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Spring 2009

Interview with Michael Elliott

Brian Gibson

Columbia College Chicago

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Recommended Citation

Gibson, Brian. "Interview with Michael Elliott" (Spring 2009). Oral Histories, Chicago Anti-Apartheid Collection, College Archives & Special Collections, Columbia College Chicago.
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1 Brian Gibson: So my name is Brian Gibson - state your name please.

2 Michael Elliott: I'm Mike Siviwe Elliot.

3 BG: Today's date is May 4th, 2009, and we're at Columbia College in the library, 3rd floor.

4 BG: How many years of activism with anti-apartheid?

5 ME: A long time. Beginning in the early 70s to today.

6 BG: So, your location of being an activist?

7 ME: I was active in both Chicago and Detroit.

8 BG: What year were you born?

9 ME: I was born in 1952, actually.

10 BG: What city and state?

11 ME: Detroit, Michigan, Motown.

12 BG: Where was your mother born?

13 ME: How's that relevant to this?

14 BG: This special story

15 ME: Well, I'm not going to tell you where my mother was born, but I say let's get into more the
16 story of the anti-apartheid movement.

17 BG: Okay, just... just a background more about you what was your earliest challenge?

18 ME: Well, it was actually ...uh...fighting my brother. Fighting my brother would happen on a
19 daily basis.

20 BG: So, what kind of neighborhood did you grow up in?

21 ME: I grew up in a working-class union neighborhood in on the west side of Detroit. A lot of
22 people worked in the auto industry.

23 BG: Did you attend church?

24 ME: Yeah, as a youth I did, yeah, a Baptist church.

25 BG: What did your mother and father do as a living?

26 ME: mother was a domestic worker she actually cleaned white folks' house in the suburbs. And
27 my father was an autoworker.

28 BG: Did your mother and father attend college?

29 ME: No, neither one of them attended college.

30 BG: What was your relationship like with your father?

31 ME: We had a good relationship because he was an outdoorsman. He did a lot of hunting and
32 fishing and he taught me a lot about outdoors, and a lot of great experiences and outdoors with
33 my father

34 BG: And what about your mother?

35 ME: My mother was, was a warrior, she was strong, she was outspoken, she loved me without,
36 without any, without doubt, she loved me more than anyone who ever lived. Yeah.

37 BG: What was your favorite meal when you were a kid?

38 ME: Probably oatmeal.

39 BG: Oatmeal is okay for you.

40 BG: So, in high school did you play any sports?

41 ME: No, I got kicked out the public school system and, uh, had to go, to go, to alternative school
42 to get a GED. But I was one of the best athletes in my neighborhood that's for sure and
43 everybody wanted me on the team. But I refused to play for any coach.

44 BG: Why did you get kicked out of public school?

45 ME: Basically, because...I didn't respect authority.

46 BG: So what was your favorite artists back in high school?

47 ME: I got kicked out of high school. (chuckle). I would have to say, you know I grew up in
48 Motown. So, my favorite artist is Stevie Wonder, so it was a Stevie Wonder song for sure. Yeah.

49 BG: So what was your first taste of activism work?

50 ME: Um. Probably, uh, that's hard to say but, um, but in Detroit they had a rebellion 1967, for
51 almost, the last car to the city got burned down and things like that. and it was because of some
52 police had jumped on some black people and the people responded. And that led to the, to the
53 right of the rebellion, as we call it. But, um, I remember a minister name, Reverend Clay, his
54 daughter is a famous writer now, Pearl Clay. Anyway, he talked about how in the court of this
55 apartment building, with all the black people looking out the window, the police beat up, some
56 white police, beat a black man to death, and nobody lifted a hand, nobody threw a pot out the
57 window to help him or whatever. And that sparked a fire in me. And I saw that should never
58 happen and I'll make sure it won't happen in my community again. From that point on, I started
59 filling myself with militant groups.

60 BG: So how did you get involved with the Black Panthers?

61 ME: Like serious, it was like it was like self-defense, you know, we need a self-defense because
62 my friends are being brutalized, you hear about some of your neighbors, and this was an ongoing
63 thing, so I was one of those people who said you know enough is enough. We can't call on the
64 police so it should be up to us to protect ourselves and Malcolm X had talked and talked about

65 self-defense, all the time and when I read his autobiography, living inspired me to get involved,
66 and that's when I started selling newspapers for the Black Panther chapter in my neighborhood.

