

An Interview with Reverend Marion D. Bennett, Sr.

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

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Preface

Marion D. Bennett, Sr. came from a family of eleven in Greenville, South Carolina. He graduated from Sterling High School and went on to Morris Brown College. After graduating in 1957, he later matriculated at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, where he received a Master of Divinity in 1960. Reverend Marion Bennett came to Las Vegas on July the 7th of 1960 to pastor the Zion United Methodist Church.

In the interview, Reverend Bennett gave his account of what Las Vegas was like during the early years. He talks about the Westside of Las Vegas during integration and speaks candidly about the racial tension that the community endured. Reverend Bennett fought hard to get the Equal Rights Commission established in Nevada. In 1973, he ran for the Nevada State Assembly and won the post for five terms, which totaled ten years of service. His focus in the Assembly was quality education and employment along with healthcare and equal rights.

Over the years, Bennett expanded the church and added a day care center. His congregation grew from 30 members to 600. Throughout the interview he spoke about well known early Las Vegans like Ruby Duncan, Mahlon Brown, Jack Anderson, and Dave Hoggard. Reverend Marion Bennett reflected on more than 40 years of life in Las Vegas and finished by giving his thoughts on what the future of the city may be.

Today is January 12th, 2004. I'm with Reverend Bennett in his office here at Zion Methodist Church. How are you today, Reverend Bennett?

I'm doing fine. Thank you.

Could you give me your full name for the record, please?

Marion D. Bennett, Sr.

Where are you from originally?

Originally from Greenville, South Carolina.

And tell me just a little about your early life in Greenville.

Well, I grew up in a family of eleven in Greenville, South Carolina. We were from a very poor family, what we would call a dysfunctional family in that I didn't know my dad for a long time. But somehow with the love and the direction of the community, as well as my mother, we were all able to be successful in life.

What is her name?

Pauline Bennett.

Did you grow up in the town of Greenville, or did you grow up on a farm outside the city?

Well, we were outside in a community called Piney Mountain. Then in the late 40s, we moved further out in a little town called Taylors, which is about ten miles from Greenville, which is the home of my father and my grandmother. We did not have a farm. We always had a garden where we raised food to eat. That's how we survived. My mother would can in the summer so we'd have food for the winter.

Tell me a little about the education that you received back there.

I'm a graduate of Sterling High School in Greenville, South Carolina. I attended the Rosenwald School in Taylors, but it was not accredited. So we knew we wanted to go to college. My dad purchased us a car so that we could travel to Greenville, which is about 10 or 12 miles each day. I'm a graduate of Sterling High School, class of '53. Then I went to Morris Brown College. Graduated in '57. Then later, I went to the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. I received a Master of Divinity from that institution in 1960.

Now, earlier you said something about a Rosenwald School. Could you tell me a little bit about that school? Do you know anything about the history of the Rosenwald Schools?

Very little. I'd heard about it, you know, that it's schools for the rural part of the South so that blacks could get an education. And that was like a multipurpose school. I mean, everything was in one little place. If we had a ball game, we took the partitions down from the classroom. The lab was the principal's office. That type of thing.

I really appreciate that because we had Rosenwald Schools in my little area of Northeastern North Carolina, as well.

Now, you went to Morris Brown, and then you went to a divinity school. Would you name that school again for me?

The Interdenominational Theological Center.

That's where you received the master's?

Right.

Now, this was the Methodist church; is that right?

Right. Yeah.

Had you grown up in the Methodist faith?

No. I grew up in the Baptist church. Then when I went to Sterling, my history professor

was the Methodist minister. He continued to invite me to come to his church. He was my mentor. He's still alive at about 101 now. On my dad's side, they were all Methodists. On my mother's side, they were Baptist. Then when we moved near where my grandmother lived --

That's your father's mother?

Right. My father's mother. Reverend H.O. Mimms became the minister for my father's family. Then that was just the final thing. So I just went under United when I was still yet a teenager, about two years before I finished high school.

When you say "United," you mean the United Methodist Church?

Right. Which is now the United Methodist Church.

Tell me how you got to Las Vegas.

Well, during those days when I was in the seminary, the Methodist component of the ITC is composed of all various denominations. That's what makes up the Interdenominational Theological Center. In the summertime, they would give the seminarians jobs with the Methodist church so that we'd have income so that we could go back to school. And we'd be doing basically survey work, conducting surveys or trying to build up the Methodist church in the various parts of the country. What made the contact for Las Vegas, at Drake University we had a big summer program where we would go out canvassing and doing survey work. And I happened to have met a district superintendent from Los Angeles, and he came up wanting to know what my interests were, would I be interested in coming West. And I said of course. He wondered what my plans were. Well, I intended to continue to live in South Carolina. Then when I finished the seminary two years later, the call came from San Bernardino, California, that the regional director or the superintendent in this facility -- or first shall I say vicinity -- needed a black person to take Zion Methodist Church here in Las Vegas. So he called and we negotiated. I knew absolutely nobody

in Las Vegas.

Which year was that?

July the 7th, 1960. I'll never forget the day that I came to this town.

And you've been at Zion Methodist ever since?

I've been at Zion Methodist for 43 years and 6 months.

Now, I was under the impression -- this is someone who's not a Methodist -- that the Methodist church move their ministers around from church to church.

That's true. I've been fortunate. I guess I've tied the record with the Rev. Sutton in New York. He stayed 44 years. And I will complete 44 years when my time is up this year. Usually, that's the case. But in the West, they tend to stay a lot longer because there are not that many black churches. But normally they stay 10, 15, 20 years. Then I have stayed here by choice. And the bishop so far has gone along with the desires of the people and allowed me to stay here all these years.

Now, tell me what this church was, what it looked like, in 1960.

Well, we were located down at G and Washington. We had a small facility. We had maybe 15 or 20 people, even though this church has been organized since 1917. Previously, it was located downtown on Stewart Street near the California Hotel. In '47, I think they moved to the Westside. I think it was in that year that they had their first black pastor. Previously, the black people were going to First Methodist Church downtown, which just closed. The black people decided that they wanted a church of their own because they didn't think they were getting the right treatment because of racism, what have you. So then previously, the pastor of First, a white guy, would come over in the afternoon and preach to the black folk. So I think in 1947, they got their first black pastor at G and Washington Street.

Then when I came in 1960, the community was growing. I just think that the church ought to be more or less the headlights for a better quality of life and so forth. We bought the land here in '63. We were able to secure enough funds and a loan to build our educational component in 1967.

When we say "this location," could you give the address of the church?

It's 2108 North Revere Street in North Las Vegas, Nevada.

We call the Westside the area -- I think it stops at --

I don't think it means so much in geography so much as where the black people are. That was a code word because really it's not the Westside.

No, of course not.

No. But back in those days, 99 percent of the black people lived in this place we call the Westside because they were not permitted to live anywhere else or to purchase a house.

Now, we've heard all along that black people were not permitted to buy anyplace else.

Is that hearsay, or is that really the truth?

That was a fact. It was a fact. In fact, when Sproul started building all those houses out on Charleston, some of the black people tried to get some test cases. Blacks were beginning to seek out and want the houses. So they started building houses over here.

In North Las Vegas?

