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Interview no. 762

Leona Washington

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Leona Washington
INTERVIEWER: Charlotte Ivy
PROJECT: Black Community in El Paso
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 2, 1985
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
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TRANSCRIBER: M. Edna Rocha

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

El Paso native, attended Douglass School and Prairie View A & I, presently a leader of black community in El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Her experiences growing up and living in El Paso, the segregation she encountered, her relationships with Hispanics and the contributions of blacks to the city.

Length of Interview: 45 minutes Length of Transcript 26 pages

Leona Washington
November 2, 1985
By Charlotte Ivy
Black Community of El Paso

I: This is the first tape of an interview with Leona Washington. The date is November 2, 1985. Leona Washington lives at 3330 East Missouri, El Paso, Texas. Her telephone number is 565-2066. This is an interview for a seminar paper on Black history in El Paso. My name is Charlotte Ivy. My address is 1409 Camino Alto, El Paso, Texas 79902. My phone number is 532-2376. (Stop in the tape, then resumes) I'm just going to ask general questions.

W: Okay.

I: We can kind of visit as we go.

W: Okay.

I: I think this will pick up alright. Okay. Leona, when did your family come to El Paso?

W: My mother came here with Fort Bliss. She came out to El Paso from Yazoo City, Mississippi because of her health. This was a good climate for tuberculosis. My father came out here with the railroad. Oh, I would say in the early 1900s. I'd say about 1917, 1918, something like that.

I: Did your mama have T.B?

W: Well, no. She actually didn't have tuberculosis but she had symptoms and the climate in Mississippi was so low and it was suggested that she come out here with an Army family. And of course, she was amazed by that family. She had taught school in Yazoo City but because of her health she decided to come out West.

I: So she was educated. Where did she go to school to become a teacher?

Washington

W: To the normal college there in Mississippi, in Yazoo City.

I: What was her name?

W: Lollie Marie Wells.

I: And do you know what the name of the family was that she worked for?

W: I really don't. I really don't. I'm going to have to research that.

I: Your daddy came out here at the same time?

W: Possibly a little earlier than my mother. I guess 1915 or something like that.

I: Was he a Pullman porter?

W: No, he was a blacksmith's helper with the Southern Pacific.

I: Did he work in a round house then?

W: Yes, he did.

I: When did they marry?

W: They married in about 1922.

I: Then you were born? Were you the oldest?

W: No, my brother Eugene Jr. was born first. Then I have another brother Roland Ford, and then I'm a twin to Leander.

I: When were you born?

W: 1928.

I: Did your mother continue to work after she and your daddy married?

W: Yes, she continued to work and later on she worked for Mrs. Clarence Longnecker who were a pioneer family here and lived on Montana. I think it was the 1200 block of Montana. She worked there and after she finished with maid work, she worked for the Popular. I think she was the first uh, what's it...supervisor of maids, at the Popular downtown.

I: What was your daddy's name?

W: Eugene Ford.

Washington

I: Eugene Ford.

W: He was born in Crystal Springs, Mississippi.

I: There were four children of you then?

W: Yes.

I: Where did you live, when you were all young?

W: Well we were born on Tornillo Street and about the age of two or three we moved to 1127 East Overland which is in south El Paso.

I: Is that the Second Ward.

W: Yes, that is considered part of the Second Ward.

I: When your mom was having her babies who delivered her babies?

W: Dr. L.A. Nixon. He was the family doctor.

I: So when you all were sick you went to him?

W: Yes.

I: Did your daddy travel on the railroad at all or was he pretty much stationary. He works... .

W: Stationed here.

I: So he didn't travel.

W: No, he didn't travel.

I: What are your earliest memories of your life here in El Paso?

W: I can remember we lived about four or five blocks from Second Baptist Church and during that time, churches were the center of the black community. Everything that really went on outside of school was centered around the black churches. There was a USO in the old building oh about, in the same block of the Second Baptist, they used to have socials there and when the soldiers would come, of course they were segregated then, they would go down to the USO which is the Masonic building now.

I: Where there alot of black soldiers here?

Washington

W: Quite a few?

I: That you remember?

W: Yes.

I: Were there black families that lived out in town, military families, or did they live on post?

W: Most of the black families lived in town?