67 BG: What college did you attend?

68 ME: Oakland University in Rochester Michigan right outside of Detroit.

69 BG: Why did you choose to go to that college?

70 ME; Because, like I said, You know, I was kicked out of public school system and one of the
71 alternative schools that I ended up at was Oakland Preparatory School, and it prepares students
72 to go to Open University. And I was in the first class of students out of that school to get a GED
73 and go to Open University where I majored in political science.

74 BG: Why did you choose that as a major?

75 ME: Because I was politically motivated and a politically conscious person. Yeah, so.

76 BG: Did you do any activism work in college?

77 ME: Yeah, I did. I became Chair of the Association of Black students, and we protested against
78 apartheid, we protested against police brutality, we protested against the lack of financial aid. I
79 had proposed that we sit in and take over to financial aid building and ended up losing a that vote
80 by very close margin. But as a student, yeah, we were active on several issues. Yeah.

81 BG: What year did you graduate?

82 ME: I didn't graduate. I was there for three years. And my girlfriend got pregnant, and I had go
83 get a job.

84 BG: So, how did you end up in Chicago?

85 ME: Well, I worked for Ford Motor Company, and I was laid off, an auto worker, I was laid off.
86 And then we were called back, we were given an option of going to Chicago or Norfolk,
87 Virginia, but I chose Chicago because Detroiters and Chicagoans speak the same language as
88 you can't tell them apart.

89 BG: Okay and how did you begin working at Ford?

90 ME: A friend of mine had get hired there and she recommended that I go to the same
91 employment office that she went to, and did that, and they called me in. Yeah.

92 BG: So, how did you first learn about the apartheid?

93 ME: Through the Black Panther newspaper. They had articles in about the situation in South
94 Africa. And, I had been reading about it through that newspaper for, for, at least a couple years.
95 Yeah, you can before I started selling it, they were talking about apartheid and Nelson Mandela
96 in jail and things like that.

97 BG: Why did you get involved with the anti-apartheid movement?

98 ME: Well because the way people were being treated. Because they were black, angered me, and
99 I understood that they were being robbed of their resources, that a small minority of light of
100 whites were actually controlling all of South Africa, and I understood that it was wrong to treat
101 people in that way. But the thing that really sparked me was when the students rebelled against
102 the language of Afrikaans, the government tried to force the students to learn Afrikaans, which is
103 like a Dutch, German language. And if they had agreed to learn that language, then they would
104 have been limited to only certain white people in the South Africa, and students say, hey we
105 want to learn English, so that we can communicate with the rest of the world. So refused to learn
106 the language and they protest peacefully. The military came and massacred, a lot of those
107 students on June 16 while they were peacefully protesting. And the first one that died was a 13-
108 year-old boy named Hector Peterson This was the first one to die so he was like the symbol. And
109 I think all the students across the nation were mad about that. And so I ended up writing an
110 article in the student newspaper about it. So that was like my first, I'd say, official action in the
111 anti-apartheid movement. The one really significant to me was when I wrote that article.

112 BG: How old were you when you first get into anti-apartheid?

113 ME: Um, 20. Yeah.

114 BG: Who else in your family was involved in the movement? Or was it just you?

115 ME; Well, I will say that took the lead on it. Some of my family members would, um, but asked
116 me a lot of questions about you know why I was involved with it and things like that. So I ended
117 up educating a lot of people in my family about what was going on. But none of them really
118 became active in the movement.

119 BG: What did they think about your activism? Did they support it?

120 ME: They always supported my activism. Yes.

121 BG: What kind of group institutional correlation is your work with...(inaudible)?

122 ME: Well, I would say the main coalitions that I was with were here in Chicago, and it was the
123 Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid and the Chicago Committee in Support of Southern
124 Africa. So one was called CCISA and the other one was the Illinois Labor Network Against
125 Apartheid. Now the- the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid was, was a network of labor
126 unions, all the major labor unions in the state of Illinois that formed this coalition to work toward
127 abolishing apartheid. We did everything from boycotts, protest, rallies, letter writing, visiting
128 elected officials. Pushing to have ordinances passed on the state level, federal level, and on the
129 city level to combat the supporters of apartheid. Yes.

