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Interview with Jeremiah Wright

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Transcript of interview with Rev Dr Jeremiah Wright

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[Tape 1 of 3 begins.]

ARLEN PARSA: My name is Arlen Parsa, what is your full name?

JEREMIAH WRIGHT: Are we recording?

AP: Yes.

JW: Jeremiah Alvesta Wright, Junior is my full name.

AP: Perfect, good. And today is the 24th, today?

JW: Yes it is.

AP: Okay so March 24th, 2009. This interview is taking place at your office, so what were the approximate years of your anti-Apartheid activism?

JW: I would say the approximate years of my-- is your voice being picked up also? -- Would be 1973 up until the end of Apartheid.

AP: Okay. And what is the location of your activism?

JW: You mean here? The city of Chicago, primarily. Those years span my involvement and my participation in two other-- really three other-- national and international agencies that had feed into the movement. One is my participation with the Trans-Africa forum, Randall Robinson was the executive director, I was on the Board of Directors of Trans-Africa, and the other two related, were denominational-related. I was on the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ and served as the Vide President for the Commission for Racial Justice, and I was also the Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Office for Church and Society which is our denomination’s social justice ministry, social witness ministry, that monitors legislation and monitors activities of all of the governments, local municipal, state, national and internationally in terms of positions that the denomination has taken on issues such as apartheid, so my involvement was in those three levels and those three different ways.

AP: Okay, good, and we’ll obviously get into more detail. So starting off at the beginning, what was the year of your birth?

JW: 1941, September 22nd, 1941.
AP: And what was the place of your birth?


AP: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And were you raised there?

JW: Raised right there. My parents raised me, I would say, nine and a half to ten months of the year raised there. My parents were from Virginia, both of them were from Virginia, different parts of Virginia, and they met in college, but their families were still in Virginia, so every holiday, Christmas holiday or summer holidays, especially when my mother was in grad school, we would, my sisters the two of us, would be back in the country, which I hated, and for the summer times which was fun, and so between Philadelphia and Virginia, those two places were the two places where I was raised.

AP: Well you already got ahead of me, I was about to ask where was your father’s place of birth?

JW: Caroline County, Virginia, and my mother’s place of birth is Surry County, Virginia. Caroline is a place that most of your listeners to the oral history will have no clue about. It’s between Fredericksburg, Virginia, those are the two closest big cities, Fredericksburg and Richmond Virginia, it sits right between the two. Surrey County, my mother’s, is in the tidewater area; Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, is where Surrey County is.

AP: Okay. So what was your earliest memory, and about what year might it have been?

JW: Of what?

AP: Of anything.

JW: Oh, anything? Oh gosh. I remember when I still slept in the crib. My parents had two bedrooms at the time, my sister slept in one, she’s sixteen months older than I. I slept, my crib was in their bedroom, and I remember where I used to play a game where I would wait until I could hear them snoring, or thought they were asleep, and I would climb out of the crib, and get into their bed, that’s my earliest memory, of living in that house where we lived. I was young enough to be in the crib, but old enough to be able to climb out of the crib so I wasn’t like in danger of falling, I was old enough to negotiate that crib climb.

AP: How old might you have been?

JW: I would say, between two and a half and three. We moved from that home to our second home, the home in which all of our formative years were spent, when I was in kindergarten, or the year I started kindergarten, we moved into that second residence, Philadelphia.

AP: And what did your father do for a living?
JW: He pastored a church in Philadelphia, Germantown. Germantown Philadelphia is like Morgan Park in Chicago, a section of Philadelphia. He pastored for forty-two years before he retired.

AP: And how about your mother?

JW: She was an educator. Phenomenal, she had her PASTOR ROSS? at fifteen, had her first Master's at seventeen, her second Master's at nineteen, and her PhD from the University of Chicago. She did her first Master's at University of Chicago, second Master's at Pennsylvania. She taught in the public school system of Philadelphia until she became an Administrator. When she retired, she became the Vice President-- Principle, pardon me, of the Philadelphia High School for Girls in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

AP: Okay. Um, so what kind of child were you in elementary school?

JW: Ah, I was always a good student, I was an exceptional student. My parents, especially my dad, raised us in an atypical fashion. First of all, when I was very small when I went to school, there was no television in the house. I think I was somewhere around thirteen, twelve, when we got or first television. And when we got it, our father would only let us watch one hour of television. You could pick two thirty-minute shows or one hour show. But then you had to read. Now my sister, she’s a great student in terms of being diligent, and I used to say being a teacher’s pet because if the teacher said read to page fifty, she’d go seventy-five, eighty, ninety. I’d stop right at fifty. But I had to read some because my father would not let us just sit around. There was no television, and when we had it, we couldn’t have it on. We couldn’t have the radio on, we had to do reading. And I spent countless hours in his, in his, in his library. So that I was on the honor roll, all through elementary school, all through junior high, practically. When I was in Philly, we didn’t have middle schools, we had junior high schools. And then we got accepted into Central High School, which was an accelerated program, all male school for kids whose IQs and whose grade scores were a certain level. I got accepted into Central and I finished Central early. I had too many credits and I thought I was going-- back then we had half years, you had 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, I thought I was going into 12A, and when they handed me my report card at the end of the semester and they said 12B and I said there’s a mistake and they said no, you’re going to-- So I got put into a class to graduate ahead of my class, I didn’t know anybody in that-- I’d seen them around halls, seen them around school or seen them in the band or something like orchestra, but I didn’t know them. I didn’t hang with those guys, but I ended up graduating early so that ended up being a good year. I mean a good childhood in terms of school, in terms of fun, I had a singing group in high school, we played in the band, it was not only high school band, high school marching band, high school jazz band, played in the all Philadelphia senior orchestra, sang in the church choir, a lot of-- I played football but they teased me. I played football in the eleventh and twelfth grades and when I got to college I got into the college [level]. My mother said, when she came down, I think it was either Christmas or the end of the academic year, she, I introduced her to some of the guys who were standing in front
of the dormitory, one of whom was left tackle. Baby lam we called him, he’s about
three-ninety [laughter]. All muscle, and she said to me, I wonder why you didn’t play
football into college and I see why now. Those guys woulda killed you. But it was a
good school, I mean my school years were lots of fun.

AP: Who was your favorite teacher?

JW: I don’t know. I would say in elementary school, Mrs Kerr, K-E-R-R. I remember
her vividly. I don’t think I had one in high school who was a favorite. But Mrs Kerr
was in my elementary school years, was my favorite teacher.

AP: Why?

JW: She would, she would, well she was doing, she would push us. And she was the
only teacher who would respond to me sensitively. When I say respond to me
sensitively, I mean this. My father made us read. I was in his study as I said. Now my
father finished a junior union university. My father, I should say, I teased him,
"you’ve got more letters behind your name than in your name [laughter]-- you’ve
got a master of theology, master of arts and divinity, master of sacred theology." And
he studied African American history under Carter’s ??eulitza??, he studied Sterling
Brown, Arthur Davis, the guys, that put together ??Carmen?? and I’m just lost in his
library, reading and reading and reading and reading. And uh, when I got to those
years when you have to learn dates, 1776, 1812, the Tilden Hayes-- Tilden Hayes
Compromise, he said the best way to memorize those dates is, he took me to his
library, memorize every time you have to memorize a date in American history,
memorize a date in your own history. What was going on in Africa? What was going
on in the African Diaspora? In Cuba, in Panama, wherever Africans were taken.

Learn those years that way, so I’m learning stuff but now I go back to class and we
ain’t talkin about none of that, so I would ask teachers and I would get these funny
looks, except for Mrs Kerr. She would answer me and she would explain to me she
knew my parents, and so she said well you know when you for instance when you
go with your parents home, you know how things are in the South-- it was
segregated-- said yeah, she said that’s why that’s not in these books. The people who
write these books are just like the people who won’t let you in the washroom down
there or drinking from the water fountains down there. And, but she would talk to
me about what I had read, and she sometimes initiated the conversation. During
recess, she said what’d you read last name? What’d you learn last night? And she
would, and I found that fun to be able to talk to her and somebody who wanted to
know, and she would write down the names of the books and go get them herself.
And she said Imma give you a test, I said don’t do that! [laughter] But she was that
kind of engaging teacher who was interested to me, gosh, let’s see, sixth grade I
would be, what, thirteen, so that would be fifty one, fifty three... If she had a
prejudiced bone her her body, I didn’t know it. And that’s why she sticks out so
much in my mind.

AP: This is really interesting stuff. What kind of aspirations did you have in high
school?
JW: In high school, I wanted, well cause I said my father was um, my father was a trained clergy-person and because a trained clergy-person-- I should say something about my mom. My mom's family also trained. Grandpa, Grandma made all their kids get a minimum of two degrees. And they taught, now my grandfather, need to back up. My grandfather on my mother's side was kept on plantation until he was twenty. And at twenty years of age, he was let, allowed to leave the plantation with no education whatsoever. Not even grammar school. So at twenty he started grammar school. And he finished grammar school, he finished high school, he finished Virginia University, Virginia Union University is one of the historically black colleges that was set up by the missionaries right after slavery for the freedmen.

And then he finished Seminary in 1902. I mean, I have his diploma at home, 1902 he finished [his] master of divinity. But with all that education, he and my grandmother taught at a two-room school in Surrey County Virginia. Boys on one side, girls on one side. Cause they were determined to pour back into those country kids everything they had and been beneficiaries of. So it's that kind of context that produced my mom and her brothers and one sister. One of her brothers, PhD from University of Chicago, was the dean at Virginia University. And when I got there he, while he was there he became the president of Virginia Union. But that whole Virginia Union University family, when we go down to Virginia, exposed me to the fact that there's more to ministry than just a pastor. I found out in my high school years that there's eleven different-- we're talking about fourteen or fifteen now-- professions in ministry. I became fascinated, hanging out in dad's library, with theological education and biblical studies and hermeneutics. And my aspirations in high school were to become a seminary professor. I wanted, I wanted to graduate high school, go to college, and go to seminary and get PhD from divinity school so I could be a seminary professor so my aspirations were from ministry, now a lot of people thought, when you hear ministry, oh you mean a preacher. No, I do not mean a preacher. I mean there are all kinds of other things that ministers do who are professionally trained from ministry and I don't mean turn my collar on, go to the pulpit and preach fifty-two Sundays a year. No, that is not what I meant. And I wanted to, I wanted to be like these people that my dad was introducing me to, that my uncle was introducing me to at Virginia Union University, persons in the seminary. Dr ??Sammydoit Proctor?? who became my primary mentor in my college years as a freshman and ironically enough those in the Christian faith would say providentially enough, the man whom I wrote my doctorate, ??Sammydoit Proctor?? Sam was a member of the Bank Street Baptist Church in Norfolk Virginia. My uncle pastored that church. So I got to know Sam as a kid, and Sam had a PhD from Boston University. Sam was one of Martin Luther King's teachers, all right? So I knew a professor of theology who had finished ??crosure??, seminary, and finished Boston Theological Seminary, so that was like the model for me, that I wanted to, wanted to be, and that's what I was aspiring to be in my high school.

AP: Um, tell me, when did you first become aware of things like politics?

JW: On those trips south. My-- when our parents would I guess when it first really started sinking in, six, seven, eight years of age, uh, we had to pack a lunch every
time we were going to Richmond Virginia, to Surry County Virginia, my mother's
sister and one brother lived in Richmond Virginia, and two other brothers lived in
Norfolk Virginia, and of course I said daddy's family was in Caroline County Virginia.
We could never stay there because his father didn't have any facilities for us to stay.
It was a house-- one of those old shotgun houses with no bathroom, outhouse and
pumped for water. But we had to pack a lunch, and I never understood, we're
passing all these restaurants, why we'd pack a lunch in Philadelphia. Because of the
laws. The politics, the laws say once we got south of Washington, DC, south really of
the Mason-Dixon line. And I used to look for that when we'd go down the road. I'm
trying to find what does it look like? What does the Mason-Dixon line look like?
Because of the Mason-Dixon Agreement, that those cities and states south of the
Mason-Dixon line had laws, politics said blacks cannot use the same washroom,
blacks cannot sit in the same classroom, blacks cannot be in the same public
facilities. That's when I first became aware as a kid and my father used to keep
asking us, you gotta go to the bathroom? You gotta go to the bathroom? Cause once
we got to DC, if you had to go he would not pull into a gas station or a restaurant,
he'd pull over at the side of the road and go in the woods cause he refused to subject
us to segregated facilities like the segregated washrooms in the south. By the time I
got to college, I became acutely aware of my relation to the whole issue of politics,
went up by quantum leaps because the sit-ins broke out and I was in the sit-ins, so
politics in the college years became really ??seen-in-?? in terms of both the gospel of
Jesus Christ and the reality under which African Americans were forced to live,
when I was, what, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old, I was in college.

AP: Well we'll get to that sort of thing later on, but I just wanted to clarify, which sit-
ins are you talking about?

JW: College sit-ins. The sit-ins at Virginia Union-- I was a student at Virginia Union,
the sit-ins, the same, the Civil Rights Movement.

AP: Oh, okay.

