

DECEMBER 4, 1984
INTERVIEW WITH BABA MSHURI
VANESSA AND JANICE

BLACK NEWARK IN THE MAKING

Can you please state your name.

BABA - My name is Russell Bingham Baba Mshuri, my organization name.

Can you tell us when did Blacks switch from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party.

BABA - Blacks switched from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party wholesalely in the Roosevelt administration, Franklin Delano Roosevelt,

Can you tell us why, what made the people switch?

BABA - With the social programs they had that they knew would best benefit the Black, that's the reason they switched from the Republicans to the Democrats.

What motivated them to stick with the Republican when they were with the Republican?

BABA: Well, they felt they owed an allegiance to the Republicans because of the old saying that Lincoln freed the slaves and Lincoln was Republican.

What role did you play in switching the Black Republicans to Democrats?

BABA - Well, I understood the fact that the Democratic Party had more to offer for Blacks at that particular time than Republicans and so I encouraged the Black people. At that time I was living in Elizabeth, New Jersey and I encouraged the people there to vote the Democratic ticket for Roosevelt because of the fact of the social programs he had to offer which far overshadowed whatever the Republicans had. The Republicans had nothing to offer us.

What were some of the things you did or said to encourage the people to switch to Democratic?

BABA - Well, just to explain to them that actually that the program that Roosevelt had to offer, which they could see the social benefits and like that, would benefit them more by supporting the Democratic Party than it would by staying Republicans because of the fact that Lincoln freed the slaves. It was the only reason why they could say that they were voting Republican.

What year was this?

BABA - That was around in '32, '34?

What was Newark like before World War I?

BABA - Well, Newark before World War I was a town that mostly was manufacturing, a lot of manufacturing going on. That was before World War I. Then after the World War I, when that started, then they had a lot of steel mills and like that opened up, and that's when a lot of Blacks came up from the south to work in these steel mills and these foundries because they could stand the heat you know, better than the average white man could.

KOMOZI - What kind of jobs did the Black people have before World War I?

BABA - Where, around here? Before World War I, Black people had jobs say like mostly as delivery men, driving a horse, at that time, you know, it wasn't automobiles, it was trucks, horse driven by horses, and at that time that was the most jobs that they had. And as janitors, and also say in the outlying areas where they had jobs cutting lawns and things like that.

KOMOZI - Services?

BABA - Yeah, services.

What was the racial population like then?

BABA - At that particular time, it was not very, way back then there was not very many Blacks in Newark before World War I. They were isolated, Blacks, you might find a couple of Black families

here and a couple Black families in another part of the city, but there was no, you could say, no real concentration of Blacks in any particular areas at that time.

KOMOZI - Where was the first concentration of Blacks?

BABA - Well, the first Blacks were centered around say like Barkley Street and Clayton Street, which there is no more. Barkley and Clayton Street and Charlton Street, around that ^{re} region, where they first sparsely.....

KOMOZI - About what year is this? After World War I?

BABA - No, this was before World War I when I was a youngster.

KOMOZI - Did the new influx of Blacks that came up for these jobs, did they move in that same area.

BABA - Yes, the majority of them moved in that area.

What would you say changed the racial population from like Blacks and Whites but now there are mostly blacks in Newark now?

BABA - Well because of the fact that Blacks came up here and settled here, you know more Blacks came before of the job situation.

KOMOZI - They want to talk about the way of life before World War I for Blacks in Newark. Like what kind of, where was the main entertainment?

BABA - The main entertainment before World War I - they had say a few cabarets that catered to Blacks, there was a couple downtown around Washington Street and Arlington Street and Augusta Street, and that was the simple form of entertainment that they had. There was little dances that they gave at the different Kroegers Auditorium and the old Armory they used to give affairs like that, social affairs.

KOMOZI - At that time were there movie houses in Newark?

BABA - Yeah, there were movie houses at that particular time.

KOMOZI - Was there segregation in the movie theaters in Newark?

BABA - Well, segregation, they did have segregation in the theaters in Newark where Blacks were supposed to go upstairs and they were not allowed to sit in the orchestra.

KOMOZI - When did they finally tear that down?

BABA - That wasn't tore down until after, that wasn't actually stopped until after World War I, after that, well that was probably around the '30's, the late 30's they stopped that.

