

An Interview with James Rogers

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

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Preface

Bishop James Rogers gives a brief description of his early years on a plantation in Louisiana near Tallulah. He describes coming to Las Vegas in 1970 at the age of 19, being mentored by Dr. F.N. Addison, and attending community rallies and town hall meetings. He mentions that his initial involvement in the NAACP came about through supporting his pastor and getting involved in marches and news conferences.

Bishop Rogers describes using his pulpit to address many issues that affected the black community, gives background on his theological training, and mentions the community marches against police brutality. He gives details on the two or three cases that were particularly inflammatory and which eventually lead to legislation that would create a citizens' review board for police and sheriff's departments.

Today Bishop Rogers continues to pastor his church and also attends branch meetings in support of President Hawkins and the NAACP. The most important memory for him was the fact that the black community had absolute confidence and trust in his ability to lead. He appreciates that his predecessors paved the way for him and reminds future generations to protect, use, and further the many advantages that have been created through the work of their forebears.

This is Claytee White and I'm with Bishop James Rogers. It is June 30th, 2009. And we're in his church here on the West Side in Las Vegas.

So how are you today?

I'm great. I'm blessed and highly flavored.

Okay, great.

Some are just blessed and highly favored. But I've moved beyond the highly favored to being highly flavored.

Okay, great. So as you know I'm here today to talk about your experience and your involvement with the NAACP.

Great. Great.

So first, though, I'd like to start with where were you born?

I was born -- where or when?

Where?

I was born in -- matter of fact, I was born on a plantation. It was called the Hodges Plantation in Louisiana. It's very near the big city, big, big city called Tallulah, Louisiana. Halleluiah. Praise God. But ain't nobody happy about that but me. But it's all right. Yeah, that's where I was actually born. But I was actually raised or reared mostly in the city of Tallulah, Louisiana.

And which year did you come to Las Vegas?

I came to Las Vegas in 19 -- let's see -- 70. I came here in 1970. Matter of fact, it was in the summer of 1970.

On a day like today; 103 degrees?

Yeah. Hot, hot. Yeah, it was hot.

How old were you when you got here?

I came here when I was 19 years of age.

So you did not have any experience with the NAACP prior to that?

None, none whatsoever.

Tell me your beginnings with the NAACP, the first involvement.

Well, I'll start like this. When I came here at 19, a very young man from the south, I was concerned about how things happened in the south and, you know, not very much you could do for

it was there. When I moved here I began to see sort of like a different kind of involvement. There were people involved in the community, doing a lot of things in the community. Of course, the culture here is a little different, although we were yet still known here in Las Vegas as the "Mississippi of the West" because we still had a lot of racial issues, a lot of prejudices going on. But then there were opportunities to do some things to make a change. So I saw this happening in the communities.

I wanted to get involved and really didn't know how to get involved in a lot of things. So I paid attention to what was going on in the news media and what was going on in my community. After a while -- of course, I didn't appreciate the things that were happening in my community where I was living. I wanted to get involved. And I just have to acknowledge this young man that you may see on this portrait up here. At this time he was about 80 years of age, somewhere like that when he took this photo -- when we did the painting, rather. Dr. F.N. Addison was my mentor.

What is his last name again?

Addison, A-D-D-I-S-O-N. His name was F.N. Addison. It stands for Ferdnan, F-E-R-D-N-A-N, Addison. Under his leadership I was concerned about a lot of things happening in the community. He said, well, look, son, the way you change things for the best, you can't always change it from the outside. So you need to get involved. That inspired me to get involved in community events. So I started going to community rallies and community town hall meetings and listening to the other leaders talk about what they were doing and what they needed to do. That's how I first got initiated into being involved, just attending the meetings and getting myself educated. That's number one.

Okay, great.

After a while a young man -- I call him a young man -- by the name of Mr. Jesse D. Scott was a very prominent individual. I got to know him as president of the local branch of the NAACP and, of course, his involvement in coming around to the churches. I had really not long ago got involved back in church. And so when I got involved in church, he would come around. He got to be very close to my pastor. And my pastor really was his mentor in a great way even though he was a member of the congregation and was a member of the Second Baptist Church during this

time. Yet, my pastor, who was the pastor of Greater New Jerusalem Baptist Church, was sort of mentoring him along the way, helping him out, supporting him in his all of his endeavors. So my pastor supporting individuals in the community sort of inspired me to support him because whoever my pastor supported, I supported my pastor. So I got involved.