JW: The sit-ins at Richmond were at Woolworth's, at ??tallheisermelrose??, the
stores that had segregated facilities, the department stores at Richmond Virginia
would not allow you to try on any clothes. You'd pick something and you'd take it
out of the store. First of all, there were no dressing room facilities for people of
color. The dressing rooms were for white people. So you had no way to try [it] on, to
see if it fit. Secondly, they wouldn't let you put on anything and have it not fit and
have to sell it to a white person.

AP: Ah, yeah.

JW: All the eating facilities in those stores of course were segregated: we could order
food but we could not stand and eat it there. We had to take it out. So we sat in in
those stores, and those facilities, um, tried to desegregate them.

AP: Okay, um, tell me about when and why did you originally join the military?
JW: I was a senior in college and um, as I said I was headed for the ministry, I was
headed for, thought I was gonna be going into the ministry to teach. The seminary.
Well, the path for teaching seminary is similar to, um, to let’s take medicine for
instance. If you want to teach cardiovascular dynamics. You teach cardiovascular
surgery. Or you’ll teach med-school. You just don’t go from college to a graduate
program, no, you gotta go to med-school to become a doctor and then continue
education to get certified to teach med-school. Same thing in the ministry. You don’t
just come out of college, high school, anywhere and say seminary. You have to go
through that level so you know what you’re talking about when you’re talking to and
teaching seminarians. As a senior I could not in good conscience go to seminary. The
next year. Because at that point, I had seen the underside of the beast and belly, in
fact my father told me in his dying years I was trying to figure out why the vast
difference between my sister and myself. And he said, cause we had been like twins,
man, I mean sixteen months apart, we slept in the same bedroom until I was like
third or fourth grade and then we had adjoining rooms with a door that rarely
closed, she rarely closed it unless she was mad at me, the night I left for college that
door was open and we was halfway through the night we was talking to each other,
and all of a sudden there were two different worlds. And I didn’t understand, I asked
my dad as he was dying, he said to me, stop and go back to fifty-nine, January. You
left here and you went to the south. And you were in the sit-ins. And from the sit-ins,
what you saw about race relations in this country, to the military, where it got worse
in terms of what you saw. Your sister’s been in a white world all her life, she left
here cause like at my school, high school, Central High School, we had 2200
students, 2,000 of them Jews. 200 of us gentiles, and of the 200 gentiles, sixty of us
black. So I grew up in a world, but Laverne, my sister, finished high school and went
to University of Pennsylvania, went through University of Pennsylvania, Rochester,
Rochester to the ??soball??, he said she didn’t see what you saw, she didn’t live that
experience, that’s why you’re different and you lived different experiences. And my,
now to the sit-ins, I’m seeing Christians, white Christians and black Christians, we
can sit down together and talk about different issues and dialog intellectually and
calmly in this setting in the campus, but downtown when we’re trying to sit down at
Woolworth’s, I’m seeing these same Christians, calling me "nigger." And calling
women names and dragging them across, and I said, this is Christianity? In the
south, yeah. In the south it was. I don’t know if I can do this seminary thing if this is
what Christianity is, okay? Add to that, the foundational learnings of my dad’s
library, compounded by the learnings in college where I’m learning about the
Christian role in the slave trade, churches in the slave castles, where you ask for
god’s blessings as you carry Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, raping the women?
This is Christianity? I added to that the black side of the ledger. What are we
protesting back in the Civil Rights Movement? September through May. I go home in
June, we’re trying to organize the people in Philadelphia. Woolworth’s is a national
chain. Woolworth’s is segregating in Richmond. Therefore, we’re not, we just don’t
want Woolworth’s to suffer in Richmond in terms of revenue, we, Woolworth’s need
to know this is a national-- So I’m up in Philadelphia trying to boycott and get other
people to boycott Woolworth’s, and I’m seeing black Christians walk right across the
picket line and go into Woolworth’s. "That’s a southern problem, that’s not our
problem." And members of my dad’s church said this to me. So this is it? This is as far as Christianity reaches? Up to the the Mason-Dixon line? The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was the SOUTHERN Christian Leadership Conference. They didn’t go north. And, I don’t know if you’ve read this in your studies yet, but the majority of black clergy in my senior year of college, did not like [Rev Dr Martin Luther] King, did not support King. You know these things take time. But he’s an agitator. And I’m saying, if this is what Christianity is about, I cannot in good conscience go to to seminary and play this game. I’m having some problems, having some serious problems. My best friend, a guy I grew up with and we were close from the fourth grade, literally on my twenty first birthday, he was the first person to graduate from high school. I was very proud of him, twenty years old, it took him that long but he finished. He went straight from a high school ceremony into the Marines Corps. And he and I stayed in close contact with each other. So I admired, he was one of my models, in fact my senior year, I drove, I drove from Virginia Union University down to Cherrypoint North Carolina University to talk with him about the stuff I’m struggling with, and I saw all the Marines and I said I like this, I said this is a good excuse not to go to seminary. And I joined the Marines Corps. It got me out of being forced to try to explain to my family, my father, mother and others, why aren’t you going to seminary? I’m in the Marines Corps. I don’t have to, that’s not up for discussion. So that’s why, that’s why my ??decrees de conscience?? in terms of the race problem and your preparation to teach in ministry. Mmmm. Not, I’m not ready for this. So I’m going to go into the military. While a senior, on the Dean’s List, on the Honor Roll, President of the Choir, President of the Fraternity. Everyone thought I’d lost my mind, and I had. [laughter] I quit school and went into the service. That’s why.

AP: Yeah, okay. How long and where did you serve?

JW: I served for six years total. I was at, I went to Paris Island when I left Richmond Virginia, went to Paris Island, went to go to boot camp from Paris Island to Camp Geiger, military training, combat training, scuse me. And Camp Geiger is sort of a subset of Camp Lejunne. From here [in Wright’s office on Chicago’s 95th street] to the loop [downtown Chicago]. That close. I went to Camp Lejunne and served at Camp Lejunne until I got an interservice transfer in ’63. I left in ’61. In ’63 I got an interservice transfer, transfer service is a transfer. The Marines Corps is a part of the Navy, most people don’t make that connection as the Marinnnnes. You know? Water! We used to call them the taxi-cab service. But Marines Corps only was a four star general, commandant, who was under the Navy, the Marines Corps is a part of the Navy, so every Marine is eligible to attend any Navy school, and I applied for the cardio-pulmonary tech welding school. And that was just, I got transferred from the Marines Corps into the Navy, had to come to Great Lakes to do the training. Training of Coreman first, ?? School and from there to Cardiopulmonary school which was at the National Labor Medical School Bethesda, well that school took 52 weeks alone. By this time, two years in the Marines Corps, cardiopulmonary training, sixteen weeks Corps school, a whole year ca-- I’ve got less than a year to do of a four year hitch. The military said no no no, it doesn’t work like that. You owe us six years,
you've got to extend your term, we didn't send you to school for fifty-two weeks and
have you get out the next year. So I had to end up serving six years, the last four
months at almost four, National Labor Medical Center Bethesda. When I graduated
from cardiopulmonary technology school, I taught in that class and got retained
there as a teacher, as an instructor in the cardiopulmonary school itself. And that's
where I was when I, when I met Bill Moyers and didn't know who Bill Moyers was.
That's where I was when I monitored both of [President Johnson's] surgeries as a
cardiopulmonary technician at the National Labor Medical Hospital Bethesda, so a
total of six years.

AP: What was your reaction when Johnson ordered troops into Vietnam?

JW: Um, not good. I had been, I had been before Johnson, before Kennedy was killed,
I had been stationed at Camp Lejunne during the Cuban [missile] crisis. And during
the Cuban crisis was when my eyes got opened in terms of your term, politics in the
military, and was some very frightening kinds of information that was eye-opening
and life-changing. For instance, when the Cuban crisis started and we put ships to
blockade Cuba, our barracks was right next to the guys, in fact some guys in our
barracks worked in G2 Intelligence. And they started telling us the 'real deal.' You
know it will take, intel shows it will take two and a half, maybe three divisions to
take and hold Cuba. That's how strongly fortified the island is now, since the
blockade. We had a part of the second Marines Division down there. You know what
that means? That means if anything jumps off, you are a statistic that gives the
United States permission to go in and wipe out Castro and you're automatically
dead, all right? I remember reading stuff in history classes back in Virginia Union, I
started talking to the guys in intel, to see if there was any military proof to it, and
found out stuff that was like common knowledge now but it doesn't matter, it's all
over. United States up to the executive office, knew the Japanese were going to
bomb Pearl Harbor, that's why the fleet was sent away, so we'd have an excuse to
get in that war. We couldn't' just jump in the war without seeming like an aggressor.

But it's like I'm gonna turn [my back], you slap me, and I'm gonna come back with
full force. I said you mean to tell me they knew those Japanese planes were coming
and we were gonna lose [people]? They said, yeah, you know, you lose some for a
greater good. And I'm figuring this out, you mean to tell me they gave somebody's
life up so we could get in a war? Yeah. And that's what's about to happen in
Guantanamo Bay [Cuba]. All right. So when Vietnam jumps off, um, it's like more of
the same. We're not in this war for any democratic purposes, we're not in this war for
anything noble. And not only the guys in G2 were talking to, I'm moving up to
Bethesda now, I'm in the naval hospital, I'm talking with guys whose lives are
mangled forever, and whose stories make this movie Apocalypse Now and
Apocalypse Now 2 version extended seem like a cake walk. To find out what our
military was doing, there was something in Time Magazine, national exposure about
My Lai. My Lai wasn't anything. We did stuff so much worse than My Lai. We-- the
United States Military-- that it would literally, well it literally turned my stomach. I
couldn't eat for, guys coming home with penises, and ears cut off, necklaces, stuffing
their pockets, souvenirs, key chains. That kind of reality of what was going on in
Vietnam because it was a war that we knew we couldn't win. Regardless of what, what we, and when I say 'we' I mean the military, regardless of what, who was that? The Marines used to laugh and joke about one of our generals was named Chesty Puller. Chesty Puller in the battle of Min Chon Harbor during the Korean war, they brought in the bad news, they said, Sir we are surrounded by four divisions of Korean troops and Chester said "Good, they can't outrun us now." [laughter] You know, it's that kind of, you can't win this thing, Ho Chi Minh had said, and my whole time in the military, I kept reading the same kind of regimen my daddy has taught me, when we were kids and I was reading two or three books a week for six years. And Ho Chi Minh had said you don't have the troops to win a battle against me. We got more troops than you've got citizens of the whole United States. So, if we start something, in Lebanon, it wasn't Lebanon, it was something else. Oh, Cambodia, North Vietnam, North Korea, when you send some troops in and we start something over here, and we can send troops, keep sending troops down Ho Chi Minh trail till you're out of bullets. You can't win this one. Intel was saying the same thing. Now Ho Chi Minh is trying to, what do you call it, propaganda, trying to get-- these guys are guys who'd been there, and they'd tell us stories, true stories, that were frightening. They'd say, "man, you know what happens at night? Out in the dark, the cong, Vietcong, talked to us. Now you were in the same digs with a white, Hispanic brother, you're three and a half, four feet apart, [they'd whisper] hey, hey black G.I., why you over here? Why you over here fighting for the white man? You know you can't ???? to him when you get back to the states. I'm going to write your obituary for your tombstone, I'll leave it here, you'll see it in the morning, it says, here lies a black man, killed by a yellow man, fighting for the white man, who stole that country from the red man." You know, that's the kind of, you've got psychological warfare going on, and the guys are saying, but the reality is, we can't win. And they know we can't win and they just keep sending more troops. And the guys, all you're doing is counting time. And you got fourteen months. Thirteen months, twenty-nine days. [laughter] Twenty-seven days. Thomas get killed. Vietnam, for the enlisted persons, and for some officers, was not a good time and Johnson sending troops and more troops or Nixon's Cambodia bombing, it was like why are we doing this? Why are we doing this? It has nothing to do with democracy. It has nothing to do with democracy as we knew it or as we were then to embrace, these fights are about business and about people getting rich, not us. Why are we here? So it was not, not so, it was not good. It was not good.

AP: Tell me, who was the first person you remember voting for.

JW: Voting for, I guess it would be Kennedy. Let me think, Yeah he was '60, 1960. Yeah, cause four years from that would b '56, and I was fifteen. John F. Kennedy.

AP: Okay. Tell me, how, how do you think your parents influenced you when you started getting active in the Civil Rights Movement or other movements like that?

JW: Well, they supported me and they tried to make me understand why many of their [church] members in Philadelphia and colleagues were lukewarm/neutral. Almost like my dad said, they had not lived in the segregated south, that was not an
issue for them, it was something they saw on television. They supported me, my
mother’s brother carried the sit-ins in the Civil Rights Movement a little further into
the political realm, the Voting Rights Act [of 1964] had not been passed of course,
the laws in the state of Virginia that prohibited black people from voting, and the
barriers that were put up-- poll tax, grandfather clauses, and all those things, he
challenged those things and in fact he ran for the city council in Richmond and had
us as students, not legally of course because he couldn’t do that but still he was the
president of the school. We were out at the polls, watching the polls, watching the
blatant discrimination tactics used by official persons of the Republican and
Democratic parties to keep blacks from voting and to steal elections, so my mother,
so they talked about it all the time, as siblings. And they knew what their parents
had been up against, what those who stayed in the south, what their families were
up against, working with her brother and the student movement, so they were very
supportive.