I: Then their children went to Douglass School?

W: Yes, they were bused to Douglass school? All blacks went to Douglass School at that time.

I: What was Douglass School like?

W: Well we used to walk to school which was about a couple of miles. They didn't have any cafeterias and the parents would fix us sack lunches. My mother, I remember very vividly, that she would put all of our lunches in a big brown bag and then tie it like a chicken, you know. We would carry that and sometimes she would walk half the way with us. ✓

I: Your two older brothers where in school the same time you were.

W: Yes, we were all in school at the same time.

I: What did you do as far as your friends were concerned? Did you have friends that were Mexican and white?

W: Yes, ahs. Quite of a few of the families on Overland were Mexican Americans and we were very close friends.

I: Did they have their own school?

W: Well, most of them went to Beall and San Jacinto so we would have to pass San Jacinto going to Douglass.

I: So you all walked to school together then, sort of?

W: Yes, uh huh.

I: Primarily then, the Mexican Americans were your playmates?

Washington

W: Yes.

I: The neighborhoods were they segregated at all? Did you feel that there were places that you couldn't live here?

W: Well, at that time there were places that we couldn't live. Yes. Most of the blacks lived in south El Paso and later on they moved to the central El Paso on White Oaks, and Manzana or in places or streets like that.

I: Were they exclusively black neighborhood though?

W: Predominantly. Yes.

I: Did you have white families in your neighborhoods at all or was it just primarily Mexican Americans?

W: Well, there were some whites in the neighborhood but eventually they would move out when alot of Blacks or Mexican Americans moved in.

I: What did you do for fun when you were growing up?

W: We would go to Washington park, go on hayrides, as I said, mostly activities were centered around the church.

I: This was then on Sunday evenings or during the week too.

W: Well, most of the time we went to school and then by the time we got throughwith our chores at home, it was time to study and get ready for school the next day. On Saturdays we would play around in the neighborhood, maybe go to the movies and then on Sunday went to church.

I: Where did you go to the movies?

W: We went to the old Crawford Theater. During that time we had to sit in the balcony and I think we would go to the old Palace, Plaza Theater.

I: Did you have to sit in the balcony also on those?

W: Yes. We would.

I: Did you all have a special name for the balcony area.

Washington

W: Well (Laughs), I don't recall. No. (Laughs)

I: Was the entrance into the movie theater different. Did you go into a different entrance to get into it from the rest?

W: Well, we went into the same entrance but we were, you know, ushered upstairs.

I: If you wanted popcorn or anything like that, did you go downstairs and get it. Were you welcome to purchase things to eat and drink too?

W: Yes. Yes.

I: Did you go to the Mexican theaters ever?

W: Yes, we went to the Mexican theaters.

I: Were you segregated in those?

W: No, not really. No.

I: What were the names of the Mexican theaters that you attended?

W: Lets see: the Alcazar, the Colon theaters.

I: Do you remember what streets they were on?

W: Umm...they must of been on South El Paso, South Oregon, one of those streets, which, there still down there I think.

I: What about when you went out to eat, you and your family?

W: Oh, most of the eating places were segregated and blacks owned quite a few businesses at the time and we had our own eating places.

I: Do you remember the names?

W: Let me see, Winstons'...eating place, let me see, Chat and Chew, Old Man Johnson had an eating place that was later on in the forties.

I: Was it a regular restaurant or in her home?

W: It was a regular restaurant.

I: And Winstons', where was that located?

W: I think that was on Manzana. I think so.

Washington

I: Did you ever go to Juarez to eat?

W: Yes, we went to Juarez to eat too and there wasn't any segregation over there.

I: Did you ever sit with people that were from El Paso that were white in the same restaurant while you were eating in Juarez?

W: Well, not really. Most of the time we were ushered to certain places, you know, but we were not aware because it was all in the same room.

I: Sure. It's about, you know, over here you were segregated but over there you were all patronizing the same establishment, sitting in the same seats essentially. What about when you wanted to get your hair done or your brothers went to the barber?

W: Well, this is as I said, most of the essential places were owned by blacks at the time so we didn't, you know. We had black barbers, black beauticians so we had no problem there.

I: Did the black barbers serve the white people also?

W: There were some that catered to Anglos at that time. Yes.

I: Do you remember when the shorter hairstyles came into vogue. When alot of white women started going to barbershops. Do you remember, if you ever heard of the white women going to the black barbers.

W: Well, I don't know because there were two or three barbers who catered to white clients and possibly they, you know, but we didn't go to those barbershops downtown.

I: So the ones that catered to the whites were mostly downtown?

W: Yes, uh huh.

I: And you had your own establishments in the Second Ward?

W: Yes.

I: What about music lessons. Did you take music lessons when you were

Washington

little?

W: Yes, I did. There was a music teacher by the name of Mrs. Mitchell, and then later Mrs. Hayward, Minnie Hayward, taught music lessons along with several others I don't recall at this time.

I: Where they also teachers at Douglass School?

W: Well, Mrs. Hayward...No, they were just more or less music teachers.

I: This is primarily piano.

W: Yes, primarily piano. And of course at Douglass School our principal, Olalee McCall taught vocal. Most of the children who, you know, were taking music were also going to Douglass School so we had vocal and instrumental.

I: Did you have a sports team at your school?

W: Yes, uh huh, quite active.

I: Who did you play?

W: Umm...We played teams from out of town, like Odessa and Midland and some of the neighboring cities.

I: Black schools?

W: Yes, black schools.

I: Did you ever play Mexican American schools?

W: I don't recall playing...No, because we were in a certain league so we more or less catered to blacks.

I: Did you all have uniforms?

W: Yes, we had uniforms. And won quite a few games too!

I: That's good! Good for El Paso, huh?

W: Yeah.

I: Did you all have a radio at home?

W: Yes, we had a radio, sure did.

Washington

I: Telephone?

W: Yes, a telephone.

I: And did you have your own automobile?

W: Yes, we had an old Dodge, sure did.

I: Do you remember listening to the radio when you were little?

W: Yes.

I: What do you remember listening to? What did you enjoy?

W: Oh, let me see. Ummm...Fibber McGhee and Molly, uh...oh, let me see...By the name of Godfrey and then of course, Mickey Mouse and those types of classics,

I: I remember listening to the scary ones.

(Laughter)

I: And things like Lone Ranger. I remember the beating of the horse hooves.

W: Right.

I: Did you ride the streetcar when you were little?

W: Yes, we rode the streetcar. The streetcar ran down San Antonio Street which was north of Overland so we would catch the streetcar and go everywhere we wanted to go.

I: Were they segregated?

W: Well, yes, uh huh, yes. We would ride in the back of the streetcars.

I: Was there a sign on the streetcar that said that you had to?

W: I'm sure there was. I can't recall at this time but I'm sure it was because many of the drinking fountains and places had colored.

I: Did they have the signs that said "colored" or they also a different color?

W: I think the word "colored" was used.

I: You had different restaurant facilities... .

Washington

W: Yes.

I: Downtown also?

W: Right.

I: Did they say "colored" also?

W: Colored, uh huh.

I: Do you recall if there were ever any boycotts by the black community about the streetcars?

W: I don't recall a staged boycott but it seems as though when the military came it was just quietly, no one would make an issue of it if a military person would sit beyond the sign or something like that.

I: When did the military come? About what time was that?

W: It must have been in the early forties. I think.

I: During World War II was when the military began to expand here.

W: Right.

I: Do you remember if before that there were military families here?

W: Uhhh...

I: Blacks?

W: Yes.

I: There were?

W: Aha, especially at William Beaumont.

I: Attached to the hospital?

W: Yes.

I: Did you ride the railroad, like go on vacation and leave El Paso?

W: Oh, yes, because, you see, we couldn't go to Texas Western. We had to go to Prairie View and since my daddy worked as a blacksmith's helper we got passes to go to and from the school. And on vacations we went to Chicago and Detroit on passes.

Washington

I: Did you have to ride in a special car?

W: Yes, it was segregated at the time?

I: Did you all call it the Jim Crow car?

W: Well, we had various names and that was one of them.

I: What else did you call it?

W: (Laughs) Oh, I don't think I'd better say it. (Laughter)

I: It will be alright.

(Laughter)

I: They weren't very nice names then?

W: No, no.

I: When you would ride for any distance on the Jim Crow car did you have your restroom facilities in that car?

W: Yes.

I: What about eating, if you wanted to eat?

W: Oh, most of us, well we could go to the dining room but, you know, we were four children plus my mother we would carry our lunches we would carry boxes of food.

I: In the diner was there a separate area or did you go buy your food and take it back to the car.

W: No, I think there was a separate area but you would sit in the dining.

I: When you graduated from high school or any of your friends graduated from high school and wanted to earn some extra money, or even while you were in high school and you wanted to earn some extra money were there any employment, areas here?

W: Not too many. Most of us would babysit or do household chores, yardwork and that sort of thing.

I: Did the boys have paper routes?

Washington

W: Very, very few had paper routes at that time. And of course they could work at some of the black establishments.

I: What about Fort Bliss? Were there any employment opportunities at Fort Bliss?

W: They were quite limited, quite limited at that time.

I: Were there just specific areas where you could work and there were areas where you were not allowed to work?

W: Well, it wasn't publicized but those who did seek employment had more or less menial jobs until later on when they hired librarians and people, of you know, of that caliber, educated people.

I: The people that were educated here in the community that came here with degrees or with higher schooling, what did they do?

W: Well, most of them umm...taught school. Many of our young people left because the opportunities were so limited. When integration came many of the black businesses folded. Many of them went to California.

I: The old back end of the south they left and moved to California.

W: Yes.

I: What organizations did you and your friends belong to when you were growing up, besides the church.

(long pause).

I: Did you have any social clubs that you belonged to?

W: Not really for young people at that time, I don't recall.

I: Phillis Wheatley?

W: Well, Phillis Wheatley was more or less an established club for women. I don't think we had any organized clubs.

I: Were you ever a member of the Junior branch of the NAACP?

W: Not really, no.

Washington

I: Were your parents members of the NAACP?

W: Yes, we were quite active. I served as secretary back in the fifties.

I: When the early days of the NAACP, were they a social organization as well as a political organization?

W: Well, they would have social functions but they more or less centered around some of the issues facing the community.

I: Do you remember in growing up that your family, your mama and daddy, and their friends talked about segregation talked about discrimination?

W: Yes, yes, quite often because there were so many places that we could not go. We were concerned about the health problems. Our doctors could not look upon operations. We could not really go the College of Mines at that time. There were many things that we were not afforded the opportunity, to really get a broader scope of life.

I: Did you feel that as a child? Did you notice it?

W: Well, we sensed it especially when we went off to school and then came back.

I: This was after you graduated from high school?

W: Yes, uh huh.

I: And your growing up years, were you ever afraid here?

W: Not really, no. There was an incident that really caused alot of attention when one of our principals was killed. I think that was one of the issues that really affected the black community.

I: When was this?

W: It must have been in the early thirties.

I: Do you remember his name?

W: Professor Bundy is what we called him.

I: He was killed? How did he die?

Washington

W: Well, it was never really discussed in the community. The older people would discuss it but they wouldn't tell us anything about it. But we did know...

I: Was it felt or at least perceived as being a racial issue?

W: Yes.

I: So it was not an accident. Everybody knew that.

W: No, it wasn't an accident.

I: Did you ever hear your family talk about the KKK?

W: Uh, not really. We knew about it from studies and that sort of thing but I don't think that they were very, very prominent here in El Paso. El Paso has been more or less a bit subtle. You just, from the looks in people's eyes you would know you weren't welcome and you just didn't bother 'cause you had the family's support and the church's support. It just didn't really become a part an issue in the young people's lives. The older people certainly saw because the jobs were so limited.

I: Were the jobs limited not only because of color but because El Paso was behind as far as being an industrialized city also?

W: I'm sure that was one of them, yes.

I: Even the variety for menial jobs was probably quite limited?

W: Well, that true and that's the reason many of the blacks went into business, you know.

I: What kind of businesses were there?

W: Oh, gosh there were drugstores, restaurants, and barbershops and then we had a local black paper...

I: What was the name of that paper?

W: It started off, I think The Southwest Guide and then The Torch. It changed names and then it eventually [became] ? Its been around close

Washington

to fifty years.

I: So it was active in the fifties, I mean in the thirties?

W: Yes, aha.

I: Are there copies available from older issues from that time period?

W: Umm, I don't have any but in the early forties I have some of the copies, I think.

I: It would be good if we could find some from the thirties.

W: Yes, aha.

I: Alright, there was a newspaper then, was there any grocery stores?

W: Yes, we had grocery stores.

I: Who were the black grocers?

W: Let me see, we had the Spiller grocery store, the meat market, the Cherard meat market, we had our own mortuary.

I: Who was that?

W: He was Fullmore. He was on Alameda. We had just about all the essential businesses.

I: Did you patronize them. Were the black community members very supportive of the black businesses.

W: Yes, yes. Well, many of them had no other alternative but to support.

I: Did you have clothing stores also?

W: Yes, we had some clothing stores and many of the women were dressmakers but we could go, you know, and buy clothes in some of the stores.

I: The "white only" stores downtown?

W: Yes.

I: Were you allowed to try on the clothes?

W: Yes, at the Popular.

I: Was there a separate dressing area for you?

Washington

W: I don't remember if that was per se, you know, but you were , well...told, you know, you were ushered to a certain dressing area, you know, whether it was segregated or not because it wasn't, you know, no signs or anything.

I: Were there any other businesses? Who owned the drugstores?

W: Uh, we had a Williams Drugstore, Darnell Drugstore, umm... . Those are the only two that I can recall.

I: What about your doctors and nurses and dentists? Did you have your own here?

W: Yes.

I: Early?

W: Uh huh.

I: What were their names?

W: Of course, Dr. Nixon, Dr. Collins were physicians, MDs. Dr. Williams was one of the dentists.

I: Did you have nurses that you can recall that were trained nurses that lived here also?

W: Yes, uh huh, because the nurses at Douglass School were black and Ruth King was one of the first black nurses in the El Paso Public Schools.

I: Do you remember any names of any of the other nurses early on?

W: I have them recorded but not right off?

I: You can't remember?

W: Yes.

I: Who were the most successful blacks in the community? The people you and your family looked to as being prominent blacks?

[Side A over]

Washington

W: Yes, definitely.

I: Did you have any political involvement? As a community did you all get together and try to make things happen differently in the community?

W: Yes, yes we did. And in most of the political rallies or discussions or seminars were held in some of the black churches. The Second Baptist was the leading church at that particular time. We had many of our friends who were white who were very sensitive about some of the issues and they would come over and join us.

I: These were the same people, these were your ministers and your teachers and your doctors that led the community? So they were a professional group? You think very well educated [group], though small?

W: Yes, yes, most of the people were learned people.

I: They were all able to read and write? Not all I'm sure most of them were able to read and write.

W: Yes, most of them.

I: Did all the children go to school?

W: Many of them did.

I: So the parents felt like-----?

W: An education was very important.

I: Do you remember the Depression?

W: Well, yes, I really do. I remember that money was very, very short. We didn't have that much money so it wasn't a crisis it was just that we just didn't have many of the things that were necessary.

I: Your daddy continued his job?

W: Yes.

I: He had no problems with his job?

W: Yes.

Washington

I: How old were at that time?

W: I must have been, oh, I guess about eight or nine maybe something like that.

I: So it really didn't seem like it changed your life very much or the life of the people around you, the Depression?

W: No.

I: That's something I don't know even here in El Paso the depression was felt that much because the economics in the area has always been depressed.

W: That's true, that's true.

I: Were there mixed marriages?

W: Yes, there were quite a few, especially with the Mexican Americans and blacks and when the military came it was on the uprise.

I: These children of these marriages went to school at Douglass School?

W: Yes, at Douglass School. If the father was black they would be considered black at the school.

I: If the mother was black would the children also be considered black?

W: Yes.

I: So it didn't matter which parent it was?

W: That's true.

I: Were the marriages legal, valid?

W: Well, I really don't know but I'm sure, you know, they were.

I: I've read some of the newspaper about the controversies that took place here on the mixed marriages, early on. You know, it was illegal, it was sort of overlooked, it was brought to the attention of the judge and then it was thrown out. But as I understand it these were legal marriages.

W: Yes, uh huh. Many of them went to New Mexico to get a license.

Washington

I: You mentioned your own mortician, when someone died you had then your own black mortuary or your own funeral home. Where were your loved ones buried then?