130 BG: So what were your, your responsibilities?

131 ME: While I was on the steering committee of the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid
132 and one of our responsibilities was pushing for a sanction against South Africa. And I testified in
133 front of the city council to include in their, in the ordinance that was being pushed to stop the city
134 from doing business with any group or corporation that did business with South Africa. We
135 were pushing to have, um, we were pushing to ban any type of city contracts with anyone doing

136 business with South Africa, and we wanted in that ordinance to be included workers' rights, and
137 they recognize workers' rights as part of the ordinance.

138 BG: You have a story about another time.....

139 ME: We get to testify in front of the Finance Committee, which was headed by alderman Ed
140 Burke. And at the time, he was really notorious for being racist, he was notorious for being anti
141 worker, and also for being someone who opposed Mayor Harold Washington, while he was in
142 office. So, when we testified in front of his commission, one of the people on his, on his, on his
143 committee on this committee was the former Alderman, Austin, his wife, his wife is now on city
144 council, Carrie Austin, but I can't think of his first name, but when he died, she took his place,
145 but he was in office. And so, I was going to each Alderman's' office who I thought I could
146 convince and pushing down to support what we were trying to do with the City Council. And so,
147 when I saw him before the meeting, he was leaving out of his office, and so I say can have a
148 moment to explain this to you. He said, well, just walk with him and so I walked with him and
149 I'm talking, you know, to try to convince him. So he walks into the men's room and I'm still
150 talking and then he, he pulls out his penis, and, you know, starts peeing. So, you know, you got
151 to be determined, so I got right next to him, pulled mine out, and we're just peeing and I'm
152 explaining to him why this thing is important to have passed. So anyway, we finished peeing and
153 he never said a word he just kept looking at me like, giving me some strange looks. And so, as
154 we walked out the men's room, he said, Well, I'll see what I can do. And then when we saw him
155 in front of the finance committee, he acted like he had never seen me before you know you just
156 have cold look on his face, so I knew that he wasn't supporting the ordinance. That's the main
157 story I remember about that. Yeah.

158 BG: So, how did the organ- organization communicate?

159 ME: the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid, we all became friends, we all became like
160 family. So, we will call each other. Kathy Divine who was our director, and a great organizer,
161 she would make sure we were all informed, through letters and things like that, and would
162 always find mail about what was going on next and also, phone calls is how we stayed in touch.
163 Yeah.

164 BG: Why these organizations and not others?

165 ME: Well, the Illinois Labor Network was a network of labor union members, and I was a labor
166 union activist. So, it was natural for me to- to- work with a group of people in the labor union.
167 And, you know, that's just a natural fit for me.

168 BG: Tell me about the conflicts or tension, among other anti-apartheid activists you work with?

169 ME: Believe it or not, there was very little conflict. We know it was very clear what we were
170 fighting against. And it was just gives this easy to recognize and so we band together, we
171 formed, not just the people in Illinois and every network who are union people, but there were
172 other groups. There were other groups of anti-apartheid organizations, and we all -we all just
173 merged into an anti-apartheid community. Chicago had one of the most powerful anti-apartheid
174 communities in the nation. Yeah.

175 BG: What national or international organizations or coalitions or groups did you work with or
176 support?

177 ME: Well, um, the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid, we worked closely with
178 COSATU, which is the Congress of South African trade unions- has like the largest workers
179 Federation in South Africa, and we would actually take our directives from them. So, if they
180 thought, or they felt that we need to put pressure on a certain corporation, or if we should take
181 certain type of actions against the cooperation and that's what we would do. We would, you
182 know, write letters we would picket, we would boycott, we would demonstrate in front of their
183 offices. We would push our elected officials to put pressure on them. So, it's very important for
184 us to work with the Congress of South African trade unions. Yeah.

185 BG: What interactions did you have with the law enforcement when you worked in activist?

186 ME: I had very little interaction as an anti-apartheid activist with law enforcement, mostly took
187 place in Detroit. and, working with- working against anti-police violence and things like that we
188 would demonstrate in front a police departments and things like that. And, you know, sometimes
189 they will come out and try to get physical with some people and things like that. Probably
190 mostly as a youth - as a youth - as a street kid I had more encounters with police than anybody
191 than at any other time of my life. But as an activist, just only when I demonstrated against the
192 police did it, you know we got some really bad reactions from them. I was also arrested for
193 handing out free breakfast, Black Panther Party free breakfast program poster in front of this
194 abandoned restaurant. And they arrested - they arrested me. They went up, they came up kicked
195 in the door- kicked open the door – and arrested me for breaking into place. At the police station
196 they fingerprinted me and the held me in a cell and then I was interviewed by two guys with suits
197 on and I'm sure they were FBI. Yeah.