AP: Okay. Tell me, um, what year did you come to Chicago, and why?

JW: I came to Chicago [laughter] in 1969. Ah, and I came to Chicago to enter the
divinity school of the University of Chicago. That’s why.

AP: Okay, so now we’re getting into sort of the heart of the matter. Tell me about the
first time you had heard about Apartheid in South Africa.

JW: Ahm. I had read about it in the ’60s, I had read about it in the military, I’d read
about it at Howard University. When I got out of the service, I transferred to Howard
University. I started initially as I said at Virginia Union, I was at Howard. But it really
hit home I would say, ’72, ’73, when I was teaching seminary, one of my students
was a man named Bongo N’allaguba. He is now Doctor Bongo N’allaguba, was South
African. And he and I started having conversations beyond the classroom, in terms
of what life was really like for him and what living under Apartheid was like for him.
He introduced me to another South African, Tonda L’obo. She was a seminary at
Chicago Theological Seminary. She joined our church, Bongo and them joined. I used
to tease him, Tonda joined the church and Tonda was the first minister ordained by
the church. Tonda and Bongo introduced me to ??Setolay??, who’s a South African
anthromusicologist. Setolay and-- all three of them had grown up in ??kwantazoule
netal??, And almost in the curial kind of fashion exploded my knowledge about what
was really going on in South Africa as opposed to what I had read about it in news
media here occurred. I was introduced to Dennis ??Buddis??, Dennis Buddis was a
poet in exile in, I want to say, Northwestern University. I loved the music of Miriam
Mikiba, had no clue about the political issues behind her music, I just liked to listen
to her sing. And ??Huma Secela??, I didn’t realize what was going on, I never could
connect any dots until my conversations, long conversations, with the Setola family.
He has a PhD in ethnomusicology from Rockford. Tonda, Bongo, film clips that they
brought us, us meaning the church, they brought us film clips, from the Sharpsville
massacre, film clips from Soweto, explained to us what Bantu education was about,
what Hector Peterson was fighting with the students about, how the students led
the way that many of their parents became a part of that movement. Now, while I’m
learning this from Tonda, while I'm learning this from Bongo and ??Alkin??, Randall asked me to come aboard TransAfrica, is also the same years that I cherished celebrating the ??Mujacaranhu?? every thanksgiving, which is a feast of unity, showing our oneness as an African people living in Diaspora, not only what was going on in West Africa, and tracing that journey through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but showing how South Africa was going with Apartheid, was very much a part of our problem as Africans living in the Western Diaspora. Remember too, in '75 now, I'm with the Commission for Racial Justice the denomination has taken a very strong stand against Apartheid, including the divestment fight that we had in this, in this state, and my involvement in the divestment effort, it was then that Alan ??Busack?? and Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela became names that meant something. It was then that Steve Biko's black consciousness movement was read as common. Because that's the media would say, or Cheney who called, Dick Cheney called Nelson a communist and voted against his being released from Robin Island. It was then I began to say wait a minute, what I'm hearing in the United States press and what I'm seeing and learning from my South African friends and in South African publications are different worlds altogether. That's when my immersion in the whole TransAfrica divestment anti-Apartheid movement really [began].

AP: So, what was, I wonder just thinking back, what was maybe the first thing that you did that was sort of a concrete thing to oppose Apartheid?

JW: Ah, I had our church buy one of the TransAfrica signs, "Free South Africa," and then I got active in the movement to try to get churches of every denomination of every race and synagogues, and mosques to buy a sign. A little simple act of buying a sign and putting it in front of your house of worship, to show that the whole Free South Africa movement, the whole Apartheid movement was number one that our faith speaks to as Christians, as Muslims, as Jews, and that we are a people who are connected to what is going on in Johannesburg, what is going on in Soweto, what is going on in Guguleto, what is going on in Kailiche, what is going on in Durban, in Capetown. And, I found out again, almost like the Civil Rights Movement, and the lack of support from black and white churches for Dr King, prior to his death, became a saint in their imaginations. Most churches would not buy a Free South Africa sign. "That had nothing to do with us. We live in Chicago." [laughter] It's like, I can't believe I'm hearing this. Well of course now my denomination, the United Church of Christ, is a predominately white denomination. And it has a long history of involvement in Africa, and in South Africa, most of the historic black denominations did not and do not, so it was talking two different languages. Our denomination started for instance a school in Kwazulu Netal Province, Inanda, I-N-A-N-D-A, it's a seminary high school. Tonda had finished that school. We started-- we, United Church of Christ, had started that school in the 1800s, or the 1830s. Tonda had graduated from that school, the first African winner of the Nobel Peace Prize was chief envoy ??Letuley??.. He was a deacon at the Groutville Congregational Church at United Church of Christ. He's buried today right in the back of the church, in that church's today seminary. Well, reading about Letuley, I could see, oh my god, they don't tell us anything over here. They just say he's communist. Communist? The
man’s a deacon in the UCC church! He’s the president! The head of the ANC. They
didn’t tell me this. And so learning concretely once, once you put a sign in front of
the church, conversations start. "Why do you have this?" The opportunity to educate
and raise the consciousness of more and more people about what’s really going on
as opposed to what CNN, MSNBC, NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox News is saying on the
television about what’s going on, so that kind of, that first concrete act was the sign.
I would say close on the heels of that, and this might lead to further questions of
yours, the divestment. I became actively involved in divestment.

AP: Go ahead and tell me about that because you’re going to cover a lot of ground
here.

JW: On a personal level, my decision that my wife and I made about diamonds, the
divestment issue, when TransAfrica started publishing information as did the
United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, and the United Church of
Christ Office for Church and Society, and the United Church of Christ Board for
Global Ministries-- they work in South Africa-- how decisions we make as American
citizens, in terms of buying diamonds, in terms of buying gold, are directly
connected to Apartheid and to the miners of South Africa. How decisions we make
about where we put our money in banks that invest in the ??Krugurand??, and banks
that invest in the African diamonds and banks that invest in keeping the machinery
of Apartheid going, it’s like, oh my god, we’re almost back to the sit-ins. Well the sit-
ins were not just to demonstrate to the media and to the public the injustices. No,
it’s to cripple financially these businesses, that are profiting using segregation as a
part of their modus operandi. Well, the only way you gone cripple and get the
attention of the Africaaner government, the Dutch Africaan’s church, the apparatus
that keeps Apartheid in place and supported by our government and our military
and our diplomats and so forth and so on is to hurt them financially. So the
divestment movement took off. It’s like, all right, we’re gonna, we’re going to first
start as a denomination that was actively involved in that. And in our denomination,
we passed resolutions that said one of our agencies, the Commission for Racial
Justice, the pension boards, said "Why is your pension money in this?" Board for
Global Ministries [said], "Where are you banking?" What do you mean, an American
bank in South Africa? The president’s office, that we then say to all the
instrumentalities of the church, we’re not doing business with any business that
does business with South Africa. And we’re not banking in any bank that does
business with South Africa, to hurt them financially. We’re starting at home. So I’m
going around with other representatives of the denomination making sure that we
passed this resolution, how are you responding, what are you doing, what concrete
steps are you taking? Two years after we passed, no, the year not two years, the year
after the denomination passed its resolutions concerning divestment, I was involved
in questioning all of the instrumentalities: where are you in the process? And we
had a public reporting-- just don’t tell me-- and when the Black Caucus met, all of the
instrumentalities, heads spoke about where they were in the process of full
divestment, a year later. Some were in the process because of T-Notes and T-Bills
and CDs and rolling over, as soon as they were rolling over they would pull the
money out. One of our agencies, the pension boards, is where the battle lines got
drawn and I got heavily involved with that, personally. They said to us, in that
meeting, "we are not divested, we're not going to. It's not about race." I said, what?
"We're a fiduciary responsibility, as trustees of your pension moneys, wherever we
can get the best [return on our investment]. Whether that's ??krugerman?? the
South African, we're gonna get the best return." I couldn't believe my ears. I couldn't
believe my eyes. They stood and I began a campaign waging war against the pension
boards, I'm invested in their pensions. And trying to find out what other pension
boards have adopted this philosophy? Cycles of Christ hadn't. United Methodists.
Why are we? Well we have autonomy in our denomination and nobody can tell them
what to do. And they refused, and we battled until Apartheid ended, they just
refused. Locally our denomination divided up into such ??conmetropol association??
Illinois. Well where is that money being banked? Banking as a denomination at
Continental-- that's why I laughed when I said the things I learned in the divestment
movement, I got involved in the divestment movement. I've got my share of ????.
The President of the Continental Bank. We showed him the resolution that had been
passed by the general senate, as we showed him the resolution that had been signed
by the Illinois Congress of the United Church of Christ, and we're here and we're
asking that you divest all of your holdings from South African banks and South
African businesses, and from businesses that do business with South Africa. Or
we're going to take our money out of your bank. [Laughter] He opened up his
checkbook and said "What's your account number?" [Laughter] And [he] wrote a
check and told us to get out of there. They weren't about to-- I could not, that kind
of, I don't care how many people are suffering or dying under this reality. This is
business. Making money's all we care about. That mentality was, was, a frightening
eye-opener for me. And I kept running into it in the divestment movement, and, and
in the personal decisions, I moved to the personal decision movement. Little of the,
my personal investment in the anti-Apartheid. Just like we had to ask in the
Congregation, what are we doing? What are our agencies doing? Decisions that I'm
making that are affecting? Now remember I've got Tonda, Bongo, Alkin, sharing with
me. What decisions am I making? Well, you want to buy your wife a diamond ring?
Where's that diamond come from? People getting married and you're gonna buy an
engagement ring? Where are the diamonds coming from? Sorta like that movie, you
trace it and it goes to South Africa. But then you make the decision to forego a
diamond, to forego a gold chain, all this bling bling you see these guys, the hip hop.
Where is your money going, that's making you look like this? Well, in tracing the
dollars, in tracing the companies, in tracing the jewels, and the jewelry companies,
we saw just how deep and entangled that web was, straight to South African mines
and South African diamonds. My wife and I made the decision not to buy any
diamonds, and any stones, precious stones, until Apartheid was over. Not just until
Mandela was free, but until Apartheid was over. And trying to get my encouraging
other people to make that kind of decision has been as difficult, was as difficult as
me trying to get people to realize, when you realize when you shop at Wal-Mart,
what you're doing? "But they've got good prices!" [Laughter] God, disconnected. So
it was, uh, an involvement at the TransAfrica level, an involvement in the Free South
Africa sign, it evolved into conversations and panel discussions and speeches and it
evolved into the divestment movement both at the national level, denominationally, local levels with Continental Bank, and the personal decision level in terms of the decisions that I made and my family made and tried to get other clergy and other members of the Congregation to make. People who knew Tonda at our church, and Alkin, they could put a face on it. It was not hard for them to make a decision. You go on to another church where there is no Tonda, there is no Alkin, there is no history, you say Sharpsville [massacre], they don’t, they say who’s he? Soweto, what’s that? Well, it’s an uphill battle later trying to get those decisions made, my personal involvement.

AP: Hold on a second, I’ve got to switch tapes really fast.

JW: Okay.

[Tape 1 of 3 ends, tape 2 begins.]

AP: You know, we can start again. So um, we’re talking a little bit about uh, religion and how religion factors into all this and how you were able to sort of mobilize folks using religion, right? So, um, tell me now, I’m kind of curious, how did you respond, because you’re using religion to galvanize, uh, opposition to apartheid, how did you personally react and respond to attempts by you know the South African National Party to use religion to justify Apartheid?

JW: Ah, the same way -- That was not a new fight for me, what they -- and you know they’ve repented, you know the Dutch Reform church has publically apologized, repenting for that theology, but that’s getting way ahead of the story. That theology of white supremacy was nothing new for me. Go back to my daddy’s study, go back to my study and having to read as a teenager and my choosing to read and study his books, that same kind of quote, religious, quote argument had been used by pro-slavery personnel in the United States of America. So I was very familiar with that line of argument. One fascinating book that I read as a, as a teenager, in my dad’s study, was a book called Slavery Defended. Very similar to the defense of the Dutch Reform Church, the Afrikaner’s church, the Nationalist Party, to support God’s having ordained that these people be in slavery, or be in Apartheid, and Apartheid is permanent, forever separated and segregated as according to God’s law. Slavery defended was a fascinating-- is a fascinating book. It not only lifts up the traditional arguments of the curse of Ham, it, but it also has essays and chapters by different scholars one of whom was a PhD from Yale-- Yale-- who said "well we all know that the problem, this problem started in the Book of Genesis, and it started with Eve’s being tempted. Now the scripture says it was a snake, but everybody knows snakes don’t talk. So what the snake represents is the Negro gardener who seduced Eve."

Now, this is in the 1800s, this is a man from Yale, the divinity school. And with that kind of thinking, it’s like oh my God, you’re talking about deeply entrenched racism, based on scholarship that’s mixed in with biblical literalism that has this taking a sacred myth, a sacred myth of a people and making it factual history? And changing it from a snake who symbolizes the Negro gardener-- I was used to those kind of arguments. I was used to the arguments about white supremacy and the curse of
Ham. The curse of Ham was one of the famous arguments used by Christians in this
country, also used by Christians in South Africa, to support white supremacy in that
Noah cursed Ham, saying that his generation will forever be servants to his
brothers. Which is hilarious, hilarious for several reasons. One of which is, Arlen,
how many siblings do you have?