And after being involved, you know, took out membership and those kinds of things. That was one of the main things. I just don't believe that you have as much influence if you're not really active in supporting in many ways, not only just with your mouth but also with your money and your time and talent and energy and those kinds of things. So I just started volunteering for different work.

And when those things happened the day came by me just being a member and going to meetings and seeing what's happening, when we had community events, injustice in the community, I would go out to be a part of the rallies, part of the -- what do you call it? -- when they set up the news conferences and everything. I would be there to support. And I began to learn more about it. And, of course, being involved in those kinds of things made a difference. So we had marches. We put on marches and those kinds of things. And I was a part of the marches even before I really was concerned with being involved as an officer or as a working person in the organization. I felt as a citizen just supporting those who were in office was very important. Someone said like this. You know, a leader is one that has followers because anyone that is supposed to be leading and has no followers, he's just taking a walk. So I wanted to make sure I supported those who were in leadership.

And then the day came that Reverend Scott, who had been involved for years and years -- four, five, six, eight years involved as president, the time came for him to say, you know what, it's time for me to step aside. And I didn't say step down. I said step aside. I'm using this terminology strategically because that meant so much. Many people will step down. And usually when they step down, they step away. They don't get involved. They just go away, fade away and don't give the expertise, don't give the experience, don't give the support at all. But Reverend Scott, he was the one that wanted to step aside and assist someone else to do a job using his experience and his contacts and those kinds of things and make a difference.

And, of course, in those times I was involved. I was very outspoken from my pulpit when

I became pastor of this church, very involved in the community and just was there. I would use the pulpit to address some of those issues. And I know that people talk today and I know that sometimes the law says certain things you can't get involved in politics from the church. I just didn't believe that. The reason why I'm saying I don't believe that is because my job and my life are centered around community service. It's centered around helping people. And when something of an injustice takes place, I have a responsibility to speak out about that. I just didn't believe I could not stand on the pulpit, preach on a Sunday morning, get people happy and get them shouting and get them all worked up, and they leave the church and go back to those environments that I never addressed. I am responsible in not only ministering to the spiritual man but to the whole man. And so if they have physical issues, I have to deal with that. If they've got spiritual issues, I deal with that. Emotional issues, I got to deal with also. So I was involved with the whole man. So I believe I had to do it from the pulpit.

Okay, great. Tell me about your -- this has nothing to do with this interview. Tell me about your education.

Well, I graduated in Tallulah, Louisiana, from Reuben McCall Senior High School. And then I came here to Las Vegas. Then I went to Clark County Community College. Went there for a while. And I also went -- here in Las Vegas we had a seminary extension, American Baptist Theological Extension. I went there for, oh, about two and a half years there. And then I also went to college here with the Bethany Bible College. Went about two years to Bethany Bible College. And so those are my experiences. And, of course, they had some training I went online. I did some stuff, the Moody Bible Institute out of Chicago, Illinois. So I did a lot of my education more or less self-education. I call it self, but it's really not self. I had others that helped me along the way. But that's the extent of my education.

Do you remember any of the marches that you participated in, what they were for?

Let's see.

NAACP related marches.

Yeah. I'm going back and trying to think of it. Well, some of those -- well, let me see how far I can go back because I was involved with everything and I didn't always hold fast to exactly what those were. Well, some of those NAACP marches were when there was police brutality. There

was quite a bit of that going on. So we had many of those marches against police brutality. When there were individuals who were fired unjustly, we had marches on that.

We had marches that dealt with -- I can't think of this young man's name, but the police department killed him. The police department had an officer that killed him. He cut his throat, a young man that was in this community, born and raised in this community. Was a dealer for the hotel industry. Decided that he would quit dealing and just walked off one day from dealing and went and started living as a homeless person. And then when the officers didn't like him, for whatever reason it was, they went one day in the desert and killed him. Came out in the desert where he was and killed him and said he was reaching for his gun and all this kind of stuff, so they had to defend themselves and that kind of stuff. So there were those kinds of marches that we participated in.

We had marches for Daniel Mendoza, a Hispanic young man that was killed by a police officer doing a drive-by shooting. There were two police officers -- I'm trying to call it Chris -- I think Chris -- one of those guys was involved with this. We dealt with this. On this one, Ron Mortenson was one of the off-duty police officers along with Chris Brady. They did a drive-by shooting. They were out drinking and then they decided they would go through the neighborhood and deal with some of what they call the derelicts in the community. So they went through this community. Called these -- about six, seven or eight Hispanics over. They were at their complex just doing what they do; sitting out and having a good time. They called them over. And when they came over the police officers began to shoot them. Of course, only one of them got killed. That was a young man by the name of Daniel Mendoza. So we rallied around him.