198 BG: Okay. What resistance did you receive from the local government?

199 ME: During the anti-apartheid movement? We didn't get a lot. I can't recall any, actually.

200 BG: What about the presidents of the United States at the time, was there resistance?

201 ME: The presidents of the United States during the anti-apartheid movement will always
202 resisting. Probably one of the most liberal ones was Jimmy Carter, and even Jimmy Carter
203 wouldn't support actions and United Nations against apartheid. I want to say this, Ronald
204 Reagan. In the US Congress, the. We had enough support to where they passed a sanctions bill
205 against South Africa, so us is basically cutting out doing business with South Africa under this
206 deal. But when he got to the president to sign, President Reagan, he vetoed it. So, anti-apartheid
207 movement had built up to such a point led by Congressman Ron Dellums out of California. They
208 had enough votes to override the President's veto. So, the override of the President's veto and
209 sanctions against South Africa was implemented. That's when South Africa, really, the minority
210 government really understood they have to compromise.

211 BG: Is that a person that really moved you get more involved in the anti-apartheid movement?

212 ME: Yes. 13 years old. His name is Hector Peterson is the first one that died. He moved me more
213 than anyone.

214 BG: Do you consider yourself a activist.

215 ME: Without a doubt. Yes, very proudly so.

216 BG: Where were you when you heard the news that Nelson Mandela had been released from
217 jail?

218 ME: I was sitting in front of a TV set with my with my anti-apartheid family. We were over at
219 Cathy Divine's house with mostly people from Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid, we
220 were sitting there in front of the television.

221 BG: What time was that?

222 ME: I want to say it was in the morning – it was early in the morning. And I will never forget
223 the feeling, and how unbelievable It was so yeah.

224 BG: So what were your first initial feelings?

225 ME: Well, we deep in the movement, we, we knew some news was coming like that. We knew
226 that organizations will beginning to unbanned because they were banned, certain organizations,
227 from being active and stuff. So, the world is the world was great. But when it actually happened.
228 you know, it was, it was just unbelievable. And to see Nelson walk out of prison with Winnie
229 Mandela. And you know he made a speech you know immediately after that. It was just like he
230 came out he brushed off his clothes and says [unintelligible]. I mean he didn't miss a beat.

231 BG: Did you ever get to meet Nelson Mandela?

232 ME: I did, I did. One of the highlights of my activism in the anti-apartheid movement was when
233 the Illinois Labor Network organized and sponsored a rally for Nelson Mandela when he came to
234 Chicago in July of 93. And I actually was able to obtain credentials to- from the city of Chicago,
235 through people in the anti-apartheid movement to- to- follow Nelson Mandela around the city
236 and video - to do a video. And so, but the funny thing was I had like bump shoulders with him
237 and say excuse me, because I was engineering our video. And when he left the city, you know I
238 sat down and said, you know I never shook his hand. Cause I set about making the video. I made
239 the video, and it is a half hour long called "Labor Welcomes Mandela to Chicago" and is part of
240 the Columbia College Anti-Apartheid Archive. Yes.

241 BG: That's cool.

242 BG: Do you feel that you did all you could do to get people to worry about the anti-apartheid
243 movement?

244 ME: Yeah, I do, I can say I think I did, yeah. I dedicated a lot of time, effort, and money in gas,
245 and you name it. I did everything I could to the end to end that brutal system of oppression.

246 BG: What song do you remember most about that time?

247 ME: Song. Probably Masekela's song – it was really two songs called “Bring Back Nelson
248 Mandela”. And then there's another song called Shosholoza, which is where the workers in South
249 Africa were seen. And while they were working and waiting on trains, because the shosholoza
250 was like the sound of the train and will come to get them to take them places. So yeah.

251 BG: So, the music and public culture plays a part in anti-apartheid movement?

252 ME: Very much so. There would be no anti-apartheid movement without music, song, and
253 coaching. People in South Africa couldn't have survived without the music and culture to keep--
254 to keep them energized. And this is so much a part of South Africa it is just unbelievable. There's
255 a movie about it called “Amandla: Revolution in Four Part Harmony”, that's the name of it,
256 Amandla: Revolution in Four Part Harmony, I recommend that for everybody. And it really
257 explains how important music is - how it is today – in South Africa. Yeah.

