna have to cut because I've gotta, I've gotta see some of these people who are out here waiting. And then I've gotta fund raiser I've gotta get to at 5:30 downtown, but uh—(phone rings) it was the Martin Luther King assassination that had the greatest impact. Because Dr. King had reached a level of being, a level of prominence—(phone rings) uh, we had so much hope placed (phone rings) in Dr. King in terms of what he was and what he meant and what he would be. But quite frankly, all of them had profound impact on me and on the things I was involved in and engaged in, and probably pushed my involvement to a greater level.

TS: Okay, uh, how much more time do you have?

DD: I will be able to take about five minutes.

TS: Okay, uh, let me see—when did you become interested in politics?

DD: I've always been interested in politics once I defined what politics was. I was not interested in electoral politics, but once I studied political science in undergraduate school under one of the most, uh, prolific political scientists in America. A guy named Adolf Reed, who at the time was in Arkansas at Pine Bluff, but ultimately went over to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, and when he died a few years ago, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville had a big memorial service for him and that kinda thing. And his son is also a political science professor, and his grandson is also a political science professor, so they both followed in his footsteps. One's down at Bloomington, at Northern, uh, down at Bloomington and the other one is at Columbia. That is his son is at Columbia, his grandson— so I've had a pretty decent understanding of politics for a long time. Politics in reality is all things, all beings, all purposes. Uh, the only politicking doesn't go on is when two people agree all the time, and if two people agree all the time one of them is unnecessary.

TS: (laughs)

DD: And so, politics is much more than electoral politics, who gets elected, and so on, and so on. There's the politics of everything, politics of education, politics of who gets a kidney and who does not, who gets a heart when there's a need for heart transplantation, who gets scholarships to go to school, why is it some people can and other people can't. And so I've always been interested in the whys of things, why are some people rich and other people poor? Why are some

population groups sick and other people seem to be healthy? The why of everything, and politics answers the question of why in many instances. I used to think that public decisions were made on the basis of what was right and what was wrong, what was good (phone rings) and what was bad, but it just didn't seem to fit (both laugh). Then I started studying and trying to find out and I thought that, you know, education would be a big factor and that if people stated goals and objectives and then went in pursuit of those that that might answer some of the questions. And that didn't answer the question for me either, and when I really started looking at politics and discovered that most public policy decisions are made on the basis of what is socially, economically, politically, and sometimes morally acceptable to whoever it is who has the power and the will to decide (phone rings). No more, no less. And that's kinda the way I sum up politics and so I've been interested in that but I was not interested in running for office. When I ran for office I didn't intend to run then, I was chairman of a committee to find a candidate to run for Alderman. We couldn't find anybody so the committee disbanded and uh, eventually I decided so that our efforts wouldn't be in vain that I would run. And that's how I decided to run for elected office and I've been running ever since.

TS: Well, all right—

DD: All right.

TS: That seems a good place—[recording stops]

TS: —Okay, lets dive back in. Okay so when did you first hear of Nelson Mandela?

DD: Oh I don't know, I've prob—(laughs)—to my recollection I've always known about Nelson Mandela . I mean, I've known that Nelson Mandela was imprisoned and all of that, I guess, from the time that he was imprisoned. I mean I've always been—I was actually a history major in undergraduate school so world events and world history and all those things have always been, you know, just a regular part of my being. So whenever it happened I'm sure I knew about it (laughs).

TS: And what were your opinions of him at the time as he was going thru—

DD: Oh I thought he was an absolute freedom fighter, crusader, uh—did I necessarily have the prognosis that he would be able to get out and apartheid would be halted to some degree, and he'd become president of the country? No. I, you know, I mean I wasn't that optimistic. Although people who struggle for change have to believe that change will occur and you don't necessarily have a prognosis for when, ,and so you can't put a time frame on it but you always feel that its gonna happen. I mean that's, that's what drives you, that's what keep s you moving, that's what keeps you going. And so, I figured it would happen but I can't say that I knew it would happen when it did or felt that it would. Same as I couldn't predict that Barack Obama would be president, but I often felt that there would be a black person elected to president in this country.

TS: Okay, uh when you became an anti-Apartheid activist , uh, what group did you join?

DD: Uh, I, I don't know that I was—well I guess I was probably apart of—oh I don't know what the groups were being called or what group I was a member of but I was member.

TS: All right, uh, you've mentioned earlier about being arrested can you uh tell me about that experience, about protesting outside the uh South African consulate?

DD: Well we were locked into—

TS: Oh locked into the—excuse me I'm sorry.

DD: —cause we wouldn't leave—

TS: Okay.

DD:—and uh I remember it was me Allen Streeter, a bunch of people but two people I remember most prominently is Allen Streeter and Charlie Hayes. And, uh we just wouldn't leave (laughs), and so they just locked us up in there. And then ultimately, after periods and periods of time, different people would say ok we'll leave. And ultimately I think they actually — thank you Josie I think I need another

Josie: I put one in there.