KOMOZI - Did it take a fight for them to open that up so Blacks could go in?

BABA - Well, Blacks had to take a stand and say that they had a right to sit wherever they wanted to sit. In fact the NAACP used to send different people in to test it. I remember in Elizabeth we were sent into a theater there that only had, they didn't have any orchestra. It wasn't like they had two floors.

KOMOZI - Was that the Ritz, Baba?

BABA - Yeah, and at that time we were sent in by the NAACP to test it, you know, and we did. I happened to be, myself and another fellow by the name of Harold Epperson, who later married Louise Epperson, who's quite well known here, and we tested it and we went in and we refused to sit on the side that they want us to sit on, and because of the fact that we had, you know it was general admission and we knew that we had a right, to sit anywhere we wanted, so they went and got the police and the police came and took us out of there and they wanted to give us our money back but we said no, you take us back and let us sit where we're sitting, otherwise, but we don't want our money back. So he said he'd have to lock us up so he took us down to the precinct and after we got in the precinct it, of course in Elizabeth everybody knew everybody, it was a small town and the sargeant that was on the desk, because the guy just brought us in and he walked on in the back and the sargeant asked us what the problem was and we said we were

under arrest that the guy had locked us up and he said why and when we told him he told the fellow, you brought the wrong people in here, you go and get the management there.

KOMOZI - White sargeant?

BABA - Yeah, he said you go and get the management because he knew that according to the law that was discriminating and wasn't supposed to be discriminating.

KOMOZI - But they still practiced it?

BABA - They practiced it, but it wasn't, you know it couldn't hold up.

KOMOZI - Did they have a sign up, Baba?

BABA - Nope, they didn't have any sign up. When you came in they would direct you over to this side.

KOMOZI - Usher, uh?

BABA - when we came in he told us to go over that side and we said no I want to go over this side. He said well you can't. I said why - I can see better on this side than I see on that side. I insisted on going on that side where the.....

KOMOZI - Was that your first civil rights activity?

BABA - That was one of my first. Then I had another case in Elizabeth, the Liberty Theater in Elizabeth wherein I knew the management of the theater. In fact, we used to eat in an Italian restaurant together and we became pretty friendly, and whenever there was a good show or something, he would take me and say to me come on over and see the show - it's a good show and I sat in the orchestra and I didn't, I wasn't aware of - I was aware of it, but it didn't occur to me that I should make an issue of it until a young fellow came to me by the name of Kenneth Worden and he said that he was denied the right to sit in the orchestra and I went up to the desk where the cashier was and asked for two orchestra seats and so she said you don't need any tickets, you can go in. I said no but he wants to buy two tickets and she said well I can't sell them to you. She was ready to let us go in and sit for nothing, but she would not allow us to buy tickets for it. So we made an issue out of that but what I found out later that instead of pursuing the case like we should have, Kenny he accepted a settlement.

KOMOZI - That didn't break the walls down the first time?

BABA - No, it didn't break it down but after we went in the Ritz Theater and test that, then they fined the management of the Ritz Theater, and then the theaters they broke it down because they knew, and especially when certain ones of us who they knew were,

you know, spearheading the struggle would go there, there was no question about it.

KOMOZI - Did you think you had a chance of winning that when you first got started?

BABA - Yes, because I was made aware of the law, the statute, you know.

KOMOZI - Was there an organization back then? What was the basic organization for Black people back then?

BABA - NAACP.

KOMOZI - What city did it come out of, Newark?

BABA - That came out of the, NAACP out of Elizabeth spearheaded, started that.

KOMOZI - Baba, would you like to, is there any leaders local leaders back in Elizabeth and Newark, that you remember from that period?

BABA - At that period they had some leadership in the NAACP who were very active and very alert and worked pretty hard to break discrimination.

KOMOZI - Was the Urban League pretty active back then.

BABA - Well, the Urban League was pretty active but not so active in Elizabeth. In Newark the Urban League was pretty active but not so much in Elizabeth.

KOMOZI - Did you catch any flack behind desegregating them theaters in the community? I mean was there a time when a group might say you better not do this or you might lose your job, or anything like that?

BABA - No.

KOMOZI - Weