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### Interview with Basil Clunie

Juston Ori

*Columbia College Chicago*

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**Transcription:  
Justin Ori**

1. Interviewer: Justin Ori
2. Interviewee: Basil Clunie
3. Location: Evanston Library
4. JO: O.k. and will you state your name for the Record?
5. BC: Sure, first name Basil Clunie (B.A.S.I.L C.L.U.N.I.E)
6. JO: How many years were you an activist for the Anti-Apartheid Movement?
7. BC: (Takes a breath) Uh... maybe thirty thirty-five.
8. JO: And where did you do most of your activism at?
9. BC: Here in the Chicago area, in Illinois.
10. JO: And what year were you born in?
11. BC: I was born in 1944
12. JO: And where at?
13. BC: New York City.
14. JO: is that where you grew up as well?
15. BC: Uh. That where I grew up, that's where I went to school and to college, I came out
16. Hear for graduate school.
17. JO: and where was your father's place of birth?
18. BC: my fathers place of birth of Jamaica, West Indies, at the time it was the British
19. West Indies.
20. JO: and your mother?

21. BC: Same Island.

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23. JO: Same Island. O.K, well let's get into some more narrative questions here.

24. BC: Sure.

25. JO: what is your earliest Childhood memory? Try to bring ya back here a little bit.

26. BC: (Laughs)... I have several, I don't, I'm not sure about the earliest, but among the

27. Earliest... my dad taking me to cricket games on Randal's island in New York. I didn't understand the game then, Still don't but I remember eating some sort of sweet candy they had, a nut kind of candy they had, it was mostly people from the British Islands and stuff, and the British Empire "quote unquote", who would play cricket. Another one was when my family took me to the statue of Liberty. I was kind of small because I remember... one event from that period of time when umm we were in a crowd I was with them I thought I looked around and nobody was there and then that's when they first told me that, umm if you are, if your with us and you get lost don't keep walking stop! First of all, I'd gone ahead of them and stuff. So, ya know, those are early memories I mean their, ya know, their just memories of family and stuff. Umm yea.

28. JO: what were some of your hobbies as a kid growing up?

29. BC: Umm... Chess umm. I like to draw always liked to draw um and uh, let me see... uh.... phew those are to I remember, oh reading of course I like reading, and a little bit later, umm in my teen years my oldest sister, who by virtue of her own experience introduced me to uh jazz, as a music form.

30. JO: Ok, and what were some of your hobbies? Or I just said that (laughs) what were some of you idols as a kid growing up?

31. BC: Let's define an age area hear, as a kid I assume you mean ten twelve? Or older?

32. JO: yea, like your childhood memories?

33. BC: I suppose they were both fictional and real in the sense of most children, I mean I don't remember... probably some idols from the kind of stuff we used to watch on T.V, were things like westerns, there was always a western hero, umm people in hats on horses killing Indians and riding through the stuff. Those were ya know uh and umm among the real folks a suppose some sports figures, we uh, one of the teams that we followed in New York, There were three at the time,

baseball teams. The Yankees whom we all regarded as those were the elite guys, ya know in the Bronx. Most of us followed the dodgers, or the giants, uh we followed the dodgers, a real big part of that was uh I was about I guess about ten years old when Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play in the major leagues, and uh the Negro leagues, and of course that had

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35. an effect he played for the dodgers, and was followed by other folks fairly soon after that, and that was always one of the things that solidified the dodgers team for us as a team,
36. but they were also known as the lovable Brooklyn bums, they were sort of seen as the working people's uh baseball club and that ya know so. Followed baseball a little bit, we didn't get to go to many games cause we would listen to the radio. And I think that those are the ones that I remember, I mean I remember others later you know in my teen years in stuff that, umm I do remember a very strong incident, maybe it's something that we'll come along later on, but I'll mention it now. We moved bought our first house, my parents did, when I was about ten years old, in Mt. Vernon witch is similar to Evanston as Evanston is to Chicago. It's the first suburb north of the Bronx, uh we lived in an apartment until then and about then they were able to get a house. So I moved, I was in the 6th grade, and we moved from New York City school system, to Mt. Vernon Westchester school system, and I remember going their with my parents, with my mom and the teacher saying "well were going to have to put him back a year" before they even tested me. Because he comes from the New York City school system. (Laughs) And I remember them insisting, that no! You don't do that, first you see whether or not if he can make it in the grade he's supposed to be in and then if their is a problem, then you can talk to us about that. I was lucky in that both my parents had gone to college, matter of fact they came to the United States to go to school. My dad left home because his father would not let him go to high school. He left Jamaica, went to Cuba to earn enough money to get to this country, and then came over hear. Went to New York high school at night boy's high school at night. Earned a degree there and then went on to Columbia university, again all this is during the depression, everybody's working anyway they could, and got a pharmacy degree. My mom came over with her mother, essentially to go to school to and eventually got a degree in math from Hunter College. And so those were, that was a very big thing among \_\_\_\_\_ Was to get an education. Any way getting back to the childhood memory, I am um ten eleven whatever 6th grade, and uh first they wanted to put me back. They did no tallow them to do that. But... now I've gone a little far from your original question.
37. JO: Oh, it's all right...
38. BC: um but I remember several things about that process, about how different it was to be regarded as somebody who people thought, well you came from the

- city. There was also two tracks of schools in Mt. Vernon at the time, one was designed for people who
39. Were going to go to college, and the other was designed for people who were going to go to vocational school. They actually had two high schools. A.B Davis was the college high school and Edison was the vocational high school. But my parents, there was never any question about what we were going to do my older sister, my younger brother and myself, you know the question was your going to go to school, and your going to learn what you like! And no ones gonna tell you well you got to go hear and you can't go their. But That I remember, in terms of that school process that immediate reaction that people were going to test me to see weather or not, not to give a single specific test, but I was