AP: None.

JW: Only child? [Interviewer nods] Well, we [my wife and I] have five children, all
right? And let’s take my first three. If one had come out white, one black and one
yellow, my wife and I would have to have a serious discussion about who she’d been
with. All of Noah’s kids were the same race. That story is not talking about historical
black, yellow and red, it’s symbolic. Noah had three kids, all of whom looked alike,
all right? Now, to take that story, which is symbolic, and make that factual history, is
hilarious. I mean, it’s absurd. It’s egregious, using it to oppress one race of people by
saying that this man’s cursed, or actually not even on Ham-- it’s Ham, when Noah
woke up drunk from his sleep in the Book of Genesis, when he passed out drunk I
should say first, Ham, one of the three sons of Noah, was on the Ark of Noah in the
biblical story, came in, Noah pulled off all his clothes, butt naked, so Ham covered
him[self] up. The mistake he made, he did not go back up to his dad and drape him
right there, he walked up looking at him, which is a big sin for the people in that
culture, to see the nakedness of your father. And because he saw his father’s
nakedness, his father cursed his son, not Ham, he cursed his grandson, Canaan, and
said cursed are you, Canaan, from this point on. Your people shall be ??_______??"

Well that became known as the ham doctrine, among Christians, first among Jew,
well, the Israelites before the kingdom split and you’ve got Juda and Judaism, and
then later on among Christians, to justify the oppression of first the Canaanites--
"cursed are you Canaan"-- and then their descendants, people of color. One of the
arguments used religiously was that before the Noahic, which means Noah’s curse,
there was a curse on Cane, that God put a curse on Cane, way back in Genesis III, he
was marked, and the mark he put on him, the racists say, was the color of black skin.
In the Babylonian Talmud, I mean these are old arguments, in the Babylonian
Talmud, the Jewish scriptures say that because Ham looked on his father’s
nakedness, God punished him by elongating his penis; they had penises like horses.
That kind of religious undergirding for racism is not unique to the Jewish faith or the
Christian faith, it’s in the Koran; the Koran says it’s all right to enslave people as long
as they’re black. So, the Dutch Afrikaner’s church was nothing new to me. That
argument, used by the Christian church trying to justify Apartheid, was one with
which I was familiar since high school days. So that’s, when I ran into it in terms of
listening to and reading to what the Afrikaners were saying, I said, oh well you
know, this is an old civil war maneuver. It’s the same thing that was used in the
United States, and in the west, or trans-Atlantic slave trade.

AP: Okay. So tell me, you plant this sign on the, on the front lawn of your church,
right?

JW: Mmmhmmm.
AP: And how did your congregation react to your anti-Apartheid activism when it first began?

JR: They were very active, very active. Now remember, Tanda was a member here. Tanda was ordained in this church. She was the first minister ordained. So they knew Tanda, they knew the South African story, they knew Sharpsville massacre, they knew Soweto, they knew the townships, so they were very much in support of it because that was supporting one of our members. They also knew the connection between Tanda and Nqobile seminary, and its work in South Africa. So when you talk about the seminaries, you’re talking about Durban, Kwazulu Natal, you’re talking about our Netuhley, you’re talking about our church. So our members were very behind it, and very supportive because of the connection of like I said earlier, they could put a face on it. They knew Tanda, they knew Bongo. And Bongo at her ordination, Bongo gave her her church, Dr Bongo Nwalegobu, well call it Bongo. Gave her her charge in Zulu. I mean the members were like in awe. To see two South Africans in our congregation, in our sanctuary, speaking in Zulu, they were very much in support of it.

AP: Okay. And when you were sort of first getting active in the Anti-Apartheid movement, how long did you think Apartheid would last for?

JW: Ahhm. At first I thought it was [pause] going to last for a long, long time. When the divestment movement started, I had a flashback to the sit-ins, and said that its’ not until we hit the pocketbooks of the merchants, was there any hope of this, to change the policy. And if this divestment movement works, it’s gonna end a lot faster than people think. Ideology aside, theology aside, racial hatred aside, when you start hitting businessmen’s pocketbooks, this is, this is not gonna last very long. So I thought, this is it, it’s gonna be-- I will live to see a change. At first I didn’t think I would live to see a change, and you had the military, you had four million whites controlling the lives of twenty-two million blacks, you had, they had the military, they had all the strength and power to back up that doctrine that had become concretized in 1948, with the official Apartheid. But when divestment started, I said whoa, crack in the dike. I said, if this can succeed, if we can get more and more people aware of what banks are doing business with South Africa, when you start hurting a banker, a banker will make a racist come to the table and talk about changing the policies [chuckle]. So at first I thought it was gonna be forever, or not in my lifetime, but once divestment became a strategy, I said to myself, and to those who were really trying to get to join us in the divestment movement, that this will really bring haste and a quickened end to Apartheid.

AP: Um, tell me, was there a particular liberation movement that you supported in South Africa at this time?

JW: Both of them. Actually, supported and raised money, we raised money for the ANC and for the PAC. Cause again, because we didn’t fall for the media’s explanation of these groups, and we had South African members, and then more South African members started joining because of the South Africans belonged here. And they
explained to us, from the inside, what the ANC was and all of its broad spectrum of work, the spear [a reference to the militant wing of the ANC, the MK] was one aspect of the ANC, and in its charter, it was designed to attack and destroy property, not people. Not, not what the media was saying. The witnesses, the people from the inside, the ??kotuwasuazey??, the MK people, and there wasn’t that much difference between them and the PAC. And we were being told how the PAC formed and how the political differences between, and ideological differences between the young turks and the old school, they thought "he’s getting old and he’s gonna sell us out" and people go into exile, and one would come back and coalitions would, ??Zapu, Zanu??, all of that, when we looked at and listened and we invited representatives of the PAC to speak here, and we listened to them. Now based on what they were saying and what our [South African church] members were saying, you know, we’ll leave it up to God, we hope they’re telling the truth, but our giving is in good intentions, in terms of, they’re talking about money for orphanages and money for kids and money for orphans and widows, so our money was for that, we’re not sending military materiel kind of stuff, our money was for ANC and PAC, for those two we supported financially, as well as—I would say ideologically, in terms of what we were told by them, so we supported those to primarily South African.

AP: Mmhmmmm. Tell me, did you ever wish that you were ever actually in South Africa, struggling against it rather than in the United States?

JW: Ahhmm. Sometimes, sometimes. And I say sometimes for this reason: In addition to people like ??Elkin??, ??Dennis Brutus??, Tanda, Gobu, reading Steve Biko’s stuff, and reading South African authors, and reading them like you said, the oral histories in context, reading them not as an isolated incident, but reading them in context of the race problem over the past 500 years, it was very, very eye-opening for me. ??Bosak?? spoke at our church. Jacob Kuruthers, has one book entitled, The Irritated Genie. And in his book The Irritated Genie, he talks about the revolution in Haiti in the 1800s. A subtext, a sort of text behind the text narrative was very important that it pertained to me personally has to do with what the French and the Spanish did in creating, intentionally, the creoles in Haiti. The Europeans were outnumbered, 50 to 1. If those blacks ever rose up, they were in deep doo doo. So the French slave holders and the Spanish slave holders took black women as their concubines and had kids with them and created a caste class between them who were neither African, nor European, British or, pardon me, not British, Spanish or French, but Creole. Light-skinned. ??Tooselagubucho?? was a light-skinned Creole. And the Haitians really did not look at him as a hero. He was a Francophile. In fact, he was tricked by the French, to come back for, he died in prison in France. See because if the blacks tried to take over that middle layer would keep them, in fact first they would run and report to them quick what they were getting ready to do. Same thing was going on in South Africa. Same thing was going on in South Africa. What is colored? That’s the race between the terms we use, blacks, and the whites. The coloreds, and I would be identified as a colored, and not embraced like I was by Tanda and Elkin and Bongo, who knew me, I’d be identified as the enemy, that’s why I said sometimes. If they saw me just on sight, unless I had a chance to talk, as I ????
moments in my 36 year of ministry. I gave him the mic and Jeffery, ??Rabin??, my

governor's of the eight different regions, and the eight governors came to the States.
And they came to worship at our church. And one of our South African members,
??Fumeksalave?? who's a good friend of Lisa Brock's at Columbia, Funeka, who put
together the Miriam Mekeba celebration at Columbia-- Funeka, sent me a note in the
pulpit, letting me know that the governors were in worship and gave me their
names. Now, Funeka and I have, she’s amazed and proud of me whenever I have--
cause I can say most of their names [chuckle], I just can't say-- the clicks, with all of
the different click sounds. But I have been saying in Tanda's name in ??____[says the
name in clicks]____?? since '75. And so, I read these names off, ticked 'em off of the
different visiting dignitaries, and Funeka was clapping cause I pronounced 'em all
correctly. And they stood up in our congregation and applauded and we had also of
course, the Robben Island Singers, to come to the church. Before, as they sat down,
something said to me, and of course ???? the spirit said to me, ask 'em if any of them
wants to say anything, they've come all this way. I turned back and I said "Would
any of you like to say a word?" And one of the governors stood up and said, "I would
like to speak." I took that guy the mic, man, and it was one of the most moving
moments in my 36 year of ministry. I gave him the mic and Jeffery, ??Rabin??, my
musician, started playing off behind him, [sings in Zulu], and he said, while Jeffery was playing, "I was a prisoner on Robben Island for 20 years. For 15 years my cell was next to Nelson Mandela's. While I was on the Robben Island, we did not know if we would ever get off the island. We did not know if we would ever see our families again, except through prison bars as they visited us. We did not know, as we watched our comrades die, or be killed mysteriously, whether any of us would ever make it." He said, "But we heard of this church in Chicago, that had a Free South Africa sign on its front lawn, we heard that there were warriors on this side of the Atlantic fighting on this side of the Atlantic, that if any of us ever got out and ever got to the United States, we would come to this church, and we would thank you on behalf of those who died on Robbin Island. So, on behalf of-- he started calling off the names of the guys that had died, one by one, Thank you, and on behalf of-- and Jeffery's playin'. Mannn, and I said this makes it all worth it, it makes it all worth it.

We had members who were there for the elections, um, I wasn't there for the elections, but that, that presence in our sanctuary, thanking us for the guys who died on Robbin Island was really like oh, this makes it worth it, this will never make newspapers, it will never make the headlines, it's not as important as, as a visit from [Desmond] Tutu, or Nelson [Mandela], being freed, or ??Megys?? succeeding, or Jacob Zuma succeeding there, but in times of what the congregation went through, trying to get them to see the importance of divestment, the importance of Apartheid and have this man stand here and watch members you know shedding tears, was like this moment makes it all worth it.

AP: I can imagine. The Robben Island singers, are you talking about the three guys?

JW: Mmmhmm.

AP: Do you know Jeff Spitz?

JW: Yeah, yeah yeah.

AP: He's one of my instructors, he actually--

JW: I just saw Jeff, we were at Columbia for the Miriam Mekeba celebration there. But he's been to [Trinity United] church.

AP: Yeah, he's a good guy. Sorry, back to the interview. [Chuckle] So tell me, um, I wonder, you're talking about divestment, how did the tactics that you used to fight Apartheid, how did they change over time?