DD: Oh ok, all right cool—ultimately I think Allen Streeter did get, actually go to jail (sips tea) an a few other people. Charlie and I didn't go to jail, we both said we had something else we had to do and we hadn't come down to go to jail. But uh, we— we uh—you know we kinda, we knew everything would be cool, that you know, eventually we was going to get out (sips tea). Generally what they do, I mean like the last time I was arrested we were in front of the uh—oh we were in front of the uh, I think it may have been the Sudanese embassy. And they put handcuffs on us and they took us to jail , booked us, we sat in the cell for maybe an hour and then they let us out. I mean that's kinda the way they do protester (sips tea).

TS: All right, uh, what affect did Harold Washington being elected have on the movement?

DD: (sips tea) Well the movement quite frankly was going before Harold Washington. The movement drafted Harold Washington in a sense or coerced or embraced Harold Washington to become mayor. And Harold was not necessarily the leader of the movement, uh, there were a lot of different people who would've been instrumental in leading the movement. Lou Palmer was absolutely a leader of the movement.. A woman named Nancy Jefferson was absolutely a leader of the movement. Slim Coleman was absolutely a leader of the movement. Uh, Marion Stamps was absolutely a leader of the movement. There've been different individuals, we had very strong community activists, people like Moe Henry, Moe Fletcher, Illa Daggard, I could just name a whole bunch of them . All of these people were all a part of the movement. The Jesse Jackson piece of the movement. Jesse was a leader of the movement, uh (sips tea), and so the

movement was community activists from all over town. Leon Finney, people who said we want something different. And we did a bunch of things then, we boycotted the Chicago fest. Uh, we had meetings at Bethel A.M.E. church, almost every other Saturday we 'd fill the church up. And the movement was looking for a candidate for mayor, as a matter of fact, me and Lou Palmer went and got Mannford Byrd up one night out of the bed to talk to Mannford and ask him if he would run. We asked uh, George Simms who was the superintendant of the police if he would run. W\e speculated we speculated about a whole bunch of different people but we kinda knew all along that our preferred candidate would be Harold Washington. Harold was the highest profile Black elected official in the town at the time. Harold was a member of the United States House of Representatives (sips tea), nobody else that we would consider had that status. So we knew that Harold was who we wanted, we even had a plebiscite where we had all kinds of people present and speech making and we'd have this all the time. And so, we ultimately got Harold to be the candidate, and Harold ultimately also decided he wanted to be the candidate. So Harold embraced the movement, stimulated the movement, activated the movement. Some people felt that Harold, after he got elected, helped to dismantle the movement, because lots of people now we got Harold we don't need to be part of the movement. That we got the mayor and we don't need to be active, we don't need to be engaged, we don't need to do what we've been doing. So (sips tea) Lou Palmer and a few people like that felt that Harold became a detriment to the movement as opposed to being an asset to the movement.

TS: Okay, so where did you come down?

DD: (sips tea) I always figured that he was asset to the movement although I do agree with those that suggested that people began to put so much focus on Harold, that many people forgot about the movement. I'm saying after he got elected. It's kinda like in the Bible there's a piece of scripture that says when King Ozai died first I saw the Lord, basically meaning that the people was looking at the king—

TS: (laughs)

DD: — and overlooking the Lord. And so I think people was looking at Harold and overlooking the movement.

TS: Okay

DD: Overlooking what it took to create and make Harold.

TS: UH, okay, when was your first trip to South Africa ?

DD:(sips tea) It was prob—to South Africa it was, I think it was actually in the 1990's. I t was after I went to congress.

TS: Okay can you describe this trip for me and your feelings about it.?

DD: Oh, I was intrigued, I was uh, not mystified. Uh, the impact on me was about what I had expected it to be., because even— you know if you 're engaged and involved then you kinda know a great deal about things so you can't say that anything is shocking, and by the time I went to South Africa I had been to other places. First place I went to in Africa was actually east Africa, and I went to east Africa in 1975. And I actually spent 30 days in Nairobi, Kenya— [Surveys the pictures on the wall]—I see somebody stole my picture I had of, of the president of Kenya who had liberated Kenya. But there had been liberators before Nelson Mandela, uh, Kenya was liberated. Julius Nyerere was the president of Tanzania, but uh the kinda apartheid didn't exist in those countries that existed in uh Rhodesia, which you know—

TS: Yes.

DD:—became South Africa..

TS: Right. Uh, how did you participate in divestment?

DD: (sips tea) Lots of ways, uh, I actually introduced a resolution in the Chicago city council and got it passed, that the city of Chicago would divest itself of doing business with any companies that were doing business with the Apartheid government of South Africa, or with institutions that were doing the same. So I was a uh, you know, anti-Apartheid activist before I got elected to the city council, then after I got elected one of the first resolutions I think I introduced in the city council had to do with the, I think, that the rugby team from South Africa, Reeboks [actually referring to the South African rugby team the Springboks] uh was coming to town. I think introduced a resolution that we shouldn't let them play in Chicago, that kinda stuff. But it was my resolution, I mean it was my ordinance the divested the city of Chicago from doing business with the apartheid government of South Africa. Yeah I was the principle introducer, I was the person that introduced that order.(sips tea).