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41. always gonna be assumed to be less then where I was. It was very interesting to see that cultural difference, in Westchester.
42. JO: Well talking about school, how did you like school growing up?
43. BC: I generally liked it a lot, I mean I uh, like a lot of people, I think I had my fair amount of procrastination, but um... I liked school I liked the social sciences, I had more trouble with mathematics. I liked natural science, matter fact you did ask me earlier about my hobbies, and one of the things I was interested in although I wouldn't call it a hobbies, was I began to get interested in dinosaurs as a kid as well. I really developed a fascination for them based on an early visit to the American museum of natural history, which is you may know one of the best museums in the world. And they have three full rooms one for each of crimps of the coruscations area. Spent a lot of time there as well at the planetarium, I couldn't not go their on my own, we went their as part of a school thing like that, but I liked school in general. I think there were by the time id gotten into late middle school, early high school, I was clearly developing a sense off.... social dissatisfaction, with people of a conservative, or less open, and I'm not just talking about racially, I'm really talking about I think what we traditionally call the left right approach to politics. This is the image or the original answer I was going to give to your question
44. I'm glad I had a chance to expand on it. My father was he's a lot older, he was in his forty's or something when I was born when he first came to this country, guess even before he came. One of his hero's was Marcus Garvy who was a Jamaican American, whose dream was whose dream was to initiate a back to Africa movement among African Americans, or blacks, who wanted to go back to Africa he wanted to establish a state similar to Ethiopia and liberal places like that. In the Twenties and thirties this country had a huge amount of, in the twenties especially before the depression, the country had a huge sort of flowering of events and social movement and stuff. At one point Garvy's movement the united Negro improvement association was basically one of these conservative, but self help kinds of things. People would contribute to his organization he was

gonna buy some ships, for people who wanted to immigrate back to Africa. At one point the U.N.I.A had one card-carrying member for every two black people in the United States. IT was huge! And of course the reactions to that on the part of people who run things like the state department. ya know this is not right, ya know, for people who don't even have a nation to act as though ya know. My father was a garveite, he believed in that kind of idea of self-help, the idea of us doing for ourselves. He and my mother were in fact, were members of an organization. We just found this out after they passed, they never told us about it we saw this in the papers that they had, from a newsletter a monthly newsletter. IT was called the Jamaican American Industrial League, and the title had each of those with a period after it. J.A.I.L, because they fully expected to be put in jail. And there object was to come over to the united states, and got education and became doctors, and pharmacist, and dentists, and stuff, these were folks who were involved their organization, people I new our own dentist, Dr. barak is one of those people. They were strivers if you wana call it that, and the idea was that you do self-help,

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46. You don't wait for other people to tell you what you can do; you go ahead and get it done yourself. They were not doing it by radical means in our traditional sense of radical, but the ideas themselves were very radical, because in the thirties, ya know, Negro's didn't do this. Even in the north you didn't decide to do stuff outside the bounds of what other people thought was proper. And so that was always there the idea that you're only limited by your own wishes and imagination, a couple articles my dad had written
47. Back then, I'm thinking 1936, 1937. This is incredible, were in the middle, not the end of the depression, people are doing whatever they can to get jobs, and stuff, half the people are out of work, ahhh quarter of the people were out of work. And yet they're talking about
48. The long term kinds of things, generationally long term kinds of things that people have to do, one of there major objectives of course in Jamaica was still part of the British empire, colony. And there talking about how you achieve independence from colonialism from the British as Jamaicans we should control the island; the British shouldn't be controlling it. We need to get in control of our own economy. Anyway that was his background
49. And part of that comes about when time-to-time, especially when we kids did something wrong. The old saying " you kids don't know how hard it was for us, and such and such.
50. But the other half was, he would talk about people like garvy, in glowing terms and stuff. In the 6th grade we each had to do from school, we were asked to write do a book report on somebody, and I figured OH! This is a guy I have heard about, don't know anything about him, let me go. I went to the Mt. Vernon Library; there were no books on garvy there. Some of them hadn't been written yet they hadn't decided to carry the others. The only reference to him was in the Encyclopedia Americana it was a very long article. And this article described him as a charlatan, who came to this country defrauded other Negro's took there

money, was eventually arrested, which he was, and convicted of fraud and deposed. And I'm looking at this and I'm trying to juxtapose the two images in my head, now my father and my mother always taught me that education, the printed word, the idea of wrestling with ideas is very important, ya know nobody can take that away from you, but also a sense as a person as people, both of them happened to be very ethical and honest people. My father was the kind of guy who if he went into a store and bought something and the guy gave him too much change, whether he realized it then or later, he would come back and, ya know, he'd give him the change, ya know "this doesn't belong to me" so and by the same token he thought one of the worst things you can do is cheat somebody. So on the one hand I had this image of him this understanding of him, and he is telling them these stories about Garvey, and on the other hand I'm seeing this thing that is a mirror image an opposite of it and I'm trying to wrestle with the idea, of why would he lie, or why would the encyclopedia lie? And that was my first inclining and understanding of, the basic idea since then, I've taught history at various schools' and stuff, of the fact that the victor writes the story. From his or her own standpoint, and that other facts are not only not spoken about, but since they don't fit they become irrelevant, and get left out of the story.

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52. JO: It's very funny you're talking about that we just had this conversation in class, about how the victor always right the story.
53. BC: Yes! Yea but the idea to is that people who read and understand and believe that research will reward investigation, you have to be able to suss out why it was left out. To me that was the biggest question as a sixth grader, why did they lie, not just... somebody's lying clearly, this is the same guy were talking about, the same picture, same image, why is somebody lying? What was the reason? That to me has been an important way of fighting was against what I regarded as injustice. You have to understand why somebody finds it necessary, is it fear, greed, is it ya know. In order to be able to counter what they are doing, without necessarily making either enemies. Or else just becoming a mirror image of them.
54. JO: Let's get a little more into your twenties here. In 1964 you were still in New York, Correct?
55. BC: Ahhh Yes! As a matter of fact yea.
56. JO: How did you hear about the race riots that were happening in Harlem in 1964?