JW: Ahm [pause] I would say [pause] in terms of the TransAfrica movement, and the bringing attention to divestment, they almost like, almost like the ANC had different divisions, Randall Robinson's TransAfrica forum and our denomination's approach maintained that the fight to end Apartheid had to go on several different levels simultaneously, it couldn't be either, it had to be both, and both ends, at different levels. Initially, it became, it was a matter of resolutions being passed and as they passed the resolution at the denominational level for instance, that was not just a piece of cake, you had to argue your positions and first of all present material,
printed material, to read, understand what you're asking them to vote on and why it is important. But then in the, are you ready for the questions? Call, presiding people line up at the mic, to voice their opposition to the resolution, and you had to be prepared to respond, so there was ongoing procedural kind of civil discourse at the denominational level. At the same time, these people over here, are protesting, because that's where the TV cameras are going. That brings attention to it. It's not going to change anything, but it brings attention to it and makes people start asking questions, like why are they doing that? Of course, Randall, Randall said start fast, and he had ??_?? But he brings attention to it, say why in the world is this important? Resolutions, to sit-ins, people getting arrested, people protesting South African embassies, down in Washington DC, or here. Wherever there's a South African embassy, protest. You're going there, you know you gone get arrested. Yes, we're going, understanding we're going to get arrested, but that's like methodology used in the sit-in movement to bring attention to the plight of people, we're getting arrested, these people can't even be in Johannesburg after dark. The average Chicagoan, white, black and Hispanic, Asian, does not know what Soweto means. And how Soweto, Southwest Township, blacks had to, you couldn't be in Johannesburg after dark. Until we started telling them things like, "You ever read" -- this was one of our methodologies in terms of education about Apartheid-- "ever read Richard Wright's Native Son?" "Oh yeah." "Well, remember back when Thomas could not be east of State Street after dark? In that book?" "Oh yeah." "Blacks can't be in South Africa, can't be in Johannesburg unless they're live-in nannies." "What?!" "No, they can't. Same thing Richard Wright writes about in Native Son is going on as we sit here talking today because Soweto is Southwest Township of Johannesburg, that's where blacks." "I didn't know that." "Of course you didn't know that, it's not in the curriculum in schools, not a part of the news media's presentation." Well, the education, well I would say, Arlen, we moved from simultaneously, there were resolutions still being passed, there was civil discourse and debate still taking place, but there were also public demonstrations, in terms of persons being arrested at the South African embassies, or at the banks and companies that refused to divest and at South African businesses in the various cities. So it was progressing on all of those levels. I saw it happening, I thought wow, we're fired up ??[company name]??, has holdings in South Africa, then everybody who's going to the Caribbean on a cruise, while they're passing out literature on the cruise, the anti-apartheid folk passed out literature asking people do you know how this is affecting? So it's like, oh no I didn't know that, it's like that's why I said when you hit that level of money, the pocket and I said, people are going to wake up. They're not going to wake up and have, I didn't think, any kind of conversion automatically about the race issue, but they're gone change some policies because it's affecting their pocketbook. And I saw it progress to the level [pause] of the symbolic, signs and protest, arrest, to not just arrests at the embassy, to many people going on hunger strikes, many people engaging in dialogues with businesses and banks that did business in South Africa, so I saw it progressing like that, on several levels. Ahm, one of the impenetrable levels, and one of these, well in Chicago for instance, and Randall's Randall's encouragement was this, ??_?? A lot of things are going on, but you just do what you can do. The impenetrable level for us was the government. Our government was not going to
stop or back down, we didn’t think, with one of the realities which is very painful
and is like taboo, you do not talk about this, was that the South African government
was supported by Israel. And you don’t—mention Israel. Don’t mention Israel, they
say you’re anti-Semitic. We’re talking about Apartheid. We’re talking about—So
forget the governmental, the United Nations has passed resolutions, they don’t—care,
Israel got the—forget that. We can’t win that one. We can win this one. We can win
this and this because this will bring about the change in policies. Well, that’s how I
saw it progressing and changing from nice little polite resolutions [in] ’73, ’74, at
least our denomination, in the eighties, saying no, divest! Now nobody was talking
about that in ’75. I mean we were passing resolutions about our objections to, on
moral grounds and on religious grounds, to defining some of God’s creations as less
than human and confining them to an existence like Apartheid, but by the ’80s, ’85
or ’84—how old’s my grandson? He’s 22, so that would be eighty-five, he was born
in ’87. Yeah, we voted ’85, as a congregation, and it escalated to divest, I mean totally
divest, and by ’87 as I was saying, I had to meet with the heads of the agencies, to see
our divestment process, that’s the year, he was born in ’86. My oldest grandson. And
I saw, that’s how I saw it escalate, from pieces of paper that somebody at church
might read, we passed it in the annual reading, we posted it on the bulletin board, up
to now, full push for divestment, simultaneously, being underscored in the media
with folks going to jail over the issue, and folks willing to risk their lives in terms of
that being an international movement, not just here but people in other countries,
and whips and beasts and batons and electric prods and all of that, standing in
solidarity with the people of in South Africa, standing in solidarity with those active
in-- Nelson was still in jail. That’s how I saw it escalate.

AP: You’re doing a great job transitioning to whatever my next question happens to
be. Talk about politicians, and American politicians specifically, what did you do to
try and pressure them, like what did you think about Ronald Reagan’s policies for
South Africa? [Mutual smiles]

JW: Well, we, we, as I said, that was the impenetrable level for us. We wrote letters,
we passed resolutions, we sent them as a congregation, as a Chicago Metropolitan
Association of United Church of Christ, as the General Senate of the United Church of
Christ, as the Commission for Racial Justice at the United Church of Christ, as
TransAfrica, as the Office of Church and Society of the United Church of Christ, all of
which were ignored. We sent them not only to Reagan, we had, our Office of Church
and Society for instance, monitors the voting records of all of the members of
Congress. So we had the voting records of people who voted on these issues. And we
would target those Senators I wouldn’t—like Senators of Utah, but the United
Church of Christ in Utah, would write the Senators in Illinois and the
Congresspersons in Illinois, we’d look at the State Legislature, in terms of our
request for divestment, where are they on this issue, and we would target them in
terms of letters, sometimes in terms of protest, because your failure to vote on this
issue means you’re supporting Apartheid, so the danger was letter writing, protests,
invitations to political forums, asked would you please come so we can talk to you
about this? Most of which unless they [already supported] divestment or the end of
Apartheid, they wouldn't come. [Laughs]. But we were involved on that level. But we had, we had mentioned Reagan. Which was almost a no-brainer. What a lot of people don’t realize is that we in the divestment, we who were part of the TransAfrica forum, we were part of the anti-Apartheid movement, had problem with Leon Sullivan, and his constructive engagement. So we were not just against Reagan, we were against Leon Sullivan, who sat on the board of GM, which is heavily invested in South Africa. The constructive engagement, that was a very subtle way of perpetuating the problem. You know, "We shouldn’t protest, we shouldn’t divest with these people and constructively engage them and change" it’s almost like, like the Southern strategy back in King’s movement, was moral suasion. We can persuade these people to change. Not when it comes to profits you’re not! And we thought Leon Sullivan who we loved dearly was dead wrong. This is not going to work. We also thought the creation of Bantustans and the creations of places like, can’t even remember the name of it, ??Sancity??, where the South African government built a resort. I think it was called Sun City. I’ve never been there and refuse to go there, and I would talk-- we take annual, or really biannual sojourns, trips to South Africa. And our members who saw on television or read in magazines about Sun City said do you realize why they created that? The Afrikaner government created Sun City, man it’s like Vegas. Casinos, and shows and breasts and butt, kinda outfits, and track shoes and beautiful scenery, and five star hotels and water and sports, water sports, created to show an image of South Africa that completely ignores ??Kaileche?? ??Landa?? ??Bubuletu??, Soweto, this is South Africa. No it is not South Africa! We America, we’re running over there. No, no we’re not going. We disagree with that. And we disagree with tourist companies, tourist agents, and tourism trying to sell American businesses into places like Sun City so they could be bamboozled. So our engagement with politicians was polite in some instances, it was in protests in other instances, and in extreme instances, we would work to get that person un-elected. And get someone in that office who would vote differently on the issues that were affecting the lives of hungry kids in townships in South Africa.

AP: I just want to follow up really quickly. You just mentioned that your-- who-- who was it who’s taking the biannual study trips to--

JW: I lead them. Ahm. It's-- well while I was the pastor of the church, we have an Africa ministry. And the Africa ministry would sponsor those trips. I, on each of those trips each year, I would teach every day. And I teach, them about, they have to read, the persons who travel with us, have to read resource material like Long Walk to Freedom by Mandela, and related materials like that, so they can have some idea about what they're walking into. This is not a shopping spree fun trip. It’s to learn, but my classes in addition to reading materials they would have about South African reality, over the past 100 years of so, what Long Walk to Freedom covers, the various acts that were passed, by the governments in South Africa. Or how do you get a District 6 in Capetown? What is the story of District 6? Things that they were going to see. My classes would cover the connection between the story of South Africans, the biblical story, and their story as African Americans, where there were
points of tangency and similarity, and points of disconnect. There was a point in our
history when Apartheid and slavery in terms of the strict segregation, were very
similar. There were parts now that you’re going to see, some blacks living in
??Hopends?? where Nelson lives, are they oblivious to what’s going on in the
Townships? Are some of us, who live in Hyde Park, or Hyde Park, oblivious to what’s
going on in Cabrini Green? ??Sageces?? The businessmen were well off. And they
cooperated with the government. What are we doing? Where are today’s Sageces?
Classes like that. So that the Bible comes alive for them, the faith that they’ve been
reading, [help them make the connection] between the biblical story, the story in
South Africa. Again, the curse of Ham, where that came from, here’s where the
Afrikaans church was, and this reformed church, and you read about it, and this is
why the, this is what they believed, and where it comes from in the scripture, and
how they’ve repented on that, and how they’ve changed that, so that the African
ministry, while I was pastor of the church, was the one that sponsored those annual,
bi-annual sojourns. And I should just add, the African ministry, doesn’t just go-- they
go in the summertime to West Africa, and East Africa, in the fall of winter year--
months I mean, of the year, they go to Brazil. This year they’re going to Brazil in July-
August, then ??__?? Then South Africa. Since I’m no longer the pastor of Trinity
Church, Pastor Moss [Wright’s successor] asked the congregation to vote as I was
approaching retirement, was that the church would continue to support those trips,
not just philosophically [chuckle], but they would continue to pay for my leading
them. Now the members pay for their own, pay their own way in terms of the
church, so that but more and more the people who join me on those trips are not
just members of Trinity Church of Christ, they’re members of all across where I’ve
taught or spoken. Last summer for instance when I was really officially retired, I was
in Ghana for three weeks with members of a Presbyterian church from East Orange
in New Jersey, so that I’m leading the tours now, the study tours now, but it used to be
our Africa ministry.

AP: Tell me, what was it like the first time you went to South Africa. When was that?
What was it like for you being there?

JW: Ahhm. It was like, my first time in South Africa, I’m trying to remember how
long ago that was. Was like home coming. Because for thirty years now, well, then it
was twenty years, 75, 95. Maybe 89, 94, for 15 years, I’d had a relationship that
moved beyond pastor-member with Tanda Ngobu, her dad, Elkin, the
ethnomusicologist, used to come to our church and teach our choir, African songs as
an African ethnomusicologist, Bongo Ngalagoba, because of our personal
relationship, and the other members from South Africa, Ubuchele,
??Chekelswezlale??, ahm, and because of my long involvement in trying to end
Apartheid [pause] I got to meet members of Tanda’s family. Her dad had died, which
is why I said it was like homecoming. I’m trying to think of, Shabarack, Shabarack
??Nefumba?? was the name, he joined our church. He was, he worked for the South
African consulate, he’s from Venda. Venda is a part of South Africa and when I went
to Venda, his people killed a cow for me. To celebrate our fight in the anti-Apartheid
movement. They gave me a name, the South Africans gave me a name,
Vulentweha?, the one who opens the way. And they had never met me, but they’d heard about what we had been doing, so it was like homecoming, to see the places I’d see on films that Tanda had brought, that Bongo had given, DVDs, to visit those historic sites to see Winnie Mandela’s home, to go to the place where Nelson lived, before his arrest, and then where Winnie lived when he went away to prison, to actually be in the places, that I read about and heard about and talked about and taught about in seminary, was [pause] a very warm, embracing kind of a homecoming kind of feeling and experience for me, my first trip to South Africa. My wife did not like—well there were two places—my wife is not a rustic person. She’s a five-star hotel woman. In Chaka land, where you stay actually in a Zulu hut, she was not happy, because it’s a hut. You have openings, and thought openings, crawling creatures come. Bats, and things like that. She had a stroke! She woke me up and said “I knew you’re not gonna sleep with a bat!” She made me get up and kill the bat. Going to the forest preserves and spending nights in the forest preserves was a very interesting kind of experience. And it’s almost like, night and day, the difference between urban settings, the townships, and to be in the, be in the out there with the wild animals, very educational, things that you learned there that somebody from Chicago, somebody from Philadelphia never thinks about. The first time we stayed in a game preserve, the guy that was showing us literally about twice the size of this window here [motions] he had a big chart, with different kinds of feces on the chart. And he says “I’m giving you the shh-t lecture. You gone learn more shh-t about shh-t than you ever wished that you knew, but you need to learn these things,” and these are the things that South African kids have to learn. They have to learn to identify an animal by its poo. Because while you think you are hunting something, it may be hunting you. [Laughter] And you’ve got to know the difference between food for your supper table, and food that you’re becoming for theirs. So here are the different kinds you will see on this, on this trail we’re getting ready to go on, and be careful if you get to this kind that’s still steaming and— we go out, we go out at sun-up when they go to get water and then in the evening, when they’re coming to the water, to get water, and fascinating to identify the poo and then that’s what we’re looking for. And over there, they’d be very still in the forest. That kind of exciting kind of, I never expected to learn things like that. But vast areas of forest preserves, that are there for tourists, some tourists camp out there, but my wife said never, never. [Laughter] We did stay one time, but it’s a secure, it’s not a hut like Chaka, it’s a regular like cabin, camping cabin where you can lock the door. Locking the door’s not gonna keep the lizards out, the snakes, but she doesn’t like to hear that. But it’s, every time I go, I learn something new. My biggest attraction and joy about going every other year is the new people I meet and the new stories I hear and the new levels of learning that I personally gain just from being in dialog with the people who live there, born and raised there. And some interesting, again, in terms of teaching material. A lot of people, African Americans, I’m gonna speak about who go with me, they want to know why did this happen, why, why, and say can you imagine, what African American communities look like, in ??__?? break down in the moment, the majority here, but try and imagine what they look like in 1980. Pardon me, 1880. Fifteen years after the Civil War, after slavery was over. What has really changed? in fifteen years. After they’ve been slaves since the fifteen-hundreds.
[Laughter] Fifteen years into freedom! And you expect some sort of magic wand’s waved, they, and add to that the shifting of ANC in exile, ANC fighting the government to ANC now the government. [Laugh] You-- you’ve got some major shifts here. These people, these guys from the MK, they know how to fight, demolition, they know how to blow up bridges and power plants, they’re now in charge of education. [Laugh] Come on. These guys have been fighting propaganda, now they’re in charge of the treasury, I mean that is some major kinds of shifts, and some broken hearts in terms of just like America, let’s use America for instance, some of the people on January 20th [President Barack Obama’s inauguration day in 2009], or November 4th [the day President Obama was elected in 2008], changes, I’m gonna have me a job by April! Well you know, it’s the people in some of the townships, who felt that now, Nelson’s out, we can have a black president, Imma get a new house. And it’s fifteen years later, I ain’t got no new house! Well there are things like some military stuff that has to be bought cause we gotta protect borders, because Zimbabwe, Mozambique, they’re still fighting, we need-- You spend the money on military, I thought y’all were gonna get me a new house! [Laughter] So that kind of grumbling, among the ordinary folk, and listening to their stories, and I said put it in context. The expectations were, and what the reality is-- now you’ve got the other reality, and you’ve got some Americans saying stop stop stop, greed knows no race. You find that this big arms deal, Zulus getting money under the table. Does Wall Street sound familiar to you? Come on! What did you expect, these people would be 8? You know, it’s payola, it’s the patronage system, all that’s going on there just like it goes on here. So learning, like one, and I warned them, I warned our members in some instances where it has not worked well cause they just ignore my warning, that not recently, I would say, ten years ago, some of the questions they would ask on the busses as we’re rolling from, say, Jo’burg [Johannesburg] to Durban, be careful what you ask this black guide. First of all, this company didn’t have no black guides until the end of Apartheid. They got a job, this is a white company that owns this bus and the bus driver’s white. You got a black guide who was giving you the best they can give you in terms of information. Most of the time, notice the difference in when they talk to you when the driver’s not around, and then when they talk on the bus. So don’t ask no questions that’s gone put him on the spot because the bus driver’s listening and he is gonna report back to the owner what the guide said. Beware of that. All right? That’s just one tip of the iceberg in terms of, I’ve got tourists with me, take that expensive jewelry off and put it in the safe in the hotel. Listen when you’re going to 47th and Prairie, in Chicago, you’re not gone wear this up in the township! And that camera costs more than they make all year long! Don’t do that! But don’t ask questions that are gonna get our guides, the answers to which. You’ve read some of this stuff, be aware of it. Man, I think about four or five years ago, we rolled to the airport, and some guide asks us, she says okay, name the eight provinces, name the official languages, those are fired back at her. You’re good students, you’re good students. Okay, we’re about 20 minutes from the airport, do you have any questions for me? Things I haven’t covered? And one of the members said, why do people in Soweto and the people on the street when talk to them, black people, like Winnie Mandela more than Nelson? And the driver, I’m sitting right behind him, and the driver leans over to hear her response. [Laughter]
She was very diplomatic. She said, well Mr Mandela, after his release and after his election, was catapulted into another world with world leaders. Other heads of state, other presidents, and he travels in circles that the ordinary people don't travel in. Winnie still lives in Soweto. She still shops at the Safeway, the A&P, the-- that everybody knows. They see her. They embrace her as one of them. They see that Nelson had moved on to another world. In fact the wife that he married was another head of state's, he's in another world. And he lives in Hope. Where the president lives. She lives where the people live. That's why they don't get to see him, they can't put their hands on him and see him like they can her. Which was a very diplomatic answer. And she leaned back and so did the driver. They think he sold them out. She can't say that! Not working for this company for him to go back and say lemme tell you what she said to the Americans. So, that kind of thing, but that's a long answer to the question, but each trip, each trip, each time we go there, I try to make sure that we leave something also to expand their knowledge of all right, this is South Africa today, now you've read about Apartheid, you've read about what they lived under in these works, now let's look at what's going on today in terms of it's a brand new party, how did that come into being? And what is the, what is the fight about in terms of ANC splitting up and now there's a People's Party, ??Pope?? They'll have to read that before we go this year.