258 BG: What, what public figures besides Mandela had a big impact on the anti-apartheid
259 movement?

260 ME: Are you speaking of South Africans in the US? So, for me it was Chris Hani, Chris Hani,
261 who was like the epitome of military revolutionary. Chris Hani was the head of Umkhonto we
262 Sizwe and Umkhonto we Sizwe means fear for the nation. And it was the underground guerilla
263 army of the African National Congress, and he was the head up. So he was like the most
264 dangerous person, you know, for the South African government. So he was, for me he was the
265 most inspirational person, and I did meet him, and had long conversations with him -I got him
266 tickets to see the play Serafina and when it was at the new Regal Theater. And I introduced him
267 to the cast of Serafina, what they were on the bus - they were boarding the bus after the play.
268 And I got him onto the bus. And out of respect I just got off the bus, the, the members of the cast
269 are friends of mine, but I got off the bus just so they could talk, and when he got off the bus, he
270 gave me this hug. And I could feel all his strength and I thought he was going to squeeze the life
271 out of me, but he was just so happy that I set that opportunity up for him. And it was a very cold
272 day, that day, April, '71. No' 91. April' 91, and he walked away. Now the last time I saw him, he
273 got assassinated in South Africa.

274 BG: From all the T shirts posters flyers and articles which one stays in your mind?

275 ME: The one that represented the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid. It had
276 [unintelligible] and South African trade unions add this symbol on it. Yeah. Yeah.

277 BG: What did you do after the moment was over?

278 ME: I kept my contacts with - in terms of South Africa, I kept my contacts with people who
279 were involved in anti-apartheid movement. And to this day. The majority of us are still like
280 family, including one of the people who influenced me very early, like in '73. I was influenced
281 by a man who came to our campus and talked about the struggle in Mozambique, which is right
282 next to South Africa, and about Frelimo, the gorilla army, the People's Army that was fighting
283 against the Portuguese in Mozambique. And that person was none other than Prexy Nesbitt. And,
284 you know, people like Lisa Brock who's my dear friend and comrade. And just the whole anti-
285 apartheid community but I also was always a lover of culture and music. So, I always love South

286 African culture and music, and I stayed involved with that. And the people South Africa, always
287 had South African friends. And, including the late Alka Satoli[?], who was a great teacher and a
288 person who welcomed South African students, they would all come and meet Alka Satoli [?]
289 when they get to Chicago, but as a result of that being involved with them, I now manage a
290 group called Echoes of Southern Africa. They sing and dance and they do the songs of the
291 villages, townships, churches, workplaces. The prisons, the movement, the anti-apartheid
292 movement, they sing all the songs. And so, I managed them right now.

293 BG: How did you get involved with that?

294 ME” Like I say, I always stayed in touch with people from South Africa. And there was a group
295 called the South African Cultural Arts Organization, which was founded by Alka Satoli’s {?}
296 daughter Bonggi. And Bonggi asked me to be part of that group, as a videographer. And so when
297 that group broke up another group formed. And they asked me to be their manager. That’s how.

298 BG: What part of South Africa did you visit?

299 ME: Well, I have visited Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Johannesburg, and Soweto. Do
300 you know what somebody told me?

301 BG: No.

302 ME: Soweto means South West townships. So, they’re the Southwest township of
303 Johannesburg, the big city, and it is the largest-- largest black township on Earth, huge, and a lot
304 of culture comes out of Soweto. Yeah.

305 BG: And what year did you go?

306 ME: That was 1998.

307 BG: How long did you stay in South Africa?

308 ME: I stayed in South Africa for almost two weeks and went to Zimbabwe for another week.

309 BG: Why did you visit South Africa?

310 ME: Because I had invested so much time in South Africa, I wanted to go and experience it
311 myself. But also, I wanted to visit Africa. And I felt that if I was going to visit Africa, the first
312 place I wanted to see was South Africa, because I had dedicated so much of my life to it. And I
313 made the right decision. Because the people there you know they greeted me, they greeted us
314 with open arms and my old friends who I met here, the cast of Serafina, um...workers, union
315 members in South Africa. Well, you know, they all re-greeted me and made sure I went places
316 that a tourist couldn't go. Yeah, it was great.

317 BG: was the play Serafina about?

318 ME: Serafina was about some students in Soweto, who- who organized a play about Nelson
319 Mandela being freed from prison. That's what it was about.

320 BG: Did you have any regrets about the things that happened, bad things happened?

321 ME: Uh... within the anti-apartheid movement?

322 BG: Yeah.

323 ME: No, I don't have any regrets. I just regret that so many people in South Africa had to die.
324 And be tortured and jailed and families broken up, and I regret that they had to go through so
325 much to gain their freedom.

326 BG: What did you learn from the anti-apartheid movement?

327 ME: That we all connected, we're all connected, particularly in the labor movement. We
328 discovered that the people in South Africa, the workers in South Africa, and the workers in the
329 US, we were working for the same employers. That's what we discovered. So, Ford Motor
330 company changed its name to Samco and GM changed its name to Delta. You know, these are
331 these are like as a result of the laws. You know the sanctions and things like that they were trying
332 to disguise who they were in different countries. But we found out we were working for the same
333 employers and that made it easier for us to, to support each other and to have more of an effect.
334 To have more of an effect with our protests and demonstrations in our campaigns.

335 BG: How did it change you? How did the anti-apartheid movement change you?

336 ME: It made me more confident in the fact that what I was doing was the right thing. It made me
337 more confident in the fact that being an activist is the right way to live. It's the right way to be.
338 To see an actual victory as a result of the anti-apartheid movement was it was a beautiful thing.
339 You know, to actually see the results that in the end, you know they gained their freedom. So, it
340 had a great influence on me. it just made me more confident and made me believe that struggling
341 against oppression on behalf of people all around the world is.. is a beautiful thing to do.

342 BG: Looking back, what are you most proud of.? Looking back on the anti-apartheid movement
343 over your whole life?

344 ME: My whole life? Oh, wow that's huge. If I look back over my whole life, it's probably my
345 children, you know, me and my youngest daughter is named Makaba, after South African singer
346 Mariam Makeba. Who I met, I met Mariam Makeba. And I told her that when my wife was
347 eight months pregnant, then if we had a girl, we would name it after her. Yeah. What am I most
348 proud of, besides my children? I would say just knowing that my grandfather would be very
349 proud that I was involved in..In the African liberation movement. He would be very proud, that's
350 ...that's the thing that I'm most proud of. Yeah.

351 12:42:30 My grandfather. We have to go way back to the beginning now, because my
352 grandfather loved Africa, he was involved in the... He was a follower of Marcus Garvey, in the
353 back to Africa movement like back into teens and 20s. And so, he would always have me in front
354 of the world map, the world atlas book, we would go over the nations of Africa, and he would
355 have been named the capitals of the countries and the leaders of the countries. Yeah. So, and he
356 always was in political discussions about Africa. When my nephew was born like way back in
357 1960, when my nephew was born, he wanted my sister the name my nephew Lumumba. And
358 everybody thought he was crazy. You know, like Lumumba! What kind of name is that? You

359 ain't giving my boy the name Lumumba! And so, you know, they helped him out of it. But I love
360 my grandfather and am confident that he knew exactly why he chose that name. so I asked him
361 about it. Essentially, I asked him about it and he explained to me who Patrice Lumumba was and
362 how great he was and how he had made the Congo.... the nation of the Congo to freedom and
363 things like that. So, he had big influence on me..he sparked my interest in Africa, from a very
364 very early age.

365 BG: And what does your middle name mean?

366 ME: Siviwe is actually my first name in South Africa. I was given a name. By my dear friend,
367 Funeka, who's from South Africa. And it means our prayers are answered, our prayers are
368 answered. She gave me that name because she said, I've always helped her people, I've always
369 stood by the people of South Africa, and I'm still there for them. So, she was like, you like you
370 answered our prayers you always been there for us. So, very proud of that name.

371 BG: What is one thing you wish you would have done?

372 ME: One thing I wish I would have done in the anti-apartheid movement?

373 BG: Yeah.

374 ME: I guess I wish I would have gotten back to South Africa, more often. Yeah. That would be
375 it.

376 BG: What person did you want to meet but didn't have a chance to meet?

377 ME: Well, let me see. Maybe I should say Nelson Mandela, you know, even though we were
378 together. But Nelson Mandela, you know would have liked to have a chance to sit down and talk
379 to him.