57. BC: I was there! My dad pharmacy was on 128th street and Common Avenue, a little bit west of 7th Ave. And in 64 when they were happening, a matter of fact I went down
58. A couple of night's I went down and shot pictures of some of the police in the streets, and stuff like that. Obviously we saw that we saw the reports in the newspaper, we also talked to people who lived, Dr.Barak still had an office on 8th avenue, and people like that we had moved to Mt.Vernon. Every night I was working at his pharmacy down there, all through junior high school, High school, and even college (Laughs) I went to City College which were only six blocks from the store. So I was there, ya know.
59. JO: So you got to experience it and see it first hand.
60. BC: I did, I did, and I remember one of the most important things that would began to take place, again in the idea of this question of self determination of a community which saw itself in opposition to the police force, that the police were not protectors but rather instigators. The primary reason for that particular conflict, I don't call it a riot because although people were rioting it tends to conflate the idea of more traditional, not traditional, but more prosaic race riots that took place in the United States a century earlier. When whites rioted and attacked blacks, these were people, who were basically tearing up the neighborhoods and um not where they lived, but places where they bought, stores they didn't own and things like that but they were doing it for in this case, in 1964, it was for a reason. A young boy 14, 15, 16 years old, was confronted by the police in Brooklyn, he was either being accused of stealing something or robbing something, whatnot. And the officer claimed that the kid drew a gun, and shot him, but he shot him in the back, he was in an alley, and he was shot in the back from several dozen yards

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62. away. And the officers name was Gilligan, and I remember that within 48 hours activist in Brooklyn had put out a wanted poster wasn't zeroxed at that time, was even memory graphed, yea they had gone to a copy shop, they had gotten a picture of his official police thing with his hat, a close up of him it said, Wanted for murder Gilligan the cop shot so and the name of the boy in the back on such and such a day at such and such a time. And they began to run these things off, and within 48 hours after that, no it was 24 and 24, it was a period of two and a half days, within a day after these things began to appear on the street, the F.B.I had hundreds of people searching to find this thing. They saw it yes! They saw it as a people in the community were highly upset because, the major thing that took place was that the first thing the police administration did after this event, was to place this fellow on paid leave, took him out of the precinct, put him somewhere behind a desk, or something like that. Where he wouldn't be around the public kept paying him, and refused to consider investigating the situation, the whole thing was based on, what did this kid do? And of course he was dead so he could not give his side of the story, and that was the essence of this whole thing, people



had been fed up, because other people had been shot by the police, but this was the catalyst, and when those hundreds of people started tearing up the neighborhood looking for this place where this thing was first done. So they could arrest the people who did it cause they regarded that as a crime, that's what triggered the larger conflict ration that spread from Brooklyn to Harlem. And we all new that story if we were there, but outside of that it was just Negro's are rioting.

63. JO: when did you first encounter discrimination, like towards you in any particular way, or felt it?
64. BC: There are a lot of instances, I remember the ones in my adulthood more obviously, and there mostly little things.
65. JO: is there anyone that sticks out particularly?
66. BC: Yea! Yea um. It sticks out because the same kind of incident happened to me twice in my life, once when I was nineteen or twenty taking a young girl out to ah, women of my age, girl that I took to a movie and we wanted, oh! I remember! It was some sort of movie; I think it was a Sydney Porte movie. And it was only playing up in, um, a suburb about ten miles north of Mt Vernon. It was one of these tiny little theaters you know sort of like Peak scale I think it were. So we had to drive, Borrowed my fathers car got permission to do that, it was a Friday, Saturday night. We drove up went to the movie and on the way back I get stopped by the police. And he wants to know, looking at all the stuff, looking at my drivers license, looking at my registration, wants to know if we'd been drinking, the whole nine yards, and I hadn't done anything wrong! I hadn't. Been speeding, I hadn't done anything wrong. The point was what are you doing in our town? We see a black person driving through are town, stop the car find out what you could get on him. The reason I say that sticks out in my mind, the very same thing took place on Sheridan road up hear in Highland Park. Decades later! Took my wife, we went to Highland Park movie theater, not the high end one, the little guy.

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68. JO: The little one.
69. BC: Yea! And we went to see something that was playing there, again it's a second run theatre, and it was playing up there cause we missed it up here. And were driving back down on Sheridan road, and um no it wasn't Sheridan road, and we saw one of these houses that had these little lights that you sort of stick in the ground and stuff, and of course, look at those maybe we could get those for our house, so we drove, what I think was a little driveway or something, we drove there looked at them, and came back down, and so were on Sheridan road, it's a little winding thing, up in your neck of the woods, and I looked in the rearview mirror, and there was a car behind us, and I saw another car pull out in front of

- that car to get behind us, and I said to myself something told me “ That’s a cop move” So you know you go for about three or four miles before you get out of highland park. So this guy stayed behind us, I kept looking at the speedometer, we stayed under thirty the whole way, I didn’t go to thirty-one you know.  
(Laughs)
70. I stayed under thirty the whole way, soon as the sign says your now exiting Glencoe, or whatever it was
71. JO: yea it’s Glencoe
72. BC: He throws on his lights, and I already told Gloria I said, “ I think there is a policemen behind us, I could not see his lights or anything, I just could tell... You know. He throws on his lights we pull over. “Sir, can I see your diver’s license?” Ok “Would you step out of the car?” By this time my wife’s getting hot because this kind of thing had happened to us at home, when we had a party and stuff, and some kids from the high school didn’t know where we lived, and were looking at other house numbers, and they called the police, but! So she’s hot by now, so anyway we get in there, he ask’s me weather or not I had been drinking, I said “ You know I haven’t been drinking” I said “You’ve been following us for five miles, you know I haven’t been weaving, you know I have been going under the speed limit” I said “ I saw you when you pulled out in front of the other guy, by this time he getting a little bit flustered, because I hadn’t done anything wrong he’s pulled me over, and I am not some gang banger. This is around ten years ago I’m old right!?” (Laughs) So have a nice night you know, I thought you were maybe weaving a little bit; he gives me this fake kind of thing, and same kind of crap. You know the phrase we have for it?
73. JO: What’s that?
74. BC: D.W.B Driving while black. And so that’s happened to me four or five different time in my life. Those were the first two.
75. JO: It’s funny that you mention that because, like I said, I live in Highland Park, and that was a huge... the chief of police ended up getting fired, because they were racial profiling people. And I worked with somebody at a store that was a former cop, and they
76. Page 9
77. got memos from the police chief, saying if you see a Hispanic wearing a sombrero... pull them over. If you see anything kind of like, totally discrimination, and she.
78. BC: And so you got to ask yourself what’s the purpose? If you had a crime spree from people outside the community that match these descriptions, that’s exactly what you’re supposed to do as a cop. But otherwise your spending time having pulled over people, while real guys, maybe going robbing somebody’s

house, and your over here in the road, instead of you know, taking care of your own citizens. Duh! (Laughs) Anyway I'm Sorry!