We really worked hard at getting the police officer, Mr. Mortenson -- now, he got convicted of first degree murder. He is now serving time, a life sentence. This was the first and, as far as I know of, this is the only police officer that has been actually charged with crime and is now currently time, a life sentence right now. Now, we don't know if he's still here in the state of Nevada serving his time because during this time they said we'll probably take him out of state because, you know, the people in prison here they're probably going to take him out.

Then we had the march we did for Sherrice Iverson some years ago. You heard about that. She was a young lady that was killed at one of Primm's properties. The NAACP worked on those

things to get a conviction in that area, as well as to help Mr. Iverson himself because there was a lot of information -- well, of course, these are during some of the times that I was president of the NAACP.

Right. So tell me when you became president.

I became president in 1996. And I served until 2000.

So who was president before you? We're trying to trace --

Mr. Jesse D. Scott.

So Jesse Scott was president in the 90s.

Yes. Yes, he was.

He has forgotten his time and he said that you would know because you're younger and you would remember the years. So he served for eight years.

Eight years.

So it was the eight years just before 1996.

That's correct.

Fantastic. I'm so glad.

See, I got elected for 1996. Our election was held in November of the year. So when you get elected in that year -- you get elected the year prior. Then you start your tenure that January 1. So it was actually in 1995 when I really got elected in November. And I started my tenure in 1996.

Great.

But eight years prior to this Reverend Jesse D. Scott was the president for those first eight years.

Fantastic. How long were you president? How many terms?

I was president for two terms, for four years.

So it was two-year terms at that time.

Two-year terms.

Who were some of the people who served on your executive committee or your officers, anyone that you can remember during those four years?

Let me see. I'm trying to think of it. Of course, Reverend Scott was one who served on that. Reverend Chester Richardson.

He was on the executive committee?

Well, he was one of my officers. He was as I called him the executive assistant to the president. Dora Lebron served with me. Marzette Lewis. Let's see who served in that area during this time? Oh, Lord Jesus. Chip Taylor. Chip Taylor served with me. I'm looking right at them. It's a husband-and-wife team. I'm trying to think. When you asked me this, I was trying to think of the names. But I'm going to make sure I get you all these names.

No problem. Any attorneys?

Yeah. What's his name? Williams. Tim Williams. No, I'm sorry. I said Tim. Was it Tim? But I know it's Williams. And the other one was Thomas Peterson, who's serving here right now. And also Mr. Sales, last name is Sales. I think he works for Harrah's Corporation now. I'm going to get his name here in a minute. I'm looking at these guys. And when you asked me the question, I just drew a blank. And we had -- golly. I always called him "The African Attorney." Matter of fact, when you go on Owens Street and Martin Luther King, his house is sitting right on the corner across from Cox Communication. I just can't call his name. But I'm going to get all those names to you so that you have those because they're there.

Okay, good. What were some of the issues that are memorable --

Wendell Williams. It seemed like to me he was there on the Political Action Committee.

Good. What were some of the issues that you faced in those four years that you were president? Anything memorable?

Wow. There are quite a few that are quite memorable.

Okay. So just a few of those.

Let me give you this. One of the issues that was (indiscernible) that the Hilton Corporation, they fired 30 black dealers. And they were all coming up to time of retirement. They were getting ready to retire. So they fired them all to cut their costs. During my tenure we fought as NAACP to get their jobs back. And because of this it was also agreed that they would put them back with their pay. And also they agreed that they would give the local branch \$5 million to work with the branch to implement jobs and training for jobs. During this time I was working with a young man by the name of -- I think his name was Sam. But it was called the Unibex Corporation. Matter of fact, they have a concession stand, at least they did for years, at the McCarran International Airport out there. So I'm going to get that name again. I just can't recall right away on that.

And then, of course, that fell through because we started having some issues in the branch itself regarding this because some of the members in the branch felt that you know what; this guy is doing too much. And so there was some infighting because they felt that the monies -- and I could call some names.

Don't. You don't have to.

But they decided that this guy is going to get this money and going to use -- you know, going to get it from the organization. Me, I'm very involved with the local nonprofit organization. I'm saying that money has to be accounted for. Anytime you're dealing with nonprofit stuff you've got to have your stuff in order. Every duck's got to be lined up. Every "t" has to be crossed. Every sentence has to have a period. Every "i" has to be dotted. That's me. I believe in work as a matter of integrity because I don't want anything to come back on me, to taunt me. I don't want my good to be evil spoken of. That's just the way I view things. So that was an issue.

And, of course, Mr. Lou Rawls, I was very close to him working in the organization. He worked very close with this organization. The young lady Joann Wesley worked on my committee. And she was one of the ones that was getting together this fundraiser with Lou Rawls. They were putting together a fundraiser for the golf tournament. It was going to be a great opportunity. This happened all during the same time we worked on this.

We worked with the gentleman with the Dodge Corporation. I can't recall his name, but I'm going to find that name out. And they were very instrumental in helping us raise funds and doing what we needed to do for the branch. So those were some of the memorable things right in that particular era.

Secondly or the second thing we did was not only getting the dealers back during this time, but I mentioned to you earlier about the young lady -- or Daniel Mendoza and the young lady Sherrice Iverson. We worked our branch -- see, those are some very memorable times for us along with some other things I'll probably be able to share with you if they all come back to me while I'm talking to you. That's what happens; when I start talking stuff starts coming back.

When we first got the word about Sherrice Iverson, we went to work on that to make sure that Jeremy Strohmeyer and the other young man -- I think there was another young man named Chris. I can't think of his last name, but he was involved with that. Of course, he didn't get

charged. Chris didn't get charged. But Jeremy Strohmeyer did.

That's right.

So we worked on that. NAACP came out real strong about this because we believed that even though there was some responsibility with Mr. Iverson, yet the hotel industry, the properties have responsibility to keep its patrons secure as well. And this was something that should have been caught by the hotel surveillance cameras and the security officer that you have walking around there. How can you let a young man -- make that two of them -- get into the girls' bathroom? The girl, Sherrice was in her proper place even though she was out -- it was around about three o'clock that morning when they found her. But, okay, she's out in the morning. But I was very adamant about this as president. When people come to Las Vegas, they come to vacation. You don't go to bed at eight or nine o'clock at night. You come and have a good time. So many people come here and they stay up all night long. When they decide to go back home --

And that's what they want them to do.

That's exactly what they want them to do. So we encourage this kind of behavior. And then when something tragic happens, all of sudden it's the parents' or somebody's fault. We fought to make sure that didn't happen, so we stayed with this case. Matter of fact, we went public on this as well. All of this kind of stuff went public. Went national is what I mean.

Oh, yes.

So we dealt with that. Matter of fact, there were a couple of interviews I had with interviewers from Jet Magazine about this same thing that we're dealing with. So it was very prominent for us to do that with the Sherrice Iverson case.

And then something in my tenure as well we dealt with the Daniel Mendoza case when I was telling you about the two police officers that did the drive-by shooting. So we worked that case to get this officer convicted because never in the history of Nevada had a police officer been convicted for anything. Anytime you shot and killed individuals, always justifiable homicide. Even today out of the hundreds of homicides -- and I call them homicides by the police officers -- none of the police officers have been found guilty of committing a crime when it comes to those kinds of things.

I can't think of the young man's name, but we worked on that very well, the one I was

telling you about that was homeless. I can't think of his name. But that was a great case for us because the whole community and even other communities looked at this and said this officer had to be guilty. How can you trace and follow this homeless guy all the way out in the desert? And we're talking about in the desert before Vegas really got built up. Why would you in your patrol car go out in the desert where the homeless live and you're out there by yourself and you're just driving through to check and see if they're safe? And this one guy that they had shown several times they had stopped him and harassed him and had arrested this guy on several occasions, now, this is a homeless guy. And they just couldn't understand. He was well educated. We just don't know. Even today we don't know why one day he just decided --

Just got fed up.

Just walked away from the hotel. And then left his home to live out in the desert. I mean just left everything, just no longer live there. And then the police officer, the same one he was having all these problems with arresting him, goes out in the desert and kills him.

Now, he didn't shoot him. And I'm saying this now. The report was that the homeless individual was trying to go for his gun so that he had to defend himself. Now, you've got to understand this. He did not, first of all, shoot the guy. It was proven by many reports that the guy's throat -- and we saw that his throat was cut from ear to ear. And we went to the court proceeding. And they said, well, the way that the cut was, it wasn't that the guy cut him from the front. He was behind him and then cut his throat like this from behind. And he used a serrated-edge knife. Now, you had to be awful close to this guy and all to do this. You know what I'm saying? And then after his throat was cut, then he was shot.

So we know that this officer -- and I can't think of his name -- they moved him straight to the desk and this kind of stuff. So those cases that I worked with are very memorable.

And then, of course, I was president working along with them when we had -- I worked with the NAACP real close when we had the Rodney King riot.

Oh, yes.

We did a march. They kind of thought that we should not be involved in the march because L.A. was being burned and everything else and because we believed that whatever happened on this case there were going to be some disturbances. We wanted to show them that we can yet have a

peaceful march here in Nevada in Las Vegas without having violence. So we were doing a nonviolent protest because we wanted to show them that we could do it. So we did this. And I don't have the pictures with me, but I'm quite sure I can find some. You can go on the Internet and find some pictures about it. We were out there and I was in my African attire.

So where were you?

We marched from here all the way downtown on Main Street. We marched downtown on Main Street to show them. And, of course, we had police all around. We weren't into that stuff. We just wanted to make sure that we made them aware that there are some injustices here. If you convict somebody it may be done well.

We marched with the O.J. Simpson trial, so we were out there on that situation. I know there are a lot of things are thought about that. I said, well, regardless of whether he killed her or not, the point is he went to court. He abided by the law of the land. He used the system of the United States. He won. The man should be left alone. I'm not going --

I understand.

So we wanted to support those. Those are some of the major events that happened during my tenure as NAACP president.

Now, during the Rodney King march something happened. Was there a riot here on the West Side?

Yes, there was.

Have you ever heard that they blocked the West Side so that people could not get out?

Yeah. You could not get out. They did what's called marshal law. You could not leave from West Las Vegas without going through a roadblock. You could not even come in here without going through a roadblock. Nobody that was black was really allowed out of the West Side. You had to show proof whether or not you were walking downtown. All this stuff had to be proven. Yes, ma'am. During this time it was called Nucleus Plaza. Right now during this time it's called Owens West Shopping Center.

That's right.

So I was aware of all this stuff down here because I was working with the NAACP during that time. I wasn't the president during this time. I was working with the NAACP and getting some

stuff -- like Jimmy's Market and everything that was there during this time got burned. And we were kind of watching over the supermarkets back in the community, those kinds of things, before finally getting back on Martin Luther King, which during this time was Highland Drive.

During our time I worked with them to get Dr. Martin Luther King Street up there. During this time it was Highland Drive. And we fought, fought, fought. There was a whole lot of stuff about we can't get this done because it's going to cost too much money. And, of course, we were able to get it all the way down in North Las Vegas because we said we wanted to have a major street. And many of the people, you know, around other states said when they think about Martin Luther King and they look at Martin Luther King and say, hey, how can you make Martin Luther King going so -- normally in most of these cities, Martin Luther King is ragged down streets, but you all got a major thoroughfare. I said that was the whole idea of us getting a street that was going to make a difference. So we got it to go all the way down to Charleston. They fought, fought, fought to go beyond Charleston. And they fought, fought, fought to go beyond Craig. Then, of course, they didn't want to do it. They call it Craig on the other side of Rancho el Norte. But it was fine. Martin Luther King is a very nice stretch of land that represents us well.

Right. Was that the same time that the NAACP office burned down?

Let me see. Was it? I think so because we had -- yes, I think so because we had to relocate the office and do something else with it.

So right now if someone wanted to find records, historical documents about the early people in the branch here, how would we find that?

You would probably go and talk to some of the other presidents like Sarann Knight Preddy and some of those guys because there are about four or five of us presidents that are still here.

Right. That's what we're planning to do. But there are no written records any longer?

Everything burned?

I think quite a bit of those records burned. And that's why we didn't have too much of a history because they were destroyed.

Right. When you were president how did you send your records to the regional or the national office?

Well, the law was that you send them quarterly. And the main -- just being honest with you, the

main part they had with you was that money. It was the money issue. That's what it was. When Las Vegas branch had its problems, it was about the money. And there were some concerns about the branch here; say, well, look, we're here fighting these fires. We're on the front lines. We beat ourselves. And then the national want all this money to support the national. And we say, well, we need money to fight this fire. And then when you ask national to help you, well, I don't want -- you know. And so there were some concerns.