In North Las Vegas, so that the black people wouldn't keep trying to move over there with the white folks.

Now, was that the Huntington development that you're talking about?

No. I'm talking about this Regal Estates. Regal Estates is a little further from here. See, Ralph Englestad, the previous owner of the Imperial Palace who's now deceased, was building

new houses all around here. But then when Sproul came, his design, people liked it so much better. He sold a lot of his land to the Sproul Company, which is all around here, down from next door. That kind of solved the problem for a while.

What is that major street, the next major street?

It's Miller. Sproul is on Miller, Gilday, Royal. There's a whole development over there called Regal Estates.

That was for black people?

For black people. Houses for black people built by the Sproul Company. He was a major developer back in that day.

Well, I really appreciate that information.

Now, when you came in July of 1960, African-Americans had just gotten the right to go on the Strip. I think it happened in March of 1960. What did you find the atmosphere like on the Westside at that time?

Well, I was rather shocked when I came here because I had participated in the Selma march and the desegregation of Atlanta. Then to find here in Las Vegas -- this was what they still called the Mississippi of the West. And I remember we had to fight to get the Equal Rights Commission established in Nevada. Certain places in Nevada, like Hawthorne and all, the blacks still couldn't go into the restaurants. And the last place we were getting ready to march on, even in the 60s, was the Golden Gate. Before we marched, they decided to let the blacks come in there, which is a small casino on the corner of Main Street and Fremont in Las Vegas.

So the atmosphere was worse than the South because we knew in the South what jobs we could have. But in Nevada, the blacks were doing absolutely nothing but maid and porter work. We had no person in a sales capacity, no dealers, no waiters, no truck drivers, nothing. The

atmosphere here was unreal.

Tell me what it was like here on the Westside. What did Jackson Street look like?

Jackson Street, well, I guess that's the only thing that was flourishing because we had the Cole. The Carver House was alive, which is no more now. The Jackson Street Hotel was going, and it had gambling casinos. It was flourishing, whereas the rest of the Westside was deteriorating. I mean, there were no streets. It was outhouses and trailer courts because there wasn't adequate housing or enough housing and stuff. But they did have a nice little business district on Jackson Street.

Do you remember any specific businesses other than the Carver House, any specific ones? Was the bookstore still there, or was it there at that time?

It wasn't a bookstore. It was the Louisiana Club. They had the Town Tavern, which is there. Now, it was flourishing. And the Louisiana Club and the Jackson Street Hotel and the Carver House were going good.

What about restaurants?

We had Mom's Kitchen on Jackson Street. It was there.

Any barbershops, beauty shops, dry cleaners, anything like that?

We had those on Jackson Street. Then we also had the Shaw Apartments. And I can shoot myself because that's where the stars used to live. They could perform on the Strip, but they couldn't live there. I later bought those apartments, and I allowed the guy next door to lease them. Finally, we demolished them for a parking lot. I hate today that I didn't have the pictures because that rich history was just lost.

That's right. So it was called the Shaw Apartments?

Right. At Van Buren, yeah.

Because we always thought and what we read now is that it was a boarding house.

It's a boarding house further down. There were two places. The boarding house is -- I don't know if that's F or E Street. It must be F.

But that was Shaw, also?

Shaw Apartments was up on Van Buren, near Jackson Street.

What was the name of the boarding house? Was that Shaw, also?

No. It was a different name. I knew that later. I can't remember now. I know where the boarding house is located because she had the land downtown. But I've forgotten her name.

What did the Shaw Apartments look like?

Well, it was one, two, and three bedrooms. In their day, they had a nice neon sign on it. It would be attractive for that area in that time. I mean, they weren't plush, but they were -- you know, three bedrooms some of them had.

Do you remember any of the stars being there after you arrived?

No, no. See, that was prior to my time. People later told me that that's what they were there. But I wasn't aware of that, that they used to live there.

How did you become owner of that property?

Well, I bought it from another guy. They had deteriorated. And he wanted to make a lot of repairs, and he wasn't willing to invest that. So I bought them along with the building next door and renovated them.

At that point in 1960, we have people in Las Vegas -- I'm going to call some names of some people who were here when you arrived. I want you to tell me what you know about these people, what kind of impact they had on the community, what kind of work they did for the African-American community. Do you remember Charles Keller?

Oh, yes. He was the trailblazer. That's my very dear friend. Very aggressive, brilliant guy. I fell in love with him the first time I met him.

Tell me about that first meeting.

The first time I met Keller -- I don't remember whether it was at our old Zion Church or if it was at his house there on Washington. One of the two. I heard about him coming into town. He was a lawyer, and he was very aggressive, a visionary man. At that time we had what we called the Nevada Voters League and the NAACP. In '63, I think I became president of it, and he showed up. He was the headlights. The thing about it, he had a lot of money, and he was very arrogant, and he was not intimidated by the white power structure. So immediately he hit the ground. And I had him to come down and to be the men's day speaker to try to energize the men and get some bodies out here because I'm used to being kind of a fighter. I'm pretty radical even in my old age to say nothing about when I was young. So Charles Keller and Jim Anderson, they maneuvered to get me elected president of NAACP. Then we started laying out the groundwork to make Nevada a better place to live for the poor and oppressed people of this community.

So what were some of the things that were needed at that point?

The first thing he started doing was buying up -- you know, he took the bar. Of course, they would not allow him to practice. So in the meantime, he just started buying up real estate. He owned the Jackson Hotel, for instance. He owned that and a lot of houses and apartments. Then he would go to these auctions and foreclosures, and he was buying houses out on the Strip, apartments near the Strip, and all this stuff.

So then that's when the white people asked him what he was going to do with those houses. He said we're going to put some black people out there to live. Since I was the youngest of the group, they started intimidation. And the first thing we did was they maneuvered -- and I really

didn't want to do it because I had just been here three years. They insisted and they maneuvered. And I became the president of NAACP. Then we had three of us.

My wife at the time taught school. So the power structure, they decided that this Keller was too much, even though if Keller would write the letters, I'd sign it. I say if I sign my name, that's me. But they knew, I guess, I didn't have the ability to do what they were doing. The first black principal was a member of my church. So the superintendent went to him and then tried to tell my wife if I didn't stop all this Civil Rights stuff that, you know, we were going to get run out of town and all that stuff. But we weren't intimidated. We knew we were on the right track.

So the first thing we did do is get the community organized by registering to vote and things of that sort. Then secondly, we raised money to get a lobbyist in Carson City. We had a lot of marches. At that time all the power was in the north. That's where the population was. Each county had a senator. So you could get nothing passed in the legislature because of the bias and what have you. But at any rate, Keller was the lobbyist in Carson City.

Keller became the lobbyist?

The lobbyist for the NAACP and the black people. We raised a lot of money. In 1964, we brought Martin Luther King, Jr., out here as our speaker. That's when we really raised a lot of money.

What affair was that?

That was NAACP.

Was that the banquet?

The banquet in 1964. Then we went to places like a Vegas shopping center and met with a lot of the owners to let them know that we don't have an OJT, where you go to school and you can work after school. We didn't have a single black child doing one single thing. After they began to

hear about the effort, the guy that would see us said, well, I think it's time we'd better hire somebody. The Vegas Village, the shopping center now where the homeless people are, was the best thing we had at that day.