380 BG: So that's the only person?

381 ME: No that's not the only person. There were.... There were people in the movement, who,
382 who died that I never got a chance to meet. One is this woman. Dosi September, who Prexy
383 Nesbitt always talks about. I mean there's just so many people man, so many people. I could
384 probably write out a whole list for you. But I would say that I don't have any regrets for not
385 meeting them because the people that I met more than fulfilled, and more than educated me on
386 things that that I should have known that I knew and that I felt, and they were great. I mean, I
387 have no regrets.

388 BG: Going into the future, what do you want to send your children and your grandchildren about
389 the anti-apartheid movement?

390 ME: Well, you know my children were involved in the anti-apartheid movement, and we were
391 out on Michigan Avenue in front of the South African consulate. My children, seven, eight years
392 old, were out there in the cold, protesting and carrying signs and they'll tell you stories about
393 how cold they were. I think they remember the cold more than they remember the protest. But I
394 just want them to know that the struggle against apartheid was a tremendously important struggle
395 because that struggle, the freedom of South Africa, which was like the most powerful nation on

396 the African continent. Now that it.. now that is under a black government. And we hope the
397 government gets more and more progressive as they go. It's already had an impact all throughout
398 all throughout Africa, particularly in the center point of Africa, where South Africa used to check
399 all the countries around them and exploit them in any kind of way. Now, South Africa is a
400 peaceful neighbor and Indian they assist you know these countries now, so now, South Africa is
401 a peaceful neighbor. And they assist these countries now. So, that struggle would eventually lead
402 to Africa becoming a stronger continent. Yeah.

403 BG: So, would you ever consider teaching a course on anti-apartheid movement or South Africa?

404 ME: Yeah, I would, I would. No doubt.

405 BG: Why is this something that you're passionate about?

406 ME: Because, you know, there was the saying that went in freeing South Africa is freeing
407 ourselves. And I truly believe that. Because you know my experiences in the anti-apartheid
408 movement, we shared the goodness of people, people of all races were involved in the anti-
409 apartheid movement. And we all care very much for each other today. And when we see each
410 other, is like, you know, seeing your sister or brother again. And it's no way that we can sit by
411 and let people be exploited, brutalized, and mistreated, and just be silent. So it was very
412 important to do all that we could, particularly under a system, I mean an actual government set
413 up to exploit the black majority in that nation, you know, it's like, so it's like 6, 7 million whites
414 about 28 to 30 million blacks and the small minority was running the majority with military
415 power. You know, that's how they kept their power. And then they had, people who, who would,
416 blacks who would work with them. Just to get a few kronos, you know, they give them a few
417 crumbs and then those people will be policeman or they will live in different areas, then.. then
418 the average than average black person would. What was your questions again?

419 BG: Why was this something that you're passionate about?

420 ME: As you can see, you know, I recognize all that. So, anytime.. anytime there are people
421 being exploited and treated unjustly. I think that you need to raise your voice and speak out
422 against it. That's why I was passionate about it.

423 BG: So what event, over the whole anti-apartheid movement do you remember the most?

424 ME: What event? Well, it will have to be the... The arrival of Nelson Mandela, to the city of
425 Chicago. Yeah. When Mandela came here as a result of the Illinois Labor Against Apartheid
426 organizing the event. That was the highlight. That was a highlight. And it also was a time when
427 those who didn't understand, thought that was the end of it. they thought that was the end of it.
428 Mandela was free. result. And those people start backing off. So, the people who were still
429 ...who understood what work still needed to be done, we stayed involved. That was certainly a
430 highlight from Nelson Mandela came. Yeah. And I made the video, you know, being able to do
431 that work while he was here followed him everywhere. And they hear him speak and privately to
432 people you know I was right there – I didn't record the private stuff, but it was just great. Just
433 great.

434 BG: Did you get a picture with him at least?

435 ME: Nope, I didn't. I want to be interested in and I was just, you know I was interested in
436 making this video, and I didn't think about any of it till it was all over and he was gone. Yeah.

437 BG: Yeah. Well, that's all my questions.

438 ME: Okay, but I have a question... question for you now. So, what got you interested in anti-
439 apartheid movement?

440 BG: Actually, I just said, like class. Yeah, it was just class. And then I studied more about it.

441 MEL Yeah. Okay. I wanted to end my interview with something. First of all, this is a very nice
442 recorder you have here. Digital right?

443 BG: Oh, that's not mine, it's a classmate's of mine.