And, of course, there were attitudes from many of the members saying, you know what, don't send the money. If you're going to send some, don't send all of it. Put them on hold. Do it the best you can. And I understood that. And that came up -- matter of fact, that was coming up basically in my last year. In the last year of my last term a lot of that stuff came up.

Come to find out that back in 19 -- what was that? The year that I came into office there was some discrepancy about the records. And I said I came in not knowing all the stuff. So I had to deal with this. That's when the thing began to mount up during my tenure that the branch had not -- because that's when they went back. They went back to last 1996. They didn't want to deal with the current records that were not being given to them. But we were pretty good at sending records.

Okay, good. Tell me about any of the Freedom Fund Banquets that were really memorable during your four years. Any of the speakers that you remember?

I think we had Michael Chavez to come in, the president.

Caesar?

Yeah, Caesar Chavez. We had him to come in, our president, you know, Chavez, president of national.

Oh, yes.

And I'm trying to think of some of the others who we brought in. Oh, Lord, I'd have to go back and look at the records. I can't remember who we brought in. It's been a few years now. But we had some pretty good people to come in. I'm just trying to think. I'm trying to think of some of the people there. I'll have to go back and try to find out myself. Now, do you do too much -- I don't know how much they may have it on the Review-Journal and the Las Vegas Sun.

They might have some things.

Because you can pull up some stuff. You can see right here was just a few things that I went and pulled up.

Yes. Wonderful.

And I thought about it. I said, you know what, I should have gone on earlier. But I was out of town last week and that's why I didn't do that. But I know you can go on and do it because I was pulling up some stuff. But I wanted to get as much stuff as I could. There was one article that I was able to put that had me involved in all this because we worked on -- as the president of the NAACP, we were working on getting the citizen police review board. So I worked on that board to get that instituted as well. And I had Senator Wendell Williams and Senator Joe Neal who introduced the legislation to get it on. It was for years. We fought for years to try to get that done. We finally got an amount of concern with it. I just kind of thought it was almost a waste of our time. It took us about a couple of years to get that citizen review board in place. And, of course, it didn't really have too much teeth in it. So it really wasn't anything. You know, rubber stamp the sheriff's department. It's difficult for the police department to police themselves.

But the good thing about it is since it's in place, you can always strengthen it.

Absolutely. And that's what we worked on. And we said, look, let's get it in and let's at least get one established.

That's right.

And let's go back and do what we need to do because it was a legislative kind of thing. And the legislature has to approve it.

Who became president after you?

Immediately after me it was --

Was it Collins?

Gene Collins. Immediately after me was Gene Collins.

Good. Are you still active today in any way with the branch?

Yes. I go to branch meetings. I work with President Hawkins.

Great. That's wonderful.

I go to meetings and stuff.

Okay, good. Are there any other NAACP memories that you'd like to share that you can

think of now that you've sort of stirred the pot a little?

Let's see. Is there anything else I can remember? I'm just trying to think.

These are the three questions that Frank Hawkins wants me to ask everybody. What are you most proud of in your term as NAACP president?

Well, I think maybe a few things to look at is that, number one, I was able to know when to participate as the president and to have the community to put this trust in me to be president. And I don't take that lightly because during my run for the office I was nominated by who I think was a great man, great president, President Jesse D. Scott. And during those times there were some issues going on in our community, which dealt with ministers and pastors. During the time of Mayor Bob Stupack of Stupack Tower, which is now the Stratosphere, there were some issues going on in the community. We were being told that many of the pastors and ministers had sold out to city hall and they were getting money under the table and getting paid to sell the people out. They were making certain things that we needed to be talking about, but we never said anything about it, never did inform the community about it because we were getting payoffs.

During this time it came to be proven that several of the pastors in the community were receiving money. And Bob Stupack told them, yeah, I gave pastor so-and-so money; just ask him. The issue was real bad about what I say was the integrity of the pastors in the community. A memorable moment for me was when the pastor and President Jesse D. Scott came to me. They said, James, of all the pastors in this community -- I had recently become a pastor of a church -- whenever we bring up pastors in the community about being involved in NAACP who have some integrity in the community, people keep mentioning you, James Rogers, this man we believe because they heard me in the community talk about stuff. And like I say I've tried to be a man of integrity and live -- I said try. I just was out there doing stuff. If something was wrong, I spoke out about it. If you did something great, I applauded you. I lifted you up. That's just how it was. And he came and told me about it. During this time there was a big issue going on in the community about payoffs and bribes from pastors and churches.