AP: Just backtracking a little bit, so what year was the first year that you had gone to South Africa?

JW: I've been trying to remember, ??____?? was 18, so I would say, when was, when was the first elections, '95?

AP: '94.

JW: [Then] we were there '95.

AP: Gotcha, just wanted to check on that. Okay good, so again stepping back just a little bit, tell me about as you were sort of fighting Apartheid, what interactions did you have with the media and how were you treated?

JW: Oh, the media didn't, unless, we--none. We were not, we were not for instance at the heart of the hurricane as Randall was in Washington, DC, the South African consulate, all right? I think-- I think, I'm trying to remember back those years. I was trying to think back I said I've got to talk to Arlen, I've got to go back to '75, gosh, how many years is that now? That's, what, 35 years ago? Can I remember that far back? Jesse I think, I know he was arrested but I don't know if that was Washington or here at the South African consulate.

AP: Are you talking about Jesse Jackson?

JW: Yeah. The media covers stuff like that. The media doesn't cover divestment. And the Free South Africa sign, and the resolutions passed by the Illinois Congress of the Chicago Metropolitan Association of Churches. The media, if it bleeds it leads. And so no media coverage, no, nobody ever asked from the media about our sign there,
about our work with TransAfrica, cause TransAfrica, you say, TransAfrica, Randall Robinson, DC. That's where the focus was. You ask the average media, who are the other board members of TransAfrica, where do they live, what cities do they reside in, what do they do? Not important, not a news media event, so that there was no news media coverage, there was no media attention. At all. Now they would ??__?? Now we would issue a press release, they'd pick it up in the SouthTown Economist somewhere, page 27 [laughter].

AP: All right, how 'bout with law enforcement or the US Government or anything.

JW: None. Well, let me take that none in terms of no official problems. Now when the Freedom of Information Act came out, we found out that we were high up in terms of being watched.

AP: You talking about the UCC, or--

JW: Both. Well, I made it there because of the United Church of Christ and the Commission for Racial Justice. 75, when I was elected Vice-Chairperson of the Commission for Racial Justice, it's the same year Ben Chambers had to go to prison, because of the Wilmington Ten case, and Ben Chambers, do you know anything about the Wilmington Ten case? [interviewer shakes head, no] Well his girlfriend was Angela Davis, so you know that part. Law enforcement screwed me, and all of us who sat on the Commission from that point on had files in terms of being watched by the government, as dangerous subversive types. But we never had-- they never arrested us, we didn't know, we never knew we in the Commission for Racial Justice, TransAfrica, if we were being watched or COINTELPRO was, so we would speak clearly so they could hear us [laughter] Are you listening? But we never had any law enforcement issues in terms of raids or offices torn up or arrests like that, anything like that.

AP: Okay, so now you're mentioning some of the organizations obviously, the UCC, TransAfrica, Commission for Racial Justice-- so why did you work with these organizations and not other organizations.

JW: Well, I was the pastor of the United Church of Christ, number one. And as a pastor of the United Church of Christ, from '72 I would say, until about '79, well '79 we had grown to be the largest church in the denomination, so I became the poster child, [UCC committee-members would ask] "can we get him to serve here," "can we get him to serve"-- Well I started serving with '75 with the [UCC] Commission for Racial Justice, that was an instrumentality of the United Church of Christ, as a part of its national structure, back then. The Office for Church and Society, is one of the instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ, I was on their Board of Directors, my denominational involvement, put me, thrust me into those places. Several people have asked me about TransAfrica and my involvement with Randall Robinson and I'm smiling and laughing because what happened on the back end-- Randall Robinson who was brilliant, a scholar, Randall, to get Randall Robinson to come and speak, his fees are, well, let me put it this way, his fees started at ten thousand
dollars. Just to get him, all right? I am one of the founders of the Sammy Dewit Proctor Conference, pastor's conference, which is a group of pastors across denominational lines, who are interested in social justice, interested in maintaining the fight for social justice in the Christian community, interfacing with communities across denominational and interfaith lines. And I got Randall to come speak for us. At Sammy Dewit Proctor Conference and we don't have any money, and everybody was like "How did you get-- did you pay him ten thousand?" I got him because
Randall Robinson's mother and my mother were at each other's weddings. That's how long I've known Randall [laughter]. His brother Maxwell pastored here in the city of Chicago, and I went to college together, Virginia Union, so I've known him for years. So when he explained to me what TransAfrica was doing, remember now I had already met and become involved with Tanda, Bongo, Elkin, and that level of Africans in exile, Africans, South Africans living in this country, and I left out completely ??Nytatte?? who we also knew, had a relationship with, Nytatte is in Detroit, Michigan, he was assistant pastor of a church there, who-- and having her for, Randall said here's what we're doing, here's-- it was right at home, a perfect fit, plus this was someone I'd known, and because I'd known him all my life, his mother and my mother knew each other before we were born, I trusted him and believed in the work he was doing, so that's why I became invested with him in TransAfrica.
AP: Okay good, let me switch tapes real fast. This leads into another question.

Tape 2 of 3 ends, tape 3 begins.

AP: [Looking back over the different groups] that, um, you have been active in, I'm wondering, tell em about any, any sort of conflicts or tensions between these different organizations that you were aware of at the time. Do you remember any?

JW: No, I-- I, if there was tension, I didn't know about it because at no meeting at which I was a part or no activity at which I was engaged in did any tension ever get articulated. I looked around the board of TransAfrica, and some of the work that we were doing, which was just not limited to of course South Africa, but was also involved with Trans-Africa, Africa across the Trans-Atlantic into the Caribbean, and the work that we were doing in Haiti and the work that we were doing in Cuba, a trip we took to Cuba was the first time that I looked around at the other members of TransAfrica and found out I was in a remarkable minority when it came to church involvement [laughter]. Members of TransAfrica were not big on church. They were not active in church, they were not active church members, I mean they were strong advocates for social justice, strong advocates for peace, strong advocates to end Apartheid, strong advocates to change the conditions of the citizens of Haiti, strong advocates to end the blockade on Cuba, but they didn't go to church on Sunday like I did [laughter]. I did notice that, but there was never any disagreement in terms of us debating or arguing with each other, or them taking issue publically in terms of in TransAfrica offenses against Rainbow Push, I don't think that ever happened-- if it ever happened in any meeting I was in, and there was never any discussion about it.
AP: All right. That was one of the required questions I had to ask you. So tell me, during the struggle against Apartheid, how would you get news and information about what was going on in South Africa at any given time?

JW: Primarily through, well, through the four sources, I think, or five, one-two-three-four-five sources I’ve named [the members of the UCC congregation who were from South Africa], some information would come through the denominational structures, which would include the Commission for Racial Justice, the Office for Church and Society, and the Illinois Council of the United Church of Christ. Remember, our denomination has a-- today it’s called Global Witness, it was then called Board for World Ministries, and in the Board for World Ministries, those were, that’s the work of the denomination throughout the world. Throughout the world includes Africa. We had actually paid persons, staff persons, ministers, clergy, on staff in KwaZulu Natal, in Durban, in Capetown and Soweto. And in Johannesburg, so that some of the information would come from them, they still, remember our denomination started a school in the 1800s, that school is still there. We still have a UCC, in fact, ??she?? finished Chicago Theological Seminary, the chapter of that school finished CTS Susan ??Valoquate??, her husband, Scott Valequate, was the pastor of the congregational church until he went to Capetown to do his PhD, but people on the ground there, we had for instance, one of the ministries in Capetown, one of the UCC ministries in Capetown, does a ministry with sex workers. Young girls, on the streets of Capetown, so some of that’s coming straight from persons on the ground doing ministry there, people who were citizens there with the denomination there. Other’s coming from our members and my friends, who have family there. So they’re giving us straight scoop, inside scoop which is different from what the media is saying about what’s going on in that country so that's where, those are the primary sources, my personal hookup, friends, Tanda Ngobo, Bongo Nalagoba, Finekase Lale, Elkin Sitoley, who have relatives still there who go home to visit their, later on Shadreck Mefumbada from the South African Consulate, but the Commission for Racial Justice, Office for Church and Society, Board for Global Ministries, and our UCC personnel who work, past tense worked and now still work in South Africa, those are the primary sources where we would get our information. And I should not omit this part because it’s very important that-- I just remembered it. In this process, particularly I believe starting with TransAfrica, I was blessed to meet two people who you know probably both of them very well, of course you know Jeff, Prexy Nesbitt [a Columbia College Chicago instructor and former anti-Apartheid activist], and Lisa Brock [a Columbia College Chicago instructor and former anti-Apartheid activist]. Lisa Brock is married to Otis Cunningham, whose mother is a thirty-year member of this church. So my affiliation with Prexy Nesbitt and Otis also places and channels through which I was getting information. I think Lisa’s son in Tucson and he and my daughter are around the same age-- my baby daughter, my baby daughter-- but that hookup in terms of that connection with Prexy, cause Prexy, every time Prexy is going to South Africa almost every other week! [laughter] Forty times a year kind of thing. But the information that he would bring back also and that Lisa and Otis would share with me, Otis is Lisa's
husband, so those are the primary sources for my getting information from South Africa.

AP: You know it was actually Prexy who suggested I interview you.

JW: Really?

AP: So, yeah.