Now, that's on Bonanza?

No. It was on -- is that Bonanza? What street is that? I can't think of the street. On Main Street. It was a shopping center. Now it's a homeless center, but it was a big shopping center then. We went and put pressure on them. We got some box boys. And we rejoiced and we celebrated. We got some grocery boys at that store. They would not take a cashier on the grocery side because they made too much money for blacks, on the hardware side. It was something like a Wal-Mart, just a smaller version of it. From there, we just kept building momentum and stuff. Then we threatened boycotts and stuff if they didn't allow us to participate in the economy and stuff.

Then we kept fighting the hotels. Finally, the Skillet Room at the Desert Inn, they would test run with some black waiters in there. It was the first place that we got blacks. And the next place was the Sahara Hotel. They put a real light-skinned member of mine as a cocktail waitress because you couldn't tell that she was black. After, they see all the customers didn't go away.

We had a real struggle with the Culinary Union. At that time it was 98 something percent black. The hotels would say it was the union, and the union claimed it was the hotel. But we know it was just the hotels. Hotels decided.

I guess what really helped us is that this is a tourist town. Then after these riots throughout America, then we threatened them -- I think it was Floyd Patterson and Cassius Clay. We were determined we were going to get on national TV so as to hurt them in their pocketbook. They started slowly but surely allowing blacks to become dealers and some cashiers and waitresses and

stuff. And then finally, we were able to sue them and got a consent decree. We're in worse shape now. But back then, we were making democracy work a little bit.

Tell me about the Equal Rights Commission.

Well, at the time we fought to get that established. And we used the scare tactic of you don't want the federal government coming here because of all this gaming and what have you. And way in its early days, it was kind of effective. We demanded salary. We got appropriation. I think it began with Laxalt. But in latter years, it's just a piece of paper.

Can you explain to me what the Equal Rights Commission was, how it was set up?

And was a black person in charge in the beginning?

Yeah. That was all black from its inception way back then. We got the appropriation, and we had a board. We had a black executive director. Their job was to ensure that we had equal housing, equal job opportunities. They would go and fight for the blacks.

Do you remember who that first executive director was?

I don't know if it was Bob Bailey. I don't even remember. I know Bob Bailey was chairman of the thing. I don't remember who it is.

I think maybe it was Bob Bailey.

It might have been.

Give me a little information about the Voters League.

Well, the Voters League, we were more like the watchdog for the community. It was composed of people like Dr. West and all the intellectuals that we had who would study the records of the politicians. Then we would interview them. Then we would tell the community. And at one point the community would not vote until we told them who to vote for and what because we would put their record out there back then.

Did the churches get involved in that?

Yeah, the churches, at that day, they were united, very much so. I guess what happened with that -- I didn't know that until many years later. Maybe it was bad, but we didn't allow no white person to be in our deliberations. This fellow Don Williams, which is a rich white man, he later -- I didn't know this -- he got him a black person to write all kinds of derogatory stories about Bennett and to put out a newspaper. But I thought the guy -- and he's my friend now. He later told me that he thought he was the white savior for the community and the audacity that we had that he couldn't come in and tell us who to vote for. So he went outside and got the so-called house nigger to try to -- and that just destroyed the Voters League. Then they gave money to other groups. They would copy our ballot. So the credibility was lost.

You mentioned the name Jim Anderson. Who is that?

He was one of the finest -- what shall I say -- organizers that I've been privileged to know. He was a guy who had a nervous breakdown. He's from Los Angeles. He'd been an organizer for the union. So he was a guy who just lived for the sake of others. He had been through a divorce. He had kids in Santa Ana. He came to Las Vegas to get away from the thing in Los Angeles. He gave his full time night and day trying to help with the poor people. I've never met anybody before or after this man that is this committed. And I loved him dearly. He would be at my house night and day. In fact, he was the one that demanded that I had to be. You just didn't say no to him. The lack of jobs, he would look in the newspaper. Then he would come to my house. And I had to type up -- because we would decide what jobs would hire blacks. We got a lot of people employed by that because blacks just wouldn't read or they just didn't know that. He was constantly working. He was a visionary. He'd tell you what's going to happen ten years down the road. He was just a gift to Las Vegas. This community has never been organized like that since.

Is Jim Anderson an African-American?

He's an African-American. Very much so.

Where is he now?

He's deceased. He had cancer I think in '69 -- '70 something, he's been gone. His former wife lives here. She's Helen Tolen. I keep calling her Helen Anderson. But her last husband is deceased, and she lives down here in Las Vegas. Everybody who has ever met him will appreciate him. Of course, I loved and appreciated him when he lived.

Is Helen still --

Yes. She is very supportive and active. She's probably in Africa now. She goes over there. She's a retired school principal. In fact, I married her and Jim. She goes to Africa carrying clothing and teaching over there for those people at least once or twice a year.

I would like to interview her when she comes back.

Yeah. She's totally committed.

Good. I'd like to see her. Was that a Freedom Fund Banquet at that --

It was a Freedom Fund Banquet.

-- that Martin Luther King came to speak for?

Right.

That was 1964. Can you tell me a little bit about that? Who organized it? Who was on that committee? How you went about getting Dr. Martin Luther King here?

Well, Bob Bailey was -- and I have a book about it, too, at my house somewhere. I was president of NAACP. Bob Bailey was chairman of the Freedom Fund Banquet. He had gone to Morehouse with Martin Luther King, Jr. Then he said let us stay big, and let's bring Martin Luther King. We had a lot of opposition, of course, you know, from some of the naysayers. And Bob

laid the groundwork. We had a booklet, and we got each hotel to give like \$5,000 apiece and stuff. Then we had a banquet at the Convention Center. I remember the time they threatened to run me out of town because the tickets were ten dollars -- the black people. So then we decided what we'll do, you don't have to eat the dinner, just come. If I'm not mistaken, we took up about 900 something dollars by passing the plate. And people came way from California. So we had a successful banquet. We made a lot of money off the ads and the donations from all the hotels. They really supported us. We filed lawsuits about discrimination. Then also, that's how we were able to pay a lobbyist in Carson City, which was Charles Keller.

Let's go back to Charles Keller. He was a lobbyist for a while. He had passed the bar exam, but they wouldn't give him a license at that time?

Right, right.

Tell me about the episode.

I think when Keller arrived, he had 250,000 or 300,000 that he wanted to put in the bank. They wanted to know where he got all this money from. He owned a lot of property back in New York and places there. Then finally, he filed suit.

(End side 1, tape 1.)

And they just thought he was doing more harm because he just wouldn't go away. He was a very aggressive guy. He just passed away. We just did his funeral here. I saw him just a month before he died -- or three weeks. Well, then he filed suit in the state Supreme Court because they had no ground to stand on.

So he filed a suit to get his license?

The license.

What reason did they give him for denying the license?

Well, they were trying to say he was involved in a lot of illegal activities. He didn't own this stuff. Wanted to know where he got the money from. Just a lot of nonsense.

Now, what did that have to do with him passing the bar?

Absolutely nothing but his race. See, he was so aggressive. He would tell the governor -- and this is a small state -- he said, well, I've got as much money as you. You can go to hell. I mean, he was just arrogant. The first time I ever met the guy, we were playing with money, and he would tell you -- you know, he was from one of the West Indies or somewhere. He was my type of guy. They just thought that he would just go away and that they could short-circuit him. But he was determined and committed.