W: Most of them in Concordia?

I: Who took care of the cemetery?

W: I don't know at that time but Mr. Rozinski came into existence during the time that I had a reason to know about the ownership.

I: Did families take care of their own areas, do you think?

W: Well, most of them did.

I: So the city didn't look after the cemetery?

W: Not really and it doesn't look after it now.

(General laughter)

I: Not then, not now. Do you remember the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1962? When the restaurants and hotels were opened up to everybody?

W: Yes, uh huh. El Paso never did have any riots, you know, and that sort of thing and they just quietly integrated. It wasn't a big, big thing for here.

I: Do you remember the City Council having meetings and writing up an ordinance that opened up the restaurants and hotels?

W: I remember Ted Bender was very active. I don't recall who was mayor then....

I: Sightsinger.

W: Sightsinger, uh huh.

I: Did you ever attend any of the meetings that were in preparation for this ordinance. Did you work within the black community to help get it passed?

W: Well, yes the NAACP was quite active, yes we did.

Washington

I: Who was the head of the NAACP then?

W: I think H.L. Washington.

I: Is he still living?

W: No. He passed away and his daughter is Dellums, representative from California, I think, she was one of his assistants in Washington.

I: Were there any other people in the community that you know of from the white community and Mexican Americans that were supporting the desegregation of El Paso? (Long pause) The churches or the religious community?

W: I can't recall right off but many of them were very, very sensitive and very supportive even if they didn't come out openly.

I: Have you been to San Antonio or Austin?

W: Yes, I've been to San Antonio. My daughter's in Saint Mary's. I'm going there this Thanksgiving.

I: Do you, from talking to people there that you know or that are in Austin, do you feel that your experience as a black was different in growing up from the experience in San Antonio or Austin?

W: Well, the only thing is that the population, the black population was so small here in El Paso. We never did have a total black community, per se, as they have in many of the other cities.

I: You mean a community that was segregated and kept rounded up in one area?

W: Yes, right, because in the early days we more or less were, you know, segregated but it didn't last long because the Mexican Americans would move in and some of the elderly Anglos would not move out. So El Paso is unique in that respect.

I: Did you live with Chinese?

W: Well, we used to go down because the Chinese were more or less in south

Washington

El Paso too. They had their businesses so we were just like, you know, they would welcome us.

I: They were not segregated establishments?

W: No, no but it seemed as though each ethnic group stayed to themselves in the early days.

I: Do you think that, from what you know of the other communities, if you do know, the level of discomfort or fear was different in San Antonio? Was there more animosity toward blacks there, do you think?

W: I really don't know but there were more blacks in San Antonio and Austin and since Austin is the capital many of the laws were made there and they were more conscious of some of the discriminatory issues, where we were more or less a transient population.

I: You felt like the black community here were on the move, they were here for a short time and then moving on.

W: Yes, many of them were because as I said many of them could not find employment. Back in 1884, there were only twenty-five black families so... . Half of the graduates from Douglass moved to California.

I: Did many of those who graduated from Douglass go on to college?

W: Yes, they did. Many of them are doctors and lawyers and owned businesses. Very prominent people in San Diego and Los Angeles.

I: Did you think it all strange in growing up that you went to your school and that you were separated from the other schools or was this just the normal experience for you?

W: Well, we were very sheltered and we would think why should we pass San Jacinto school and have to go all the way to Douglass and we were all friends in the same neighborhood. We grew up with Bert Williams because he lived on Magoffin and we would wonder why he went to San Jacinto and

Washington

we would have to go to Douglass, but it wasn't something that haunted us, you know, kids don't retain issues like that.

I: Sure.

W: We thought about it. We wouldn't go to the same churches, we wouldn't go to the same schools, we wouldn't see them in any of our restaurants, but we would play together.

I: You know, Bert Williams was one of the four council members that voted for Anti-Discrimination Act to pass.

W: Sure. Yes, I know. I've known him for a long, long time.

I: So he was your friend when you were a little girl?

W: Yes, my brothers and Bert used to fight. We'd run him back over there to Magoffin and he'd run us back on over.

I: Do you think the cultural mix here really helped to, not just that there was a small black population, but that El Paso has been maybe more a melting pot?