JW: Yeah, I'm getting ready to slip up and forget his name [laughter], but he was an invaluable source of information and an invaluable resource personally, and it's always solid in terms of, you're never getting fluff, you're getting fact from him.

AP: That's right. Um, tell me about the time, the time, tell me about the exact time when you remember learning that Nelson Mandela had been freed from prison in 1990.

JW: Hmm. [pause] I think Tanda called me. Either Tanda, one of my South African friends slash members called first, before I saw it on television. And I guess my first impression was, mixed. And by mixed I mean, I was so glad he was out, and it was like, when I said there's a crack in that dike, this thing is gonna come down, the house of cards is about to be destroyed, here's proof. It was mixed in that when I got information from Tanda and from Funeka, it was never like what you get on MSNBC and CNN on the television. I was getting the inside story from South Africans, from black South Africans, which was always a mixed bag for me, on this:

this last trip, two years ago, in South Africa, I met Funeka's sister's boyfriend. And I kept teasing him, why haven't you married this girl all these years? Well, he was with the MK [the militarized unit of the ANC during Apartheid] and he was in exile, which is why they hadn't been married. But I said you've been out of exile, you've been home, they would give me information, like, some of the problems that educated people were having, particularly those in exile who were getting word that Nelson was negotiating with the enemy. That he's sitting at the table with folks, with DeKlerk and people like that "we've been fighting all this time, I had a brother die, I had a cousin die, and you going, this whole negotiated thing, and you're free because you've been sitting at the table with the enemy." Well, they're giving me that side of the story, he's out, but you know, he sold out in the process. And I said what? You know, it's like he's out, Nelson's free, but they didn't give you any idea how he got there. Then they start telling me the word on the street in South Africa, about stuff that later comes out in print, that he's been talking to [laughter], negotiating-- so it's like mixed. Oh no, please don't tell me, well, let's look at the greater good. He's out, all right? But I got this nagging, mixed I call it, thing in the pit of my stomach. Well, Jeremiah, you haven't been locked up for 27 years. You don't know what he had to do to get out. So I can understand it, it's just painful to hear the people on the street, their read of it is painful. So that's the mixed part. But now, before the public, it's all celebration, they're not gonna talk about any of that. It comes out later on in print-- well you know, people have to do what they have to do, but let's look at all the good he's doing, he's fighting against AIDS and so forth and so on. But that's the original
feeling. Cause a South African [congregational] member called and shared with me what her family [felt], and I was like oh wow, it's, are you kidding me? [laughter] So it was good and not so good, but overall good, just a nagging feeling like you have to do. And I'm sorry he had to do anything, and stand on principle. So that's, that was my initial reaction to hearing the news.

AP: Tell me about the moment when you realized the struggle had finally ended and that Apartheid was gone.

JW: [My reaction was] I hope my wife doesn't hear this [interviewee smiles] because she's gonna remind me of the fact that I wouldn't buy her diamonds. And now that it's all over, I've got some promises I made several years ago that I've got to keep. That was my human reaction. [Laughter] My ministerial reaction [laughter], was that it did happen in your lifetime. And it was worth it. It was worth, smart remarks, nasty remarks of the opposition who thinks that blacks are inferior, it was worth it. It's finally worth it. And I think, not that it was over, but that first election there were those long lines and I remember because we sent members. That was even more powerful than "Apartheid is over," that these people get to vote for the first time in their life. With old folks, standing in line, all day, day and a half, two days kind of thing. It's like, it really was worth it. That they get a chance to vote. I guess it was worth it was the feeling, that you have a tangible victory without bloodshed. I mean, that's, that's, that's a good feeling. Cause, well when I say without bloodshed, it didn't take a war [interviewer: mnhm], that's, there was the military arm of them [the ANC's earlier-referenced MK unit], but it did not take needless deaths of thousands of people for this thing to end.

AP: Tell me, how did it feel to be part of not just a movement but an international movement? How did that feel for you?

JW: That felt very good. As I said, I became aware of those connecting of the dots, I should back up in terms of, now remember I came into school in '69 I came to school before I started at Trinity in '72, my major was history of religions and as a historian of religions, a heavy concentration on Islam and West Africa, I was being exposed to the religious beliefs of a people who are not like my people. We were folk from Virginia, Baptist, [laughter] and I'm reading about the Sufi, Tangiers, 19th century, ??______? Learning under that whole culture and having my horizons concretized of stuff I had read about now finding and meeting people and then through the historic religions piece to that now my denominational work and Bongo Nalagobu, I'm meeting South African, I'm meeting Senegalese, I took my oldest, pardon me, my second daughter, for her graduation trip, graduation gift, to Senegal. From high school. So I'm getting to know Senegalese, I'm getting to know ??_____? , I'm getting to know South Africans here, in church up close and personal, I'm beginning to see the Pan-African movement and I'd read about Pan-Africanism on the ??duboy?? and at Padmore, and at the turn of the century but now to see it at work, and to meet people who were personal friends of ??Shakandadiat??, and to understand that, as I said, when Randall Robinson takes us to Cuba, and is talking about Haiti, it's right across the water, right over there. To start seeing that this is not just a South African
issue, that this is an international issue, that was confirming for me a lot of the things that were going on in my head, my heart and my life. When I took Jeri, my daughter, to Senegal, splashed all over the news magazines and papers in ??Akra??, what is the capitol of Senegal [Interviewer, laughing, "You know I'm not gonna be able to tell you], well, it's a famous city. Pictures of Harold Washington [Chicago's first African American mayor], and Senegalese celebrating Harold Washington and talking to me in broken English cause that's a French speaking country, about Pan-African movement and the importance of Pan-Africa. Well, my time at Howard University, my relationship with Charles ??Kabe?? the head of the Commission for Racial justice, his wife is Martha Kabe, who shown me the international movement going as far back as the Harlem Renaissance, her book on Harlem, Haiti and Havana, showing how the themes written about by persons in those three countries were the same themes, and when they first started writing they hadn't met each other. Although ??Gyueyen?? and Langston Hughes did get to know each other, did become friends. Well, reading Steve Biko's Black Consciousness, well, the black consciousness movement is going on in other countries. It's like, oh my goodness, they've got to be connected here, and ??inbayeez??, the capital of El Salvador, where the largest group of Africans are, in Brazil, the Steve Biko Institute, and Pan-Africa. Their understanding yourself as a part of a trend of an international movement, again as I said earlier, you asked about the things escalating, looking at what's going on in different parts of the world and seeing "we're not in this thing alone," all over the world, people are taking stands against what is happening in South Africa and the ideology that undergirds the 1948 decision to make this an Apartheid state and make this official doctrine and law of the country. It felt good to know that, you know, you're not out there by yourself and you're not a little small segment unrelated to anything, that you're related to people and it's almost like-- it's almost like what I had read about in autobiography of Malcolm X. When he went, when he made the Hajj [the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca], what he discovered when he made the Hajj, that what he had been taught at the Nation of Islam was wrong. And there are white Muslims and yellow Muslims and brown Muslims, and Swedish Muslims, all kinds of Muslims, that this is not just a little black community on the south side of Chicago or Detroit, Philly, New York, Harlem, no. This, I'm a part of something that's worldwide. Well it's that kind of feeling, that people were joining in the fight to end Apartheid were not all black. Not all Christian. And to find out about South Africa, in terms of, have you been to District 6 or do you know about District 6? [interviewer shakes head, no] Man, they've got Indians, black and "colored" and whites who refused to let the Afrikaner government move and segregate them and when they did the Bantustan act and the housing areas act, they were coming in and moving a black family out, and the Indian neighbors would move all their stuff into their house. [laughter, interviewer says wow] They come, move them, and next the Muslims would move into their house. The first time I was in District 6, our guide was a Muslim. He said, "I've had more Seder dinners and eaten more Easter eggs than you can imagine." Because they honor each other's religious decisions. "I'm not trying to convert you." He said, "I'm a devout Muslim, but I've got Jewish friends, I've got Christian friends, they celebrate Ramadan with me, I celebrate Seder with them, i celebrate Easter with them, and I hate Easter eggs." [laughter] That, here you've
got this isolated folk in District 6 and Capetown who refused to let racism and
Apartheid destroy their community. Even when they leveled the buildings, they put
up shanties. They leveled and they put up a little shanty here. And out of that
evolved, [interviewee motions] I’m doing this for saxophone, a strong jazz
community, interracial. Multi-racial. When you go to the museum in District 6, they
show you the pictures of the different jazz groups that, and the years that they were
formed. That kind phenomena, it’s that kind of feeling that it’s wonderful, it’s
wonderful that, living in this country, growing up in this country, going back to
Caroline County, Surrey County, Virginia, lunchbox, no bathrooms, we suffered
under what Carlos Moore calls a binary understanding of the racial problem. Black
and white [smiles]. To find out that there’s a whole more than black and white, and
there’s a whole lot of white folk, who’re not like folk in Richmond or in Norfolk,
Virginia, who all over this world who said this is unjust. We’re not gonna put up
with this. We’re gonna fight, we’re standing up shoulder to shoulder, it’s more than
a feeling of black and white together with [Rev Dr Martin Luther] King, no, these
people were putting their lives on the line to end this thing. That’s an exhilarating
and rewarding feeling for me, was that whole international movement.

AP: Certainly. Um, tell me, when were the times when you felt most discouraged
about Apartheid and what kept you going during those times?

JW: Ahm, I think, I probably felt most discouraged when I would hear from our
South African members of another tragedy, or another senseless act for which there
was no recourse, perpetrated on somebody in their families or in their church at
home in South Africa. On the one hand, equally as discouraged when I could not get
persons in the city of Chicago [smile] to understand how important this was. Now
here you’ve got international support, you’ve got help coming from all these other
countries, and you’ve got folks right here on the South Side of Chicago, who look at
you like you’re speaking Chinese. And they, they don’t speak Chinese. That’s
discouraging. I guess what caused me never to give up hope was, the spirit of Tanda,
Bongo, Elkin, who, they had lived that experience, but they refused to back down.
It’s like, they inspired me not to give up. You’re getting upset because these people
here won’t buy a [TransAfrica Free South Africa] sign, and they’re not gone boycott
no bank or no jewelry store, and they won’t even hear what you’ve gotta say, but
these people grew up in a township. I mean, and look at them. They’re not giving up.
So that—that—that kept me going. One example a pastor, pastor Gomba, G-O-M-
B-A, he pastors, this is painful- a sure sign of old age [laughter], he pastors in
Guguletu. Guguletu is a township outside of Capetown. Saint John’s Apostolic
Mission is the name of his church. His church’s about the size of these two big rooms
together with the doors removed [referring to two rooms in the interviewee’s office,
approximately 40 feet long by fifteen feet wide]. Dr Linda Thomas, I don’t know if
you’re gonna interview her or not, she’s Dwight Hopkins wife, either Dwight or
Linda, Dr Dwight Hopkins, Dr Dwight Hopkins has one PhD, from Union Theological
Seminary, and Dr ???? has a second PhD from the University of Capetown. But he
and Linda lived in Gugulethu, with the Gomba family, while she was doing her PhD,
she did her PhD on that church, on Saint John’s Apostolic Mission, she’s the one that
introduced us to that church and to that family. Pastor Gomba, man, you got a
crown this small, he didn’t have theological education, and seminary and all that, he
didn’t have any money, and he grew up under Apartheid, so he’s doing the best he
can as by vocation. He’s got a little church and he’s got a regular job. On the way to
his regular job one morning, he goes by the church on Monday morning to open up
the door to take the little offering, and we’re talking, what, 30 dollars, 40 dollars,
he’d drop it off at the bank on his way to work. The cops see him, this black man,
fumbling in the dark with his key, trying to get in this door, put six bullets in him.
[pause] The good news is, he’s alive. Bad news is, he’s so badly messed up he can’t
work again, a real job. But to hear pastor Gomba was gunned down because he’s a
black man, and they think he’s breaking in, and nobody gets arrested, nobody does
any time, there is no recourse for his family, that’s discouraging. He’s just a black
man in a township. What are you doing? Who can do what? The police shot him.
Lucky they didn’t put a gun at his hand and say he was trying to shoot them. Tale
after tale after tale like that, is so discouraging, and many of them not as happy
ending as that one-- people didn’t live. That’s overwhelmingly discouraging. You
know, we sit here trying to decide, "Am I going to Dunkin’ Donuts or am I going to
Starbucks?" These people are fighting a life and death struggle, and you feel helpless,
that for me was very discouraging.

AP: I wonder, fighting against Apartheid personally, what would you have done
differently, if you could do over again.