So when he went to the Supreme Court, they had to give him the license?

That's right. Judge Mobray was the Chief Justice, as I recall. No reason. Because it was just made-up stuff, not supported by any evidence, just hearsay crap.

So after he became the lobbyist, what was his next position after being a lobbyist for the NAACP?

Well, now, I guess after that when he got his license, he opened up a private practice. He continued to work with the NAACP. In fact, he was president. Then he led the fight to desegregate the schools.

He became the president after you?

Right.

Tell me about the desegregation of the schools.

Initially, the so-called Westside, we never had a middle school or a high school. Don't have a high school even to this day. Then when I became president, they understand what the black people had is they agreed. And I'm guilty. We went right along with that because we

thought being with the white folks was the best thing to do. I remember that we were trying to be an equal partner. We wanted to abandon our value system to be with the white folks. That was the mentality we had. Then finally with Jim Anderson's help and all, we got the old Westside School, which is the first one on the Westside, closed. Where KCEP is today, we got that closed. We thought that was the answer, to send our kids away.

Then we turn our attention to desegregating these schools. By now, we were getting a little more -- saying we're a part of this thing and we want a better education. So we filed suit to desegregate. First, the white people prior to the court action, they made prestige schools and put in all these facilities and stuff. Then that's so funny. Because when they thought that we fought a court decision, they came and rushed over here to the Westside and put tons of money and renovated, all new facilities, because the white kids had to come over here. Prestige schools at Gilbert and Madison, all of them. But at any rate, then some of them came up with the idea to just make all the schools in the Westside sixth grade centers. Then that met the court's decision. They whipped us on that.

Then I talked with a Jewish lawyer from the Legal Defense Fund at NAACP. I asked him to -- well, we'll sue them on the basis we're the only subdivision with this large of a population that don't have any schools. See, and I was going to pursue that. Then I got interested in politics, and I didn't follow through because this NAACP thing was taking all of my time because we were still in a small church and I felt that I needed to get some time to try to develop the church and raise some money and stuff.

So you ran for the assembly?

Right, in '73.

In 1973. And how long were you in the assembly?

For ten years, five terms.

So you were there from '73 to '83?

'73 to '83. Right.

That's wonderful. What do you think were some of your major contributions during that ten-year period?

Well, the focus on education, you know, the quality of education and employment. That was the main focus. Healthcare. Number one was education. Next thing was job training and rehabilitation for people with drug problems and what have you.

Did you get any of those programs successfully running here on the Westside?

We did. We were real fortunate. We got a \$300 appropriation for EOB. That was a real start. For the people with the background where the employer pays a small portion, EOB pays. A business can't afford to risk all that sort of thing, to hire a person with no experience.

Now, when you say EOB --

That's the Economic Opportunity Board. Social action for Head Start and all the so-called social programs sponsored by the government.

Before I go into that, I want to ask you about Mr. Hoggard and Ruby Duncan. But before we get to those two, could you tell me after the school desegregation case that Attorney Keller worked on, what was his next thing that he worked on?

Well, the next thing after that, then we had to get them teachers because they claimed, okay, all these white teachers and people need to have somebody that looked like them. And they had a way of bringing the people over here to teach our kids as punishment. So we worked on them. Then we had to start recruiting blacks, going to Atlanta and North Carolina. If you want black teachers, you have to go where they're being produced. They weren't being produced up

here in Salt Lake City and places of that sort. So we worked on that. Then it was housing. That was the next big thing we had to work on, quality housing and stuff, and to be able to live wherever your money would allow you to pay.

I saw a picture of Charles Keller once sitting in his house, and there were bullet holes through a window. Can you tell me about that incident?

Oh, yeah, they had a lot of that. I mean, see, where Keller lived --

Where did he live?

He lived in Bonanza Village.

Tell me where that is.

That's about four miles from here. It was a white area. They were shocked at Keller's house. He built it from the ground up. It was superior to all the white people's houses, even though all of them were big white lawyers and all. They had to admit that he had made an improvement to the area.

The bullet holes, we had all kinds of intimidation, you know, the racism and stuff here. They thought that he would stop making this push to desegregate Las Vegas.

Do you remember the address of Keller's house that was such a nice house? Does his family live there now?

Well, he still has it. When he moved to California, he married again after a divorce from his first wife or his second wife, whatever. They live in Long Beach. He came up for his 93rd birthday. The house is still there, and his wife has it and his son, Michael.

I see. Give me some information now about the impact and the work of Ruby Duncan.

Yeah, she was rather an outstanding woman as it relates to welfare rights. She still is alive

and around. But she was a woman who was able to -- what shall I say -- she was able to get competent people like lawyers or Jack Anderson and all those people. She went through this community like forty going north in terms of getting houses built and demanding rights for welfare people so they'd be first-class citizens and stuff. See, because we had a terrible governor even then. They didn't even want people to have -- all they wanted them to have was those commodities. Didn't want food stamps and what have you. So Ruby started to hook up people to go to the Stardust and eat and walk out and would not pay. And the welfare system was just terrible. George Miller and all. It was almost like fighting in the streets day and night.

Tell me how Jack Anderson and I think Mahlon Brown helped her?

Well, by getting all those federal grants. Jack Anderson was a genius. I think he's in San Francisco somewhere now. See, they would write her. Then she bought the Cole Hotel. They were the brains by getting all these monies. They would keep her straight on what's legal in the welfare. They would untangle all that stuff. He was a behind-the-scenes guy, but he was a brilliant guy. That's how she built all kinds of houses around here for the low income people.

There is a housing project now, I believe, that has her name on it.

Ruby Duncan Manor. She built that.

Where is that located?

It's on Owens Street. Their headquarters is about like 600 or 610.

Owens?

Right. O-w-e-n-s.

Good. I want to go see that because I think one of her daughters still works there.

Yeah, I think her daughter manages that or something.

Good. I want to find her. She had a son named Dave Phillips.

He's a lawyer here in Las Vegas.

He told me at one time that he became a lawyer to keep his mom out of jail.

That may be because, I'm telling you, she was in and out.

Did you get to know David at all?

Yeah, I know David. In fact, we're neighbors. Yeah, I know him. He's a very fine young man.

Now, was he a community activist, also?

I guess he was too young back then. We're old folks now -- old folks. But he wasn't involved then.

Give me some information about Mr. Dave Hoggard.

Well, Mr. Hoggard was one of the most dedicated and committed individuals that I've been -- and I relied upon him heavily, even for guidance. When I first met him, he came back to the church. He had left the church. See, he passed away, what, a year or so ago. We were the best of friends. He loved the NAACP. He was a community activist. He was well connected. He gave his life, you know, in terms of service to help for others. I don't know what I would have done without his support and help and guidance all those years.

Do you have any stories that you would like to share about either Mr. Hoggard or Attorney Keller?

I guess I'd have to think.

Well, you know, I'm coming back another time. But I'd like to hear some of the stories, some of the things that you guys went through together in the foxholes, those kinds of stories.

Do you know Joe Neal?

Yeah, I do.

Now, he's currently active. Tell me a little about him.