W: I should think so, uh huh. I really do because sometimes I wonder why they say three cultures when there is many, many more cultures that really built El Paso.

I: What three cultures are they talking about?

W: They're talking about the Mexican Americans, the Indian, and the Anglo. They say that its multi-cultural.

I: Multi-colored, you know, sort of like the rainbow coalition.

(General laughter)

I: Well, I can't think of anything else, Leona, I need to ask. Can you think of anything. What about if you were to see the history of blacks written in El Paso what would you like to see done? What would you like to see included?

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W: Ah, let me see. I would like to see the contributions that blacks have made in building El Paso and the unique gifts that they have really given El Paso.

I: What have they done? What contributions have they made?

W: Well, I hate to say it because I read Ambrose's, Editor Ambrose's editorial this morning about the song, I wrote the official song.

I: For El Paso?

W: Yes, and let me see...Francis Hill's grandfather was one of them Indian scouts and gave the land that Thomason General is on now.

I: He donated the land where the city-county hospital is?

W: Yes, uh huh. Mary Webb was one of the founders of the playground that the children play. And these things are really not known in the overall history. Dr. Nixon was the one that stood up and ordered us to vote in the primary in Texas. There are any number of things that blacks have made contributions that have not, you know, is not written in the history.

I: We need to write them down. We need to have them someplace where people can know.

W: Well, that's true and do you know what Charlotte? We were really going to go lickety-split over here at the McCall Center but it was the funniest thing. The Mexican Americans had asked for a cultural center a long time ago and they just, you know, weren't able to get it because they wanted some huge thing. So when we named the McCall Heritage and Culture Center, well they said, "Why can you get a heritage and culture center and we've been asking for one for a long time." So then the council decided they would change it to the Neighborhood Center. Well, we have Mexican American Bible study and it just wouldn't be fair to

just have alot of black material until we can change it back to a Heritage and Cultural Center. It's a neighborhood center and if we'd have all of the black material and history and everything I guess they would question it. The city still owns the, you know, but once we become owners we can do whatever we want to. We kind of stopped focusing on black heritage and culture but we still do it kind of under the cover.

I: Well, while some of the old people like Mrs. Haywood are still alive we need to gather the information together.

W: Yes, we just missed any number of opportunities just sitting back and doing nothing.

I: What have the blacks built here, do you think? Anything about what they contributed to the community? We have then the land where Thomason is, the playgrounds.

W: Well, now, ummm...I would have to say, of course everyone has done that, but the churches but many of the Anglo churches they're either Southern Baptist or affiliated with some sort of convention or something like that. But most of the black churches are built by blacks because our conventions and conferences and things like that don't have that sort of money and they don't have funds to build black churches. Just like Mt Zion, the people raised over \$300, 000 themselves to build a church.

I: You think passing along education too would probably be much the situation the school system. You really didn't get too much support from anyone for your schools early on did you?

W: No, that's true and right now we're questioning the policies of the El Paso Independent School District. We don't have any blacks in policy making positions and it's because they didn't let us advance early on. We were kept in the classrooms and now they have a policy where you have

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to go step by step. They have just ignored the grandfather clause when the majority of black teachers at Douglass had their Master's and many of the administrators didn't have Master's at that time but they wouldn't promote us and so we question their, you know, situation.

I: Fairness?

W: Yes, fairness. I think we might try to press the issue.

I: What about in governing of the city?

W: Well, you know, with so few blacks and so scattered out we would have to form some sort of coalition in order to be elected and that has been one of our problems. Oh, I guess about ten have run for office but they've been defeated. I believe one day I'll try to run.

I: Yeah.

[General laughter]

I: Well, thank you very much. If you think of any other contributions if you'll write them down for me... .

W: Okay.

I: So we can, you know, be sure we get it all recorded.

W: I think what you're doing, Charlotte, is one of the things that, and I feel real guilty because this is something that blacks should have done years and years ago and I don't feel guilty in that sort of sense but we've been here and we've just done it piece by piece but your going day after day and we were even trying to get some funding to really get a good history of blacks here but we could never get us together and I think your to be commended, you really are.

I: Well, thank you, Leona. I really enjoy it. I'm really enjoying what I'm doing. I think its being in the right place at the right time.

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End of interview