JW: Hmm, differently. Differently-- Well, I don’t know. Because, again as I said, I
pastor a church. Pastored, past tense [smiles]. And being tied down with a church,
limited what I was able to do in terms of flights of imagination, I’d go there, meet
with these people and so forth, and I left out one or two other things in this oral
history. We took the Karos Document. Are you familiar with the Karos Document?
[interviewer shakes head, no] K-A-R-O-S is a Greek word which means, it’s one of
the two words used for time in Greek. Kronos, K-R-O-N-O-S means chronological,
Karos means it’s the right time. The South African Council of Churches put together
called the Karos Document, which said now is the time for Apartheid to end. Karos
Document was the South African Council of Churches saying violence may be
necessary. Almost like Malcolm X’s "By any means necessary, we’ve got to end." We
took that Karos document, and made it a church-wide study document where the
whole church had to read it and we discussed it. That’s one of the things we did
concretely as a congregation up during the Apartheid era. Well, the fantasies say, I’m
gonna, next time the South African Council of Churches meet, I’ll go over there, so I
can be in the meetings, I can hear the deliberations, I can bring back well-- for the
different I would like to have been physically present when that doctrine was
hammered out, cause I know it was not an easy doctrine to hammer out. Now
remember, I’ve been in the sit-ins where I’ve seen black Christians say "these things
take time" and they wouldn’t support King. I know some of those black prisoners
over there had ????. What are you talking about, violence may be necessary? We’re
following the prince of peace, yes, but we’re living under Apartheid. And it may be
necessary cause power concedes nothing, except with a struggle. An armed struggle
might be, we're hoping it won't be, we're praying it won't be, but it might be an
option, the only option left open for us. Well, for South African Council of Churches,
that's an interdenominational group of clergy, seminary professors and lay-people,
to hammer out that document, I know was an exciting time, and I wish I could have
been a part of that. I wasn't. And as I said, flights of fantasies said Imma find out
when the next meeting is, Imma be there to hear how it's being accepted in the
pews, cause a lot of. I found out, denominationally, a lot of stuff we passed
denominationally, the folk in the pews, they can't-- you know, I'm still shopping at
Wal-Mart [laughter] I ain't giving up no diamonds, cause I just got this new chain in
??Cabo san Lucas??! [laughter] So that, I wanted to know, and I would hear, again,
from our members some of the thinking in the pew, and I wondered what it was like
to be, and probably if I could do anything differently, been a part of that
international, cause like Dwight Hopkins and some other scholars were over there,
they saw the actual proceedings that led to documents like that, I would have loved
to have been a part of that and I probably would have if I could, but then my reasons,
as a pastor, I gotta be back Sunday. What flight will get me back Sunday? [laughter] I
got three services on Sunday. Limited what I could do, in many, many ways.

AP: Tell me, was there any, or what backlash did you personally experience because
you were speaking out against Apartheid?

JW: The only backlash I received as I said earlier was like when the resolutions
would hit denominational floors for votes at the state level, the city level, Chicago
Metropolitan Association, state-- Illinois Council of Churches-- or the [national]
Senate level, that's the delegates from all 39 congregations of the United Church of
Christ all over the country. Only when they're debating that issue would I find any
kind of backlash, or rancor or strong feelings of disagreement. And to give you an
update on what that's like, just so you understand what I mean, there's a movement
now, internationally with Jewish sponsors who are called by Zionists in the A-I-P-A-
C [AIPAC, a prominent Israeli lobby], self-hating Jews, to divest from Israel. Now,
I imagine that debate [chuckle], and how heated it's gonna get, among Jews. Well
among Christians, the same thing. They're saying, you don't divest, just like the
constructive engagement piece I just mentioned with Leon Sullivan. We shouldn't
divest. As long as we're going to invest our monies with them, they'll sit at the table
and talk with us. We're saying, stop! Hit 'em in the pocketbook. So that, with those
two rabidly, radically opposing viewpoints, the discussions around the resolutions
that were being proposed got heated at times, and rancor was expressed, and
backlash in terms of folk, cause you know, you can end discussions just and say,
"well you're racist" or "you're anti-Semitic" and how did you jump to that? But at
that point, "Oh he is? Oh!" There's that kind of backlash, because somebody will
come out of the meeting and say, he's racist. Now they didn't hear a word I said, they
didn't hear any of the argument, but they heard what this person said, so that
there's that kind of backlash, when somebody's reacting to what they heard went
on, at the general assembly, or at the Illinois Conference meeting, so there was that
kind of backlash, but again, fortunately thank God, no media. Just the denominations
[laughter].
AP: Fair enough. Tell me, how did being involved in this movement change you as a person?

JW: It changed me in many, many ways. I just gave you a classic example, showing you how widely disparate the worlds are when we wake up in the morning wondering, are we really gonna stick with Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts. Completely oblivious to the reality, these kids don’t have anything to eat in Gugulethu. Or Kailiche. It changed me in terms of making me sensitive to, what it’s like to live on two dollars a day. I met people, I know people who live on two dollars a day. It takes down the level of my buying into the American dream of, you know, am I gonna get a Gucci, am I gonna get a Rolex. No, I’m not getting either one of them. I cannot in good conscience do that. As I mentioned earlier, changed me in terms of, all women say diamonds are a girl’s best friend. My wife wanted a diamond. I knew she did. But she began to see her convicted to the point where she said I’m not, no. Not until Apartheid is over. Now first of all that impressed me that at least somebody’s listening, somebody’s caring. It changed me every time I would see or talk to a South African members [of my congregation], to hear the story of Hector Peterson. Do you know that story? [interviewer shakes head, no] When you see in the Soweto posters, there’s a kid being carried, he was the first one murdered. Hector Peterson. I talked to his mom, I talked to his mom. That, that whole, that changes you to how precious life is, and that these people are fighting for is their lives. It changed me in terms of moving from something philosophical that’s so tangible. The kids who fought against Bantu education were kids-- they were not grownups, philosophers, college professors, these were kids and they’re saying no, no, no. No more Bantu education. That changed me to being more concerned about devoted to, and determined to get African American kids here concerned about their education. These kids, I mean they’re dying. They’re not boycotting like we do with the sit-ins, no they’re dead. Over education. And you won’t even pick up a book. You’re watching BET and MTV. It changed me in terms of making more more determined to stop that and open up kids eyes to the importance of education. And show them, look what these kids did for their education. To show, it made me more determined, it made me more sensitive, in many, many ways. It makes the faith, as I said, getting that letter from Tanda’s father, makes the faith that we live and preach and try to teach come alive in some very concrete ways. Not philosophical or what we consider out and argue intellectually. No, these are faith decisions that affect future generations and how they will see themselves, how they will see the world, so it affected me in numerous ways, almost too numerous to mention.

AP: I wonder, what you learned, during this movement, any lessons that you learned, how have they helped you later in life, post-Apartheid, what you learned. How has that helped you?

JW: [pause] What I learned during Apartheid? How, during that struggle, that has helped me? Ahm, I would say it has helped me intellectually, spiritually and politically-- when I say politically I mean in terms of political acumen. Seeing, learning what I did in the Apartheid struggle, about how politics was involved in this
Looking back, what are you most proud of?

Um, now, okay, this is one of these required questions, it's hopelessly broad.

Looking back, what are you most proud of?
JW: Again, I've already answered that one. I've most proud of the fact that what we did, made a difference in the lives of ordinary people. Such that, the governor reported that we made a pact, that if any of us ever got out, this church that we heard about on 95th street in Chicago gave us hope and helped us to hold on. That's most important. That what we were doing, while we laughed at my Continental Bank, while we ignored my people who won't buy a sign, or who won't rest, that people on Robben Island, and people who you never thought you'd meet, were affected by what you're doing, that's most important to me.

AP: Um, tell me, why do you think it's important that younger people today who weren't a part of this movement, why do you think it's important that they learn about it?

JW: I think it's important that they learn about it for several different reasons. I'll try to summarize them. Much the same way that my Jewish-- remember now I was in high school with 2,200 students, 2,000 of them were Jewish, close Jewish friends, and much the same way that they say "Never again," it's important that they learn about it so that never again we allow anybody on the face of this earth construct a social setting that defines people as less than human, that defines one group as superior to another, whether that's Sunni-Shiite, Palestinian-Israeli, Black-White, or Darfur Christian-Muslims. Whatever [a] society is. They have to know that devious, evil system, how it was put into place, so that never again will we allow that to happen. And learning about how it happened, how very slowly, like a growing cancer, it became just the way things are. God sanctioned it. No, no. There needs to be some critical thinking and some hard questions asked and the young people learning today about that struggle, about how Apartheid came to be, and how the struggle to end it resulted in a free South Africa, I think it's very important. It's almost like having—for the same reason that you learn history, so you don't repeat the same mistakes that your parents and grandparents make. I think that's why it's important.

JW: How 'bout where do you think South Africa's headed?

AP: Oh, deep trouble. [laughter] I think it's headed, I think it's headed in some good directions, I don't think getting to the goal of where they would-- where the leaders and the people of integrity and authentic concern for humanity, it's not going to be easy getting to that, and reaching those goals. I think it's going to be a very difficult journey. But I think they have put their finger on something that the world needs to learn about. The whole truth and reconciliation commission, the whole, like it or not, we are a multi-racial society. Get over it [laughter]. How do we build a world, given what we have as givens? There's givens that aren't going away. That kind of determination to build a multiracial society that honors all persons of all races, all genders, and all faiths, is unique. I mean, not too many countries are following in that model. I think that their goal toward making that dream, that dawning of a new reality, making it a concrete, just as concrete as the walls of Apartheid, I think that's a good thing. I think that's where they're headed. As I said earlier, talking about trying to help our members understand, people are people. You've got crooks,
you've got white crooks, black crooks, Muslim crooks, Christian crooks, Hindu crooks. Politics, and the stuff that goes on and the arms deals, that's a part of the political system of all countries, Muslim, theocracies, democracies, and they're going to stumble. They're going to stumble as all human beings and all human institutions stumble. This guy, a friend of mine, he worked for IBM, he's in computers, he's an IT expert, right? His answer to me, I wanted to slap him, but he's so right, and it pertains to this situation in South Africa. Man, my iPhone, Baltimore, Maryland. Going to bed at night. Get up, flying to Selma, Alabama to celebrate the 44th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. I changed planes and showered. I turn it back on, because it's off when you're on the plane. All my contacts are gone. I'm trying to figure out what happened. When I hit restore, cause I had like a two hour layover at the airport. So I plugged in my laptop to the electric thing in the gate area. I hit restore, no contacts. I go back to, the restore before that was in October. Restore back then, twenty contacts. So I asked my IT friend, what caused that, man? He says, "Anything made by man." I said, you know, that is not an acceptable answer [laughter]. I need a better answer. Again, these are human communities, social structures made by humans. There gone be mistakes. Mess-ups. But I don't think they had the final word. I really think that the same desire and drive of the ordinary people, not just the big names, of Bosak, and Tutu, and Nelson and Winnie, ???, I think the ordinary folk, Pastor Gombo with six bullets in him, the ordinary township people, their desire and hope for a future for their grandchildren, that says never again. And we're gonna create a world where that doesn't happen. I think that will outweigh the stumbling of the steps and the human frailties that cause people to get disgusted and want to give up on the process.

AP: The last question I have written down is, if you were able to speak to, you know, somebody who was in your shoes several years ago during this movement, what piece of advice would you give them, or activists in future movements or current ones, what piece of advice would you give them?

JW: I would probably give them, hmm. The advice-- to build on how I ended my last response to my last question, when you look at the people who are sincere, at what they did, how they hung on to their faith, and the people who I mentioned, that I, when I felt most discouraged, would not give up hope. When you look at them, there is a very important ingredient, that's left out of most of the written textbooks that I've seen, history books and books on sociology, and political analysis and so forth. These are people of faith, and it goes back to, what I was talking about: I looked around the table and realized these people don't go to church. Well the United States side. The South African Council of Churches put together the Karos document. The ??encarta?? party, ??bootalezh??, Zuma, Gombo, he and I might unite in terms of our political belief systems. He's got a large church following, people of faith. Do you know what Bishop Tutu and Nelson and those who are dancing when they come out of those shoes, when they come out of that church service? The toi-toi. Look at the spiritual aspect and the spiritual lives, that's the sacred dance, the toi-toi. To look at that, you can look at these people and learn from them. Because I would say to somebody in my position, you go on over there and you talk to Tutu about what
South African Council of Church is doing at a national level, you go and talk to Nelson Mandela, ??Deke Ozuma?? to talk about how to escape before the-- no, go into townships and talk to the ordinary people. Go to Venda, where they kill cows and dance in church and worship. And learn from them. Because it is from them, I would say to somebody in my position, that you evoke strength in terms of understanding how this really is an international movement, much bigger than people’s particular particularities, geographically, theologically, sociologically, and that faith element, that we don’t like to talk about, makes us in the West very uncomfortable, is a very important element that, why they keep hope alive? Why they don’t just give up? Pick up a rifle and plow their brains out or shoot the first thing they see? That faith element has some invaluable lessons for us, I would say to somebody in my position, that you don’t ever need to lose sight of. Because when you feel discouraged and when it doesn’t seem like you’re making any difference in the world, looking at those people you’ll see it does make a difference, and as evidenced, what, six years after elections, it’s affecting the lives of people whom you never knew you were touching. That would be my advice.

AP: Is there anything else you wanted to say.

JW: No, I’m okay. Tell Prexy Nesbitt I said-- What does he say? [laughter] Alluta continua. As Prexy always signs his letters to me.

AP: Oh, does, he, okay. Well listen, I want to thank you very much.

JW: Thank you.

AP: You shared a lot with me, and I want to thank you on behalf of the collection and the scholars who use it are going to be like, you’ve got a lot to work through here, thank you so much.

JW: Thank you sir.

AP: Also thank you for being so generous with your time.

[End of final tape.]