I've known Joe a long time. I don't know how to describe him. Backing up some, well, Joe thought that Keller, Bennett, and Anderson were opposed to him because we were trying to help Joe way back to get a good job. And I'll give you a little history about that. When he'd have the interview, he'd be rejected, so Joe really got the kind of idea that we weren't playing with a full deck as far as he was concerned. With Dr. West and all, we had him as a U.S. Marshal. Then Jim Anderson asked if Joe had done something wrong, we want to know. But Joe by nature is a -- I guess he's kind of a negative-type person. I mean, there's nothing wrong with fighting, but he's always suspected. Well, I guess ever since I've known him, I've considered him my friend. He's a good person, but he has difficulty coming together with people. Just to be negative and be against all the time. You know, criticize without offering some solution and stuff. That type of thing.

Before you, Bob Bailey, Dr. West, Dr. McMillan, I want to know what was happening in -- what have you heard about Las Vegas prior to that 1955 era? That's when they came. What was Las Vegas like for the black community before that? You've told me about all of the fights for Civil Rights. But this was after these people that we've been talking about. What happened prior to that?

I don't know. Except that I just heard it was bad and deplorable. I mean, I remember this. The living conditions in the 60s, I just could not believe it. I mean, I think it was just like motion without direction. They just accepted the status quo. The self-esteem was low. I mean, they had lost hope. I guess in '55 when Bob and all these other people began to come from other places is what gave -- like a transfusion or a spiritual uplift, transfusion. They began to believe and see there was hope. I remember hearing Keller say it's difficult for (indiscernible). We didn't have no

restroom. Now they get a house with one bathroom, and they think we've arrived because that is a big jump for them. Why would they want to be so comfortable with what was happening to our kids and community and stuff?

I've interviewed a lot of people in the African-American community. It seems that what I just asked you -- and I asked for a reason -- it seems that there were some people who were here for a long time, since the 40s, late 30s, that feel that the people from 1955 on took too much of the credit. How can you explain that?

Well, I would explain that because they were just so in need and they responded to it. And I understand what you're saying because I've heard it here in the church. These people say we were just here, but not making any difference, just accepting the status quo. And these people from the outside, they were just determined we're not going to accept the status quo, things as they were. It's been here all these years. I remember Don Clark, one of my friends and one of my members, when he started challenging Governor Sawyer. A lot of black people, some of my members -- what we call the old guard -- I know we're the old guard now -- but we did. They said they're here messing up our good relationship. Well, you know, we're not here to just go to tea and to shake hands and not to get something. We want something. That's what I say about the old-timers is that they were just so proud that the governor would come and talk or they could go and have tea, and that was the extent of it.

Just like I said Dick Bryan -- now he was governor and my friend. But if I got up in this church and told those people that man was -- he was governor for eight years almost. Never employed not one black. (*Blacks*) never got anything. See, they don't see it. But he would come during Martin Luther King. He saw in the paper they were having an appreciation service for me. He went everywhere just like the Lord, but he ain't giving up nothing with all this power. See, and

that's the complacency and the apathy that was so prevalent back then. And it's getting like that today because everybody's just looking out for themselves.

I'm going to ask you one more question because I know that you have to leave and do some other things. I want to know a little about Donald Clark. Then I want you to give me some names of some other people that you think I should interview. So tell me about Donald Clark.

Don Clark he was a real community activist back then. He led the fight for better jobs and stuff with Dr. West and all of them. When Dr. McMillan -- yeah, he went through a divorce. They didn't want Clark to be president because they said he wasn't educated enough. And we fought. And Clark was challenging them. If he didn't like it, he would challenge them, Mr. Johnson, which is my member. But we're not there to socialize and stuff. He was a community activist, and he's made a real contribution by being supportive of programs and stuff for the betterment of the oppressed people of this town.

Is that Reverend Clark?

Uh-huh.

Is he a pastor of a church right now?

He's not a pastor of a church, but he's a chaplain at the hospital. He does that type of stuff. And then he has his consulting business.

Give me a list of people. If I want to see this community from all angles, whom would you interview if you were trying to get a true picture of the community?

I think you have Hoggard's stuff because, boy, he knew all this stuff. I don't know if you got McMillan or not.

McMillan wrote a book before he died.

Yeah, that's right. He did write the book.

I interviewed Dr. West's son.

Yeah, John West.

Who else would you suggest?

And you said Helen Tolen. She would be the old-timer. And Ruby Duncan, you know, she's still here.

She's still here, and she's been interviewed by a person from the community college.

So we're going to have that on tape.

Woodrow is gone.

There was a woman in the community named Juanita Barr who passed away. Did you know her?

I knew her in name and stuff. I think I may have met her because she's been to the church up here. Oh, I did know her, but I don't know -- she knew all about this church and stuff.

Mr. Hoggard probably told about Ms. Macanz. Ms. Macanz, her husband used to be president of NAACP.

Arthur Macanz was her husband. Mrs. Macanz is still around?

No. See, back then people just had a more togetherness and community spirit. I mean, it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody. Yeah. You're talking about way back then?

Well, I'm talking about just people who could tell me --

Bob Bailey, you know about him?

Yes. He's been interviewed and so has his wife. Alice Keyes and Sarann Preddy, they've been interviewed. Is there anybody else that you think that we're missing as part of this picture?

Lubertha's dead. I think they did hers way back because she was a fighter.

If you think of somebody else, I would really appreciate it. So I'm going to end the tape now. I want to thank you for today.

(End side 2, tape 1.)

Today is January 21st. I am with Reverend Bennett, again. How are you doing today, Reverend Bennett?

Just great.

Good. Just a couple of questions to follow up on what we were talking about before. You mentioned that you had marched in the Selma march. Now, was that a march where Martin Luther King, Jr., took part?

Yes. It was the march. Prior to the injunction they got against the march, Martin Luther King, Jr., sent out a request for ministers throughout the nation to come to Selma, which was a rally to Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, Alabama. I was president of the NAACP at the time. I was so excited, and I wanted to go. And Charles Keller asked me if I wanted to go, and I said sure. He said if you want to go, I'll take care of the expense. So Charles Keller gave me the check for my expense, and I was able to go down to Selma, Alabama, and to participate in the march along with John Lewis and a lot of other people who later became famous there. And we helped and rallied at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma. It was standing room only, and ministers throughout the nation and Canada had come to Selma to support Martin Luther King.

So the majority of the people who made up that march were ministers?

Well, quite a bit, not the majority, but it was a lot of them. It was really encouraging.

Do you remember the year?

No, I don't remember. Was it '63 or -- I'm not sure of the year.

Okay. I'll go back and find exactly which year that was.

I did have some newspaper clippings and all that stuff, but I don't know where they are at this point.

I also wanted to ask just one more question about Charles Keller. When you were talking about him the other day, you mentioned a name of Anderson. And then there was another name, David. And we didn't pick up the last name on the tape.

I wonder if it was David Hoggard.

No. I think it was someone who was a friend -- Charles Keller --

Jim Anderson.

-- Jim Anderson, and then there was a David someone.

I don't know who that could be. It wasn't Eddie Scott.

Maybe you did say Hoggard, but the tape just didn't pick it up.