TS: What other South African Apartheid abolitionists have you met?

DD: Uh, well of course Bishop Tutu, Winnie Mandela, I've actually visited Winnie Mandela's home, and had several interactions with uh Winnie Mandela. Uh, uh, Sisooli, uh, I've actually visited the ANC Headquarters. And uh people were there, the old bunch, and of course Mbeki. So a number of South Africans uh , whose names and so forth I wouldn't necessarily remember. They were, you know, lesser figures in the government and the leadership of South Africa than nelson Mandela or Mbeki , or Winnie Mandela, or whoever.

TS: Was this prior to the end of Apartheid or after?

DD: This was uh, during the process and after.

TS: Okay,—where were you when you heard Mandela was released from prison?

DD: I don't really remember.

TS: Uh, can you describe the feelings that you had—

DD: I felt uh, just ecstatic, I, I was just overjoyed, almost overwhelmed. Uh, yeah it was hard to believe but it was a good feeling.

TS: What about your feelings when you saw him elected as president?

DD: Same thing, it was one of the most incredible turnarounds, I think, that uh historically I knew anything about.

TS: Uh, how did you react to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report and its conclusions?

DD: I thought that it was on target, that it made sense, that it was a good approach to trying to deal with the truth or the reality of what had taken place, but at the same time effectuate some form of reconciliation to the extent that people could still move towards a harmonized relationship.

TS: Uh—looking now back what challenges does South Africa face today?

DD : Well I think that there are still large numbers of South Africans, especially Black South Africans , who have not gotten filtered into the mainstream, who need opportunities to work, to go to school, housing. So there's still a high level of inequality in South Africa, from an economic vantage point. Uh, sure people are free, they're liberated, they can participate, they can vote, but they don't have the economic freedom that is needed yet.

TS: What legislation have you been involved in that addresses these challenges?

DD: Well as I indicated earlier, I introduced the legislation in the Chicago city council, when I was a member of the city council, to uh, bar the city from doing business with the apartheid government of South Africa. I was the author of that legislation, that was mine that got passed, and I was, uh, also, uh, supportive of other legislative enactments—I left the city council 1990 and went to the county board, which, which means that when the other piece of legislation passed in the city council passed I was gone, I was no longer there, that Dorothy Till man sponsored.

TS: Uh, what are some of the fondest memories that you have of the movement that we haven't covered?

DD: Well, you know, we just , we participated —I participated in lots of marches and demonstrations and rallies, and quite honestly all of them were, you know, great pieces opportunity. But I think the fondest memories really were the two things in terms of , one the release of Nelson Mandela, and two his being elected the president of the country of South Africa.

TS: Uh, looking back would you have done anything differently?

DD: Nothing more than maybe spent more time, been more involved, been more engaged.

TS: And how has the relationships you formed during the uh—during your involvement in the movement helped you become the person that you are today?

DD: Well the relationships were just great. I mean a number of different kinds of people that I got to know and interact with who I probably never would have known had it not been for the anti apartheid movement. Cause there 's some people involved in that who would not have been involved in the anti housing discrimination, or the police brutality, or the push to get good schools, or the push to equalize opportunities for African Americans. And there are some people who were a part of all of them, but there were some people who war more into the whole notion of , of liberation than they have been some the other socially relevant things that we did, so there are people I would not have known nearly as well had not I been involved.

TS: All right—and lastly were there any drawbacks or consequences of being a part of the Chicago anti apartheid movement?

DD: None that I can think of. Uh, you just kinda do what you do, and do what you feel that you need and have to do, and want to do, so you just kinda go out and do it. I can't say that there has been any kinda repercussions that I felt, uh, from being an activist. I'm sure that there have been instances where I may have been in pursuit of say jobs or work opportunities where I didn't get hired as a result of my activism. I mean nobody would necessarily say that, but, you know, you just didn't get hired. Uh, so I'm sure that that has happened to me. I've been a professional for a long time, in terms of work professional, who earned my last terminal degree in 1977. So I've actually had a doctorate degree since 1977, as well as lots of different kinds of work experience which means that there were probably some jobs that I applied for before becoming an elected official that I didn't get. And probably the primary reason that I didn't get them probably had to do with my social activism.

TS: Well thank you sir for your time and your recollections.

DD: Thank you, thank you, but it wasn't no big deal you jut kinda knew that they would hire someone else before they would you. As a matter of fact, that's one reason that I ended up getting a doctorate's degree was to not have to worry too much about finding a job and still being an activist, you understand. No matter what you are you still got to eat, and you got to have a place to hang your head—

TS: Yes you do

DD:—and so I decided— I'm certain one of the reason's I get a doctorate's degree was because of that. I don't think I necessarily needed a doctorate's degree to do the kinda stuff that I did, you

know, but I just felt that it would make me more likely to be, you know, able to— [recording stops]