79. JO: Alright, Let's go a little bit more into the future a couple more years. What did you think of Malcolm X's assassination? How did you hear about that?
80. BC: I uh was there. Many of us who at the time I think um, I actually finished a degree at Bronx community college before I went to city college for my bachelors. And met some folks and, you know by that time in the early sixties, I had really become politicized, primarily because of not only the kind of thoughts my dad had, but Malcolm X was one of the people, one of the few people speaking about the liberation of African Countries, in addition to just the Civil Rights Movement. Most of the people from the south \_\_\_\_\_ were very much involved in the sit INS and things that were going on down there. There wasn't that much of that in New York and stuff. But in New York you had the U.N... starting in 1957, you have the independence of Ghana. You have people like in Kruma to be elected out of jail to be the first president, black president of that country. You had them coming to the U.N, were watching all this kind of stuff and we would get politicized, to fact that there is a larger world out there, that's in fact one of his, that was one of his approaches was that it's not just a question of civil rights in the Unites States, it's a question of human rights, not only are we being oppressed as Negro's in the United States, but Africans, Asians, South Asians, South Americans, the whole south, huh Southern Hemisphere of the world. So this was a different message that made sense, this is again right after he come out of the nation of Islam, he begins to look at a worldview, that accommodates what were thinking about, in terms of what's happening to this. 1959, Castro get's elected, uh uh, comes to power. And within a year come to the United Nations, and he doesn't stay downtown in a Hotel, he comes up to the Teresa Hotel witch is a major hotel in Harlem, 125th street and 7<sup>th</sup> ave, and he stays there and brings his whole entourage, and the state department's going crazy. "What is he doing up there with those blacks there"? Well he says " Were an ethnic country that has black and white Cubans" he says " I'm coming up here with people who, come from the Caribbean, who come from Africa, just like so many of us come from Africa". And so he stays up there, and that was a big thing hundreds of people outside. So when Malcolm X would have these talks outside once he got out of the Nation Of Islam, and began to start the Organization of the African American Unity, which I joined, and the Muslim Mosk, which I didn't join, cause I'm Christian. He began to try and talk about what we could do to help our African brothers so we were there. And so he would have these talks at the autobahn, he's trying to build an organization and stuff like that and um. His
81. Page 10
82. assassination was of course something that we saw in a couple different lights. In addition to him being assassinated, within twenty four hours two other people Louis Amear, in Boston, and one of his other associates on the east coast were also killed and we understood that, at that young age 19, 20. That Muslims didn't

have that kind of reach, you know. As a matter of fact I attended the trial, of the people who were accused of that. And two of them who were accused, that always maintained their innocents, and they were members of Moske Seven, which Malcolm X had come out of, and the third guy basically made statements that I was one of those these other two weren't, there is four of us and were not Muslims. And um... they had the three guys that were going to be convicted and that's what they did during the trial, but that whole question, there are several books written about this from people who were there as well. The question of who was involved, clearly the Muslims were involved, but they may have been accessories during the fact as it were, and we truly believe that the U.S government had at least access, and passably a hand in providing weapons, and access and things like that. And of course one of the things that Malcolm never did at the autobahn, or anywhere else we had stuff, was to search people. Muslims had a very strict, you come in you search everybody, so he wanted to create a more open situation. So he refused to let people do that at the door.

83. JO: How did you, or when did you first learn about apartheid?

84. BC: early on, in the early sixties, we heard about in 1961 the Sharpsville incident, or Sharpsville Massacre, was a thing that brought it to world wide attention, we recognized the difference between Apartheid and other kind's of Colonialism, and the more you learned about it, the more you realized as a settler nation, very much like the United States is a settler nation, they had a different kind of problem. They saw themselves as a primitive member of that society, that should run it forever, and that you had to do something with the indigenous population. So the Sharpsville occurrence where we had demonstrations in New York, and United States and Japan, and all over the place, because at that time people thought, or the thinking of the news paper and the media was that they killed all these Africans shot them. It was an unarmed demonstration, the whole country is gonna explode, the words blood bath always occur when white folks think there going to get killed, I mean you know you just start reading this crap, and I call it crap because for many, the same kind of thing was happening a year earlier in the Congo, when you began to get, as soon as order broke down and Lumumba was assassinated, Mumboto begins to take over, you have a secession in Katanga. The Belgians fly in troops to reestablish order. And the front page of life magazine has a picture of mercenaries going in to save a white nun, and were looking at this thing going what about all the Africans that have been killed on every side of this conflict she's the only one that counts, and we developed the phrase "The only time you get news about Africa is when somebody white get's killed" It was a very difficult time, so anyway, the idea was about apartheid, Sharpsville really brings it into sharp focus, and we began to, at that time, we began to talk about sanctions and stuff.

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86. JO: is that what made you want to get involved? That incident?