At one point you mentioned that the leaders of the community started organizing the community. Could you explain that process of organizing the community?

What Jim Anderson did, he has an organizer from the labor movement in Los Angeles. So first, he started to summon up the leadership of the community. He would go from church to church and house to house and make a plea for us coming together. Then we organized what we called the Nevada Voters League. That was the first thing. And we got people registered. Then we would endorse candidates. We would do the bio on all the candidates. Then they would put out a ballot. And it got to the place that the whole community would not vote until they got the ballot because they had confidence in us. Then once they saw that the community -- saw that we were real organized -- we voted in a block -- we got recognition and attention from all the politicians previously who had ignored us.

How was the Voters League organized? Did you have a president or a chairperson?

Yeah, we had a president and a treasurer and a chairperson and all that stuff. Then we had a committee like Dr. West and other people who would interview the candidates and ask them the questions and stuff.

So the political candidates would actually come over and meet with your committee?

They come over to the Westside. Right. Because at that time, there were not any districts. Everybody ran at large. And they would come over. And particularly, we would be the difference in a big election. So I think at one point, it was 12,000 people voted. And a vote of 12,000, you would decide who was the governor or the U.S. Senate and stuff.

Do you remember any of the people who held office in the Voters League? Any of the presidents?

Dr. Charles West.

Was he president at one time?

Uh-huh, Dr. West was president at one time. Charles Keller was president at one time. I know Jesse Scott and Dave Hoggard.

How long was the league active?

Actually about 20 years. And what happened was eventually the other people -- things I mentioned previously, we didn't allow any white folks to participate in the Voters League. And there's a rich guy in town by the name of Don Williams, and he decided to break that up. Then a lot of candidates, they went to another group in the community -- other groups in the community, fair rights and all, saying they were being -- you know, we didn't endorse them. Then they would reproduce the same ballot identical to what ours would be, and the people didn't know the difference.

I like the whole idea. Do you think something like that is needed in various neighborhoods today?

I think it's needed here more so now than ever before because we are so divided and we don't have the unity. And we have the problems are just as severe -- or worse than they were at that time because at least then we had jobs. Now we don't have any jobs. Brothers in the Culinary Union and stuff. And people don't have a voice. We don't have no one to -- they don't know where to turn.

Sometimes I feel as if it's not necessary for the black community to have a leader. What do you think? Do you think it's necessary for us again to have some strong leadership?

Oh, I think so. I think that's what the apathy and the void now is because we're just like sheep without -- you've just got to have a shepherd. And a lot of these people come from deprived backgrounds, and they haven't been exposed to anything. So they need someone to teach and lead so that they can become more productive citizens and stuff. I think it's the economics and the status of the black race.

So here in Las Vegas, especially in the area that we're talking about, the old Westside part of North Las Vegas, who then can be put into that leadership role or who should we draft into that leadership role?

I don't know. I would say I don't know. But I would say, as I mentioned to my congregation, when you see the statistics, the failure rate on these kids and the deterioration of the black family, maybe we all need to go together as an organization and just pay -- if you had to bring in an outsider -- a community developer to be the alarm clock to let people know. Just like the students need a good teacher, you know, you need the same thing in terms of community

activities to wake up the community because they are asleep and we're getting further about further behind.

So do you think, then, that we made mistakes in the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s? What do you think? Do you think integration was the right thing? Should we have stopped there? What do you think is needed today?

Well, I'm willing to admit some of the mistakes that I think we made back then. And the first mistake we made -- myself included -- we thought that integration meant that we abandon all our values, everything that we hold, surrender and just merge. It was more of a merger than integration. And as a result, we're the ones that got short-changed. We didn't demand anything. We closed up our schools here on the Westside to just go be with the white folks and not demanding anything in return. Not only here in Nevada, throughout the nation, that was the trend, to close up the black schools and just go and be with the white people.

So do you think the schools are the only institution that were short-changed?

No, I don't think it was just schools. On employment and all and what have you. Because I know what they would do here, they would deliberately -- when we had a consent decree -- demand that we wanted in every category to look like the population. So what they would do, they would take these maids and porters and put them up as cashiers and hotel managers knowing very well -- just like they did in the Reconstruction -- knowing that they didn't have the education or the skill. They didn't want to reach around and say let's train or let's recruit blacks with the know-how. So they said, oh, I told you they weren't capable of doing it. So I think that was the biggest mistake that we just -- I maintain -- the too proud people to get together. Just like a corporation is merging. You bring some of yours and I'll bring some of mine.

Back to the schools, none of that compensatory education, none of that stuff was taken

with our kids because they were behind. And not behind because they were black. They were behind because of their starved environment from which they came. Now, if you already came and I'm just started, I'm never going to catch up with you. So you have to make special efforts to bring us up to par. And we didn't demand that. We thought being with whites automatically was going to educate us.

What do we need to do right now?

I think we need to revisit. We need to reinvest and look to where we are in these schools, in these churches, look at who we are. And I've heard this in our history. Then we'll have special tutoring and reading programs to bring our kids up.

What are the churches doing?

I don't know. Not very much, including here. The focus seems to be now on the self. Just as long as I get mine, it doesn't matter if we're leaving too many kids behind.

But you have a childcare center here?

Yeah, we have a childcare center here. That's why we started it. Thirty-six years ago, I came here from South Carolina. They had elementary schools in the Westside. No secondary or middle schools or high school. And we clapped to that because we weren't good enough, we thought, to have a high school or a middle school.

But at any rate, every black kid in the Westside automatically was retained. Nobody went to the second grade. And I said that's hard to believe. I came from the woods in South Carolina, and I knew that just didn't -- something's got to be wrong. What they would do, they would recruit some of those Mormon teachers, what have you, who got into trouble, who hadn't finished college. They would come over here to teach the blacks. See, at that time the Mormons had control of the school system, and they really thought that blacks were inferior. And I prevailed upon my

parishioners -- we didn't have any money. But at least the first thing we need to do is to do an educational component. There wasn't even a black day-care center on the Westside. Divine Providence, which was operated by the Catholic Church, had a day-care up. Instead of building a sanctuary -- we didn't have the money anyway -- let's build something that will help our kids, create jobs for our community, at the same time benefit for the church. So we went along with that. And that's why we started that, to teach those kids -- not playing every day -- the basic skills and stuff.

Now, are other churches doing other programs here in the community?

Yeah, they do. They have something to do with the adults, the New Jerusalem Baptist Church has some type of program for reentry. And I know Second Baptist has something in the works, if not going, with our prison population, dealing with that.

In the President's State of the Union message last night, he talked about two things. He talked about a reentry program for prisoners, and he also talked about funding programs through churches. What do you think about that?

Oh, I think that's fine because I've always felt that the church ought to be the headlights. And when I came along, the church made a difference in my life in terms of motivation, education, and financial support when I went away to college. Now, unfortunately, I guess maybe with government money, the church may come back to its original mission. We ought to be doing that. But at the present time, the focus is just selfish.

There was one other thing that you talked about last time I was here. In 1964 Martin Luther King, Jr., was your Freedom Fund Banquet speaker --

Right.

-- for the NAACP. Do you remember what he talked about that night?