So when that happened I was then asked to lead a committee in addressing these issues and stand up to try to fight for the community and fight for the pastoral leadership. So I became -- they made me the leader, the spokesperson for the community for the pastors conference and the

ministers alliance. And that quelled a lot of stuff. And he said since you were able to do this stuff, we're going to strongly recommend you to be president of the NAACP. And to have the community say, well, if he runs we'll support him.

So having the community support like this and confidence, that's one of my greatest moments of being president. I know there are the Sherrice Iversons and Daniel Mendozas and all those things we did for the 30 dealers from the Hilton Corporation and some other things we did in the community. But just to have the confidence of the community; that was awesome. And I never looked for that. I just did what I did. I just do what I do. I'm like Ray Charles. When the fellow asked him, you know, Ray Charles, how do you get that piano to sound like this, Ray Charles said I just make it do what it do, baby. So I was able to just make it do what it do.

Good. That's wonderful.

What would you say to our ancestors if you could? And I don't know if Frank means ancestors when it comes to the NAACP or just our ancestors broadly. But let's say broadly.

What would I say to them? Well, specifically those who have held a torch and carried that torch to get us to a place where we can really make our presence known, I have deep respect for my ancestors. Think about it. I told you I was born on a plantation. To see them go through what they went through, to not try, but to make it better for me that I can now basically live where I want to live and not be denied for my ability like Dr. King said; it just wasn't by the color of my skin, but the content of my character; to give me an opportunity to be able to do this and to be able to do something that makes a difference and then leave such an impact on this community. I know that Mr. James Rogers, Sr., would not be not recognized because I know somewhere along the way I made some impacts in this community. I think my name is out there whereby I'm somewhat respected in the community as a community activist, as a community leader and as a pretty good pastor in the community, those kinds of things, a person that will help you do whatever you can do. That's some things I think our ancestors would say, you know, you did good because when I think about this young man, yes, this young man here I was the first -- I think there've been some since me, but I was the first pastor in this community for whom another pastor really stepped down and passed the torch without a vote. This man said to the congregation that God said that this is your pastor. Like from the days of old when Moses stood Joshua up and said,

Lord said Joshua is your leader. When Elijah says to (*) you're the one that carried on. To have him to do that for me was so awesome. And this is my ancestor. This is my mentor. To do something like this -- you know, those are the kinds of things that people do for you that they don't have to do. And then to have the congregation say, you know what, this man has served us for 36 years. He served as pastor of New Jerusalem for 36 years and we have followed his leadership for these 36 years. And since he's ready to step down -- when he stepped down -- I say step aside. He was 83 years old when he stopped pastoring. And what he said to the congregation is that God said this is your leader and I am stepping down in favor of James Rogers. And he said, now, if you don't want him, then I rescind my resignation. That's what he said. They said if he sent us to you, then guess what? If he said that the Lord told him that you're the man, then we're going to accept you as pastor because he has served us for 36 years and we have spoken to him over the years and we have followed his leadership and know he's blessed. And so if he said the Lord spoke on this issue, we haven't disagreed on other issues with him, we're not going to start disagreeing with him now. And so to have those kinds of things, to have my ancestor say this about me and put me in a position like this, those are -- I want to say to my ancestors thank you for paving the way to allow a young man like myself to come along and make my deposit into this community and into society as a whole.

Wow. My last question: What message would you send to the future generations?

Well, I don't want to be too religious. I'll say it like this.

There's nothing wrong with spirituality.

Well, no. I know. I want to have them to understand that too much blood, too much energy, too much effort has been spent for us to make this community, to make this world, to make this nation recognize us as to who we really are; that we are not three-fifths human, that we are kings and we are queens and we are princes and we are princesses. We are leaders. We have the ability. We are the builders of society and the builders of this world. Don't take this lightly and destroy all that has been accomplished to the point where we have an African-American in the White House. I'm concerned about the generation behind us that may come along and take this too lightly. The way many of us live today and the lifestyle we're living, it just cuts at the fiber of us as a people, us as a race who have done so much to pull ourselves up and to reestablish ourselves as the world's

leaders to just throw it away on a whim.

That's what I would say to them. Just too much blood has been shed. Too many lives have been given for us to throw it away and not take advantage of it. This is the moment. This is our time. And we need to take advantage of this and get back to where we were.

Thank you so very much.

You're certainly welcome.