87. BC: It was that yea yea, I mean this was clearly that this was something that I mean uh, your seeing, devolution at the end of colonialism and all the rest of the continent, but in the southern sixth of the continent you see, South Africa as the crown jewel, you see Rhodesia as it's white younger brother, and you see the Portuguese colonies Angola and Mozambique and then on the west coast of course plecepetomia, and cape Viriden islands, guinea basou, and you see that these are the places that whites are going to fight to keep control, so we began to concentrate using anti apartheid, and Anti Colonialism as a theme, when I say we I mean people who decided to be political, we said this is something that we should be involved in too even though it doesn't affect us directly, and later on we find out it does (laughs) Our money was going to support this.
88. JO: how exactly did you get involved? What steps did you take?
89. BC: I was at 44 54, by the time that I got both at Bronx community college there's an African American student organization, and at city college there was one, at city college it was called onyx society. We would do several kinds of things; we would organize demonstrations, like petition drives for the U.N, as well as for people to send to various consulates, we had what was called the golf campaign, (Cough)???? was involved and compendia as we still are today. At the time they would separate there local, and international, operation you know local stuff they say well were supporting schools in east Harlem, and such and such, but internationally they were on of the people, whose money was going to support the Apartheid regime and it was always the question of what are your money's doing? Both companies like Golf, and Ford, and Kodak, as well as bank whose funds supported it. One of the things that took place after Sharpsville was to the world, especially the financial world, thought that South Africa was going to blow up. Began to withdraw, and that might have brought the regime right down then, ten American banks formed a consortium, to offer the south African Apartheid government and unconditional loan of up to Forty million dollars, if they needed it to support any of the businesses that wanted to leave, if they borrow the money they pay interest on it, if they didn't borrow it everyone else would know it was there as a back up, and that saved the regime economically at that time, and we never forgot that.
90. JO: that's very interesting, I've never heard about that part
91. BC: J.P Morgan, uh chase (laughs) you know the guys.
92. JO: what did your family think of you being an activist?
93. BC: Interesting. My dad was pretty much all for it, in the sense that he thought, number one on the right side of history if you will but um, my mom believed in that that but she also felt that, you don't want to hurt yourself, you have to

remember this is the sixties now, one of the things that was constantly in the background, of any kind of activism, but

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95. especially activism that took place, that had to do with the third world, was that people who believed that you shouldn't do that would say you being duped by the communist, were in the middle of the cold war in the early Kennedy years, Cuba becomes independent within a year later, there getting help from the soviet union, Castro turns from a nationalist into a communist dictator, you know they add the dictator part, because the whole world was supposed to be divided into white and black, with no pardon my pun, no middle ground. And of course we saw things in a different way. The Africans have a phrase "When the elephant's fight the grass get's hurt" and there fore they begin to form the non aligned movement at the united nations, and as that grows, it was not just Africans but like I said, South Americans east and south Asians, and stuff. Those who were not aligned with the west loop of the Soviet block. And it grows to seventy eighty nations, but there always seen as you know, your not are enemy so we don't have to care about you. But that was the kind of thinking we had and it was completely absent. My mom was worried that people will say if you're involved with this group, or that group. It had a truth, in 1964 I was apart of a summer job, I was apart of are you act, which is one of the anti-poverty groups i'm talking to much... Toward the end of that year as we get towards Labor Day, this is part of Johnson's program, the anti-poverty program; the funds began to dry up. Were asked to clean up offices and stuff on labor day weekend, then after we do that were told were not going to get paid for it. And so our boss, and of course there was a lot of in office fighting, our boss says "When you get your last pay-check" which doesn't include the work we did on labor day weekend " sign under protests, so you'll get the money, but if anything happens in the future, if there's a class action suit, " oh we didn't know we were kids" Fine, so we do that. That's Labor Day, two month later i'm at school, and I get a call from Freedom National Bank, which was one of the black two owned banks in Harlem, which is where I had that account. They were the ones writing the checks. I get a call from them saying did you sign this last check several months ago under protest? And I said yes, we'd like you to come down we would like to talk to you, I figured hey! Maybe I use this money. Take the bus across town from City College go over there. Go and sit in a room something like this and there's five guys in there all wearing suits, one of them is clearly a bank official, and the other's clearly aren't, because at Freedom National Bank, you don't have professional looking white guys working in the bank who are say 35 years old. There 55 or there 15 but there not 35, wearing suits that clearly outclassed the other guys suit. The Black Student Organization, at Bronx community college, had been named the Samba's by the way; it's an east African word for lion. So the guy starts to ask me a couple of questions about the poverty thing, how many hours you work such and such, you didn't tell me to bring the records down so I didn't, but I hadn't been home. Then he starts asking questions like " didn't you go to Bronx Community College before you when to City"? I said " Yea" " Were you apart of the African American Student group the Samba's

there”? I said” Yes” “ Does that have any relationship to the Samba’s, Pierre Mu lei lei’s group the samba’s. Now this was a separatist group, communist oriented group in the Katanga Province. There was a second revolt in the Congo in 1964 again about who was going to control the rich copper deposits. And Pierre Mu Lei Lei was a left leading guy, who was getting arms apparently, with the soviets or Chinese something like that... And there

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97. called the Sambas we’ve read about them. So this guy is asking me questions about whether the samba group at Bronx community college has anything to do with the Sambas in the South Congo. And right away I say to myself, not onyx is this not an F.B.I guy (laughs) and not a bank guy. You know I look at him and I say to myself “ Do you have my money”? I was scared to death, I knew exactly who he was, he was a representative of the Central intelligence agency, and I also knew enough by that time that they are prohibited from doing activities within the united states, and therefore prohibited from interviewing people, interrogating people in the united states, they have to let the F.B.I, or the justice department do it. So I says” Do you have my money”? He said, “Well just answer the question.” I said, “ Do you have my money”? And I started getting very agitated, and finally he said “ just go” I said to myself they got our number, and when you join the samba’s you know, you go to a couple parties, you have a couple demonstrations, nothing, we never so much as got even had anything where people and police came and said your parties to loud so, these guys had infiltrators at every school, and later on we knew about that, they had done a lot of stuff at black schools.