No, I really don't. Except he talked about equality and the problem -- at that time it was really -- what shall I say? It was very much alive in the South and in the southern states about equality and the necessity to stay focused and to exemplify love and compassion. Those type of things. But I think the title of the thing was about equality.

Okay. You mentioned something about the Skillet Room in the Desert Inn and how, I believe, that they were one of the first places to hire some blacks?

Black waiters.

Do you remember any of those waiters or how those people got there?

All I know is that Jim Anderson -- he was a laborer and an industry man. And he would go out and meet with the various regional offices and presidents of the hotels and stuff. They wanted to try it out. I don't remember any of their names because they thought all the white folks would leave -- well, at least that's what they said -- if a black person waited on them. So it was a big room. Skillet Room is all I remember. And they had black waiters. And everything went fine. Then they discovered they didn't have tails and that they were --

The last time we talked, I would mention a name, and you would tell me something about the person. We had talked about Charles Keller, and we had talked about a few other people. Do you remember Lubertha Johnson?

Oh, yes indeed.

Could you tell me what kind of force she was in the black community?

She was a very strong force. When I first came, I was shocked that she was so militant in terms of Civil Rights and a better quality of life. And she never lost it, even though she lived way out beyond the airport. But she never lost her love for the black people. She was like a forerunner in everything that was for good to lift us up, even though she was in good financial shape and all

that. But she'd come here from Mayfield (sic), Illinois, she told me. She was a woman of commitment and dedication. She started Operation Independence, which is a childcare facility. We both agreed that this is where it starts. You've got to educate the kids. And she loved kids.

Now, Operation Independence, was that part of the EOB?

Yeah, that was the forerunner of EOB. In fact, Lubertha helped organize EOB.

Was she on the board?

Initially, she was (indiscernible). I can't remember when she started up. Then she started Operation Independence. Then from Operation Independence, the big EOB (indiscernible), that was before all this funding and stuff. And it got big and all. Then they wanted to kick her around. But she was the founder of it all.

Tell me about Dr. West. You've mentioned him several times. Do you remember any incidents or any campaigns or anything that the two of you worked on together?

Yeah. Well, Dr. West was a dedicated man. He spent his entire life, at least the part that I know about, here in West Las Vegas trying to help the black people. Now, he ran for the city council. See, that's prior to my coming. But he would have been elected. Then they discovered he was black. You couldn't hardly tell from the -- then when they found out he was a black man -- he's very militant -- they took a drunk. He was a brilliant man, and he loved Africa. He founded the Las Vegas newspaper to get the message out, The Voice, The Las Vegas Voice. He stood up to the big people of this state. He is similar to Charles Keller in terms of being involved in the Voters League and everything for the betterment of this community and giving good people medical care.

Did you know Mabel Hoggard?

Yes, I knew Mrs. Hoggard. Yes.

Other than being a schoolteacher, was she also active in the community?

She was active in the community, particularly as it relates to young children. She was totally committed to that and was always in the forefront of trying to get a better quality education and what have you.

The school integration suits, I want to know more about how the community leaders went about the activities related to school integration.

Well, the first thing we did is we tried to educate the community, and we pointed out the disparity in the education and all this stuff. So at this point, we're maturing. Now we see that we have something to come to the table. So we decided that we didn't want them -- even though they're bussing the rest of our kids for six years, at this point we want something -- shall I say -- to match up at least where we lived. So we filed suit that we want these school desegregated right where we are. I think we got an injunction to stop them from closing up. Because the first thing was let's close up all the schools and bus them over there. And we didn't want our babies bussed at, you know, 6 o'clock, 5 o'clock in the morning. At first what they did, they started making these prestige schools, offering everything, what you couldn't hardly pay for, to make the white kids want to come over here. Then we fought that.

What are some of the things that they offered in a prestige school?

Small class size, like four or five kids. They had all those amenities, first aid school, all types of reading programs. Then I remember the guy who is the governor, Kenny, he was superintendent. Immediately, they renovated the schools and brought in all nice equipment and stuff. Some of the white friends I know, they got angry at me because they were saying -- the majority bring their kids because of the class size. They might have five kids in there with all accelerated programs. Then we fought that. Then finally, as I mentioned previously, they decided

to make them sixth grade centers. Then everybody would be bussed and coming. And they upgraded them.

Now, when they became sixth grade centers, when they had those prestige schools, were those classrooms integrated?

Yeah, there were a few blacks in there. Mostly white kids. Blacks couldn't get in because all the white people were coming.

So what happened to the black kids?

You had to make a certain score and stuff to get involved in it and so a lot of them were left behind.

What happened to them?

They just went into the regular classroom.

Over here on the Westside?

Yeah, here on the Westside. Then they started bussing them. Then we said, if you're going to bus -- they promised us compensatory education. Unfortunately, we didn't have nothing in writing. The bus would just drop them kids off over there at 6 o'clock in the morning and go and pick up another load, just like hauling cattle or something. But they had beat us in the court thing.

As I had mentioned, I talked to the Jewish lawyer from the Legal Defense Fund of NAACP. I asked him if he could bring a suit on the basis of we being -- at this time we still have a large population over here -- if we could just file a suit on the basis that we have been discriminated against because we're the only subdivision in Clark County without any schools. He thought that would be an interesting thing. Then in the meantime, I didn't follow through on that. I got into politics.

So you didn't follow through at this point?

On that, yeah. I had initially thought that. Then the burden was becoming so great, I was not having any time to do my job, you know, like building the church and what have you. Then I decided maybe if I got into the politics that would be my social contribution. That wouldn't take as much time as the NAACP and stuff had because it was a volunteer thing.

Tell me about your time in politics. You started talking about it before. Did you actually write any bills and have them go through?

Oh, yes. I was very successful and thankful. As I mentioned, we had a \$300,000 grant for EOB. It was a job-training thing. We got the food stamps. At that time the governor did a food stamp program for Nevada as opposed to getting a commodity. It was an option way back then. Acupuncture, that was a bill we processed. I was chairman of the mental health and welfare. So we had a lot of health-related bills.

And another bill was the insurance thing. Previously what it was, you can work 40 years in a company and you get sick or retire or something, then you have no insurance, particularly if you got sick. What brought this about, my sister worked at the welfare department, and this lady had been there 30 something years. She developed cancer. Then it was tough luck, you know, no insurance. And what they did, they falsified it, said she's on a leave. And then all the employees chipped in to pay the insurance. Even though you can leave the group, you can still keep it now, even though you may have to pay a higher rate. At least you have some protection. So when you get old, nobody's going to take a risk on you, particularly if you have some type of disease. If you don't have no disease, you got that age on you. Well, we got that passed through the legislature.

Oh, good. Did you know Sara Ann Preddy?

Yes, I did know her.

Did you ever work on any committees together or any special events or anything?

I guess I've been involved with Sara Ann on about everything she's ever had, maybe too numerous to mention. Yeah, I knew her. She's been a real go-getter. I worked with her on the beautification, the NAACP, the Freedom Fund, everything. She is quite a -- still a go-getter, even to this month she is.

That's right. Now, people like Sara Ann Preddy and Lubertha Johnson and some of those other hard workers, Mr. Hoggard, Mabel Hoggard, they were here before people like Dr. West, Dr. McMillan, Charles Keller, all of those people. Why do you think it took that new group of people to actually get the ball rolling?