98. JO: you talk about that group, what national or international organizations or coalitions did you support? In...

99. BC: In the Southern African Context?

100. JO: Yea

101. BC: we general supported the organizations that the organizations of African Unity support. They would try to vet organizations that would claim to be liberation groups who were fighting against the Colonialism. In South Africa I choose to support the African National Congress, they seemed to be doing the most at the time in Angola we supported the N.P.L.A, and again primarily because they were the ones who um, and that takes place a couple years later, that takes place in the early seventies, but from the early time on there were three groups in Angola, the N.P.L.A, and Unita. Unita was always very flaky, it was under the interest of Jonas of Embiun, and he seemed to go any which way we wanted. He would get help from the United States, then a couple years later get help from the Chinese, then he would ask people and um as it turned out a couple years later he was the one that south Africans used to cross the border and try to invade, and take over the capital before election day. Well we generally

supported the N.P.L.A, who had a line that seemed to be as good, F.N.L.A might be pretty good, but it had a lot of support from Mombutu across the border In Ziaer, and that's one reason we didn't trust Roberto's people. Because we saw what mombutu had done in the past to the united states to kill, Lamumba, in Mozambique it was very easy, there was one liberation group ferlima, they were vetted by O.A.U, as we took them. In Rhodesia there were two groups, Zapu, and Zanu Zimbabwe African Peoples union, and the Zimbabwe African National Union. And we generally specially after they formed, briefly they formed a patriotic front, where the two armies worked together, but we generally sort of looked for early in that process, zapu and A.N.C had an alliance so we supported them, then later on

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103. Zanu seemed to gain extendedness in the work that they were doing against the Rhodesian troops, but generally was the people who supported by the organization of African American Unity, that continent wide organization, that tried to provide an umbrella, of who was who was legitimate.

104. JO: and what positions did you hold in the movement?

105. BC: O.K, uh in New York I was part of the committee that honor society had, and we had several groups that were basically at hawk on whether were trying to raise funds for this thing or that thing, Once I came out to Chicago I got out here in 68, was a graduate student. And within a couple years, someone who I had graduated from City College with contacted me. Who at that time was one of the co-chairs for the coalition for Illinois divestment from South Africa. Cheryl Johnson, and she called me on the phone and asked me what I was doing lately for the movement? I said what are you talking about? She said were having a meeting next we so. So I join the coalition for Illinois divestment in South Africa, and eventually became a leader of one of there programs, and eventually became one of the co-chairs of that. And that was primarily divestment group, and once we got the divestment bill passed at the state of Illinois level, we had several discussions, and changed from a coalition to an organization, called the Chicago Committee In Solidarity in South Africa, C.C.I.S.S.A. Many of us were the same people who got some new people coming in, the divestment stuff we had a lot of lawyers, and a lot of folks who basically doing research to find out which companies were doing stuff. This one was more or less the support, in terms of raising funds and raising concessions. And I became the co-chair of one of those. In those days you have a lot more women then men, they do a lot more work then men do, the microphones comes out the men come out. One of my colleagues said to me (Laughs) says you're the puppet of the matriarchy (Laughs) In terms of the second group a Ciza that lasted about ten years. Basically we developed a process, in addition to raising consensus, and when people would come through hear from southern Africa we would get then audiences at various schools, and churches, and places like that where people that would hear what they have to say, and hear it from the horses mouth as it were, and raise funds and donations get as



many venues as possibly, among the people who came through, Myaqueso brothers from the Alex township.

106. JO: so they came on a platform to...

107. BC: Yea, Yes, Lena Maguey was hear from Angola, you have Joe... not Joe hmm. One of the fellows who was, who was in prison with Mandela, one of the leadership, the top leadership of the A.N.C, who had been released early because Dennis Goldberg, because he was white, they released him early hoping, to split a wedge in the A.N.C, between white, and non white members, so they released him about ten years before they released the others. He comes out, he immediately come to the unites states, well first he went to Israel he had relatives there. He comes to the United States falsely advertising under the A.N.C then he goes and heads up the London group. But when he came through here, we

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109. did the same kind of thing. The University Of Chicago, Northwestern, Loyola, places like that churches as well... So! We would do that about three or four years into the organization we began to decide, as a matter of fact it was after 76, we decided on a, to have a major fund raiser event every year. We would call it on the Anniversary of Soweto Day, which is June 16<sup>th</sup>, and the kids would come out in South Africa. And demonstrated against having to be taught Afrikaans as a normal language, and they'd been killed and all that stuff, so about 1979 or 80 we began what we called Soweto Day walkathon, first year we learned how to do that from Church World Service. WE designed a walkathon, a booklet, we had people decide they were going to walk, we decided on a length of 10 kilometers, which is 6.2 miles, a nice easy walk, something that kids could do, people could do, I remember the first couple, when my daughter was in stroller, as well as carols, and now there both graduated from college. And each person who was walking had this thing where you would get pledges, you know I'm goanna pledge a dollar for every kilometer, you know and each year we raised over ten thousand dollars, for direct support, first year was the national medical and dental association of south Africa which was an Anti-Apartheid medical group, of non racial, women. The South African Counsel Church, all sorts of groups and each year we had a different person we were sponsoring 100% of the money we raised went to those groups, and some dicey times trying to get it there because people were trying to prevent us from organizing people, and the point was ceza and sensa were both in south African context you call them non racial groups, in this case you call them interracial groups, always, there were people's who ideas were progressive and basically, we want what they want. Which is independency in these countries, so that was the primary kind of stuff that, I've been on radio a couple times debating against folks who were defending what either the banks were doing, or what the companies were doing, or railing against the process of what these terrorist were doing, Nelson Mandela is a terrorist, but you didn't know that yet. Once upon a time.

110. JO: What conflicts did you see among the activist? Did you see any internal conflicts?
111. BC: we well, conflict is a, it is, conflict is a dangerous word, there were certainly differences of opinion
112. ‘
113. JO: Butting heads I should say?
114. BC: Yea there were differences of opinion, but one of the things that we learned primarily from working with so many people from overseas, was that when you have differences of opinion’s you argue them out. You have people listen to those arguments, answer those arguments, and it’s a very unveiling kind of process. Were used to in this country especially in the age of sound bites and stuff, you pick one from column A, and one from Column B, send that’s my position. But if you don’t talk about why someone has a difference of opinion, and under what circumstances it makes sense, and what circumstances it doesn’t, you never get a full understanding of how to move the struggle forward, because that’s the idea, the process is involved in how do you move things
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116. forward? What are our aims and how do we get those aims accomplished, not that are right. That kind of thing is the way of arguing that takes place, at the most local democratic, it’s a very different kind of democracy, then the kind we see, in the sense that has different parameters, although the ends are very much the same. In South Africa especially in the South African context. The village or something like that will be faced with a difficult question, and it’s goanna advantage some people, and disadvantage other people, and they talk about it all day long everybody participates in the conversation, it’s like a town meeting, it takes all day long, sometimes all weekend long. But even the people who end up being in the minority, that are being out voted, understand fully two things, I know why I am out voted and why my argument didn’t carry today, secondly i’m still part of the family, i’m not on the outside, and am going to fight this answer, and that’s where the phrase, its come into American lexicon, that’s where the phrase “At the end of the day” because it means you finish these arguments, and everybody understands why, and how the community is set up, and what they believe today , and why were going o move in this direction. So that process is something that we incorporated. Now what were than nature of the conflicts, the differences, when we changed from sidza to siza, the question was first how active are we going to be? Were we going to do this of civil disobedience? Try to get arrested to raise consciousness that way? Or were we going to go in another direction, we eventfully decided to go in the direction of, what do the people on the other side need the most? DO they need for us to make a lot more noise? Or do they need us to been seen helping them I that way, or do they need material funds? And we decided pretty much on the later, because then the idea of apartheid, and the idea that is was bad, was pretty much set in peoples minds, legislator learned how effective we were going to be at finding out who they

were, I mean the process during the whole divestment campaign, was very simple was that, you find out what people were doing mostly downstate, was to vote present, so they get credit for voting on something, but you couldn't tell which way they believed, it was not a yes, and it was not a no, and they wouldn't pass it. So we would put them into three categories, friend's enemies, and refused to.... We would go to their churches to their homes, to their communities. And get petitions. There was one guy, who face nobody ever new, cause he was constantly one of these people constantly elected on Vote 22, hear in Chicago and stuff. We got a picture of him, and we had a bunch of petitions, with his picture at the top saying this is your state representative, he has never voted yes or no on apartheid, and about the money that's being used, and the Illinois pension funds, to support Apartheid ask him. And he saw when we got is picture, it was the first time anybody had seen his picture, he's running for office, he's winning all the time, you know Stamp 22. He immediately changed to a yes. Just to get those things off the street. You know we learned processes of how to make things work, but in terms of the conflicts, it was really a question of how do we move forward? I mean standing way back from that. There were a lot of intense discussions, that would go along with what was happening, they would move away and start something else, start another group, but it was never like i'm never going to talk to you again or something. So those were the types of conflicts, but like I said we learned over the years to account in terms of, what do we think is most useful? How do we get there? What sort of things will work, and wont. And this is how we frame the question

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118. JO: I think you loosely touched on it earlier, when you were talking about the walkathon, how did you mainly raise awareness of Apartheid.

119. BC: The walkathon was a very big thing; in each case we would raise awareness in those neighborhoods, because everywhere we decided to do something, we had to find a root to get support. Like every mile or so you would have a water station, you know stations with bottle of water, we'd have churches or organizations, businesses schools whatever, who would allow us, we generally did it on a Sunday, to have those stations, and supply those things, but we also had, they were also in neighborhoods, some of them were in the south side, some of them on the west side, and every single case, we decided to tie together what was happening in South Africa, and what was happening in there neighborhood. In one case it was the area around U.I.C, where they were busy taking over buildings, and changing neighborhoods, and moving people out. And we would tie that to the land questions in South Africa, and right there we had a bunch of people who said I know exactly what you mean, they came in bought up our block, now we have to get out. And as an institution they decided to use there power like this, without involving us in the decision making, and so they may have supported us in that reason, in every case it was critically important that people understood how Apartheid effects you, but also how you have struggles hear that are tied to those. That the world is a much smaller place, the idea of

social activism is to change your life for the better, and you can help do that even if you don't join us in this thing, you can start something here you know, about how the next time U.I.C wants to do the same thing to you, if that's your problem, or at least go and talk to them and stuff. So every time we tied it to something happening in a local community or area, so that was a big thing. WE got absolutely no help from the newspapers, at one point I think, we also had the support of the Illinois labor network against Apartheid, which was one of two groups, of labor organizations, we had fifteen hundred people outside the consulate that day, and we called up the tribune, we knew that this was a huge demonstration, and we talked to them and said were going to have this big demonstration. The point is you people aren't supposed to be having demonstrations, if you anti communist, you can have a demonstration, but, so were not going to cover it, the women had two questions on the phone. Are you going to break any windows, are you going to get arrested? Well we don't plan to. Well it's not news CLICK! But the people who did carry it were the defender, a couple fairly small newspapers on the south and west side that served black neighborhoods and stuff, they would send reporters, and take pictures, also as a photographer I took pictures and sent them off to places. But the tribune and the Sun-times wouldn't even have a picture with a caption.

120. JO: That kind of goes into the next question of, I was going to ask what kind of resistance did you get from the local government here? Cause I know that back with old Mayor Richard Daley, and the police back then were known for cracking heads first, and asking questions later.

121. BC: Yes, my recollection is that we, like I said when we started out as a divestment organization, and we had some demonstrations then, in front of the state office building,

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123. which had been built with South African Steel. At the same time people were shutting down southworks, in south Chicago so that became an issue about that. And we had big demonstrations there and in front of the consulate. The idea about the first ones that took place at the consulate further southward on Michigan ave, people should go in and refuse to come out and get arrested as a way of raising consiussnous, and that was early on, I think trans Africa started that thanksgiving in 76 or something like that in New York, and we were doing the same thing hear, So we had people, who had big names, people who were state representatives, or aldermen, we didn't have like Danny glover, so you get these people to get arrested, because those names would make news, cause the newspapers were afraid not to report it, if there competitions going to report it. But after that it wasn't a question of getting arrested it was a question of trying to get the news out. And so if we couldn't get them out with the big news stuff, the resistance like I said was always high, from the Sun-Times, but we very seldom, I can't remember anyone at any of the T.V Stations cover our stuff, but again as a social incident. The walkathons sometimes got coverage, I think once or twice

get coverage from A.B.C, M.A.Q or a place like that. Because it was seen as a community event, you know we had two hundred people marching, similar to doing something for like breast cancer or something like that. But because it had a political bang, there was a lot less of that, cause if its political there's more than one side, and people can be tainted with being radicals, or commies, we don't want to touch it. That was what we saw.