Well, I think they had a lot of perspective, and they weren't intimidated about this friendship and this socialization so much. That was real prevalent. And I love Lubertha to my heart. In fact, she's one of my parishioners. She knows I love her. But I remember her when Don Clark started saying how bad it was. Her complaint to me was he's messing up my relationship with Grant Sawyer. That was the governor at that time. That type of thing. See, it was a little closely knit thing. And I think we just widened the circle. We came from a different perspective.

You didn't get here until the 60s.

Yeah, I came here July the 7th, 1960, in the afternoon. I remember that.

Okay. Were you aware of the influence of Howard Hughes on the city?

I read a lot of about it. Yes. After I came, I read about it.

People in the black community, what did they think of Howard Hughes?

I don't know. I used to hear Mr. Hoggard say -- because he had seen him and all this stuff -- he's just a rich man that owned everything. But I don't know what to tell you. Then all this new stuff happened, like buying the hotel because they wanted him to move and all that stuff.

Being a minister in a town like Las Vegas -- we're the gaming capital of the world, the entertainment capital of the world -- when you go to South Carolina, travel around the country, what do you think the national attitude is about this city?

Oh, I think they think that we're more in sin than anywhere else. The offenses we have are in the Methodist church. They don't want to have no meetings here because we had so much sin. It's unreal. But they never sent in the money we sent back. Our headquarters is in Phoenix. The lady was taking me to the airport, a white woman. I said, Why is it you all don't want to have a meeting in Las Vegas, we have to always meet in Arizona? She said, Oh, you have so much gambling and stuff. Then I just had read this thing. I said Arizona gets more money from its lottery -- the state does -- than we get from gambling and horse racing. I pointed out all that stuff to her. She said, Oh, yes, but it's not open like Las Vegas. That's what they're saying. In other words, it's out of sight, it's not seen.

Right. Do you see Las Vegas as a gambling town, as a gaming town?

No, I don't. That's one of our biggest industries here. But I don't see anything different with gambling than I see with Boeing or having a big air force base or a manufacturing company. It's just employment. And all these things indirectly is...

Since 1960, what do you see as some of the major changes in Las Vegas, the black community as well as the city as a whole?

Well, one of the major changes when we turn to black people, we began to draw a different class, an upgrade and educated class. We're getting formal black educated people here. In the past -- that's why I said we needed black leadership because most of these people who initially came here, just voters, in pursuit of my type of employment who did not play a major role in the cities and towns they came from. But now we're getting a lot of educated people here. We've got

equal housing. So you don't even know they're black until sometimes if you go into their offices or what have you, except if they identify. Then we do have some blacks, though they live in Henderson, some who recognize that their roots started here, and they come back and help and what have you.

The growth and development, it's unreal. Now there's better housing. When I came in '60, black people didn't even have streets. No toilets. Trailers, that was the big thing. Now, almost no trailers and stuff. And blacks couldn't work anywhere. But at least we have a few of them in every job category today.

What do you see as the future of this city?

(End side 1, tape 2.)

My last question was what do you see as the future of this city? When it comes to the part of the black community that still needs to be uplifted, be engaged in the whole economic process, is that going to happen here in Las Vegas?

I hope so. I have to hope that. As Martin said I still have a dream that somehow somebody will come that will help motivate us to love ourselves and to invest so we support black businesses and what have you and grow and recognize that without any -- if we don't do this, we will not have any future. I hope that as more and more people come that somewhere in that group will be a real person that will stimulate us and motivate us to know that we can get out of the muck and the mire. That we can own and control some of these businesses and stuff with this population being what it is.

When you think of Las Vegas as a city and the county, where do black people need to make a greater impression, greater impact? Should we start going to city council meetings, the county commissioners meetings? What should we do as a community to be heard?

Well, I think first we need to be organized. And secondly, I think that we need to pool our resources and not rely upon always the government to do for us what we need to do for ourselves. Do our part. There's nothing wrong with taking advantage of the government loans and SBAs and stuff like that. But just to keep asking for a handout or a poverty program... the danger in that as I see it is that when those funds are no longer available, you don't have anything. We need to invest in ourselves and teach these people to save a little money to buy some property and all this stuff. And not think that we have to be a dope dealer or a con man to own and control something.

And my last question is -- I want to know your opinion of the leadership in our city now. Our mayor is Oscar Goodman. What do you think of his leadership? Do you see a place in his administration for African-Americans?

I do. I do. But you see, there isn't one except those who he can control and manipulate. I mean, he's a lot of show and a lot of talk. But if you look at his record as it relates to blacks, it's almost (indiscernible) than New Hampshire, so to speak. But he makes a lot of noise and he's intimidating. And I think people will fall in or fall out. But I don't think he's good for the black community and stuff because he talks down to us in terms of -- you know, he just reminds me of that southern plantation mentality. I don't blame him for that. But I just blame the black people for not standing up and speaking out more.

And my last question. Blacks now are in political office. I believe that there are two blacks on the city council. I don't know how many are on the county commission.

One.

One on the county commission. And we have several blacks now from this area in the legislature.

That's right.

Is that the way that we should be going to be heard?

Oh, I think that's a good way. At least we've got a presence there, and at least they know what's available and what's coming down the pipe. Then they can have people who can handle those types of programs and stuff. Then they can intercede and demand that blacks be employed and get a piece of the pie, you know, particularly blacks in business and planning and that type of thing. Blacks who are already equipped and are out there struggling, that they get a piece of the pie.

And are our elected officials doing that?

I would think so. I know Yvonne is pretty good and stuff like that. I don't know with the city of Las Vegas, but that's kind of a political thing. Goodman is the main man there. And I guess that most would accept -- and when you owe your election to somebody, you're kind of bound by that, I mean, maybe to an extent. So you don't speak out as much. And a lot of time it has to do with the person, too.

Now, those are the questions that I have. Is there anything else you would like to add? Anybody else that you wanted to mention and I didn't ask you about that person?

I don't know. Have you ever met Dr. Tate?

No. I don't even know that person. What is the name again?

Dr. Tate. He's a trauma surgeon out at UMC. I can't think of his first name. He is very militant and very involved.

He's a surgeon at --

Yeah, he's a trauma surgeon. He has an organization. He's been in the forefront up against racial oppression and all that kind of stuff. But I can't think of what he calls his organization.

How could I find out about him? Is this Tate, T-a-t-e?

Uh-huh. Dr. Tate from UMC. I can't even think of Tate's first name. He's a very good -- he's not forgotten where he came from.

Before I left the last time, I had asked if you knew anyone else in the community that I should interview. Did you think of anyone else who should be --

I know you said you wanted to talk to Helen.

Yes.

Yeah, Helen Anderson. I keep saying. Helen Tolen.

Is there anybody else that you think -- Dr. Tate is a good one, as well.

Oh, yeah, he'd be good.

Now, how long has Dr. Tate been in Las Vegas?

Oh, he's been here a long time.

Okay, good. So Dr. Tate and Mrs. Anderson, I'd like to get in touch with. And if you think of anyone else, please let me know. Well, I really appreciate this.

Yeah, I enjoyed talking to you. A pleasure.

Well, thank you so much.

You're quite welcome.

(End side 2, tape 2.)

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