124. JO: Ok who was the most influential person that you met in the movement?
125. BC: Nelson Mandela, (laughs) No I have met several; I have only had the chance to meet him once. Very briefly.
126. JO: what was he like?
127. B.C- you know seeing him talk at various places it's incredible, I've only seen two people in my life with that kind of charisma, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela, but the idea was the force, in the belief of what they were doing is translated when they speak. (Cell Phone beep) It's telling me I got about ten more minutes on the meter (Laughs)
128. JO: I got about ten minutes to then.
129. BC: causes the city their death on me, for such a small town you got a lot of people that have nothing to do.
130. JO: Well let's get into the reflective part.
131. BC: And those I think the charisma and the belief that in what they were doing. One of the things that Americans Always did with Nelson Mandela was to play up this huge thing once he got out of prison after 27 years and he's not bitter of course he was bitter, anybody would be bitter, but the point was how do you move forward? So the way in

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133. which you think about these things is something that as a culture, we really haven't embraced, partly because we don't, as Danny Schecter and others of the news media say, weve been dumped down, the more you see the less you know. And I remember something that really oppressed me was, I think I was in New York at the time I was at my sister's apartment, when Mandela was first on nightline, and Ted copal was interviewing him and stuff. And every time copal would raise a question, Mandela would stop him, and re phrase the question, so when you're asking this, this is how we operate. You know he asked him once if when your elected, this is before he was elected, " when your elected what are you going to do" He said " listen I may not be nominated for president, if they asked me to sweep the halls on the floor of congress, that's my job, and that's

what i'm goanna do, you don't understand that were an organization, it's not me it us! And its what we believe that is going to transform South Africa. At one point he asks a question and Mandela starts to answer cople said... and Mandela says, " I think I made you speechless " because again the mindset was so different, and they'd been thinking about this thing for decades. The whole time they're on on Robin Island they thinking how do we eventually get this thing? They had a phrase back in the sixties " Freedom in our lifetime" Which was a hope not an expectation, and that's the same way they thought every time somebody would get arrested and come in years after the guy had been in jail, he had become a newspaper, he would be telling them about what's happening on the streets about such and such, when other people left they would take the word back out, that's how we changes our strategy, it's a long term sense of how do we transform our culture, our country , our nation,..... I'm sorry

134. JO: it's all right, lets get into the last part hear the reflective's. What was the most difficult thing you encountered as an activist?

135. BC: I think, for me it was, the lack of willingness of people who, are in control of things, the government the media, businesses to understand, change is inevitable, but that everybody is important not just those that currently make changes, in that sense in some cases it was arrogance, in other cases it border almost on ignorance. The sense is this is the way it is, that is the way it was, this is the way it's goanna be, it's never been that way, it's always changed, the question is what do you want out of life, and if you only think in terms of what I have, your not even thinking about your own kids, less anybody else's kids. To me that's the most frustrating thing, so often when your talking to people, the idea was sort of like, and again try to put you in a box, well yes apartheid is bad but! And the but always meant the other side was going to be worse were not talking to them so they got to be evil, sounds like a rant right? (Laughs)

136. JO: What personal Sacrifices did you make to be an activist in the Anti-Apartheid movement?

137. BC: I'm not rich, i'm not wealthy, i'm not even well off, several, there's stuff that come along the way, when it came time for the elections, id been working at Northwestern for Twenty-five years, yea gotten my watch and all that kind of stuff. I was a manager of the

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139. graduate Faculty Housing, which was the only person managing a major housing thing, that wasn't a director, or the level of a dean. I had up to five weeks vacation coming. You never spend all your time... I talked to my wife and went with the idea this is something I wanted to do, I wanted to finally come to a real victory, and that people were asking for ten thousand international monitors, so the election would be free, and I wanted to do that so, our group became, one of the Midwest groups vetted to find volunteers we didn't want any crazy's going

“I’m goanna kill some voter!” I’d been involved with other election things. I got vetted to do it, I wanted to do it I raised money to do it, borrowed money from my credit union, and went to my church. I go to get, you needed seventeen days I remember, I went to get the seventeen days off, and of course I had struggles with Northwestern for a long time, they didn’t want to divest, and I was part of the staff and faculty that was always fighting them on that. By this time they had divested, kicking and screaming. So I go to the vice president of student affairs, and tell her whets going on. I tell her id like to have these seventeen days off, she tells me that, again my immediate boss was the director of the graduate housing it was a student that I had trained, this guy was taking care of the Chicago campus, this guy was a huge guy, had some health problems. And she said “ well George is sick, and is going to see the doctor, we want you to take over his operation, and we could not passably spare you for more than fourteen days” So she wasn’t saying no, but she wasn’t saying what I needed, and that’s the way they operate, is that your supposed to say no, and later on they say, well we gave him fourteen days, well I call up new York, Washington, this is my situation I’ve got to be back, the mourning the second of may, and they said you can write your report on the plane, on the plane coming back from Africa you save those thirty hours, instead of losing them, so I went in a couple days later and told her, I’m going to take the fourteen days, and she looked at me, that kind of look that, you know, you see that every once in a while in your life, you’ll see a look like somebody wants to kill you, and sometimes it cause of rage, sometimes it cause of arrogance, because your not supposed to do that from that day to the day that I finally left northwestern, she never said a word to me, I was led to understand, matter of fact, there was a black guy, university attorney, that we used to go to , when we were having discussions with the university, we would come into our meetings, everything that was said in the meetings he would translate to the upper administration.

140. The final minute of the interview was cut off. Basil talked about a African man who was on a stretcher, and for the first time in his life, was able to vote for the person he wanted, and when Basil asked him who he was go for going to vote for , the man smiled up at Basil and said “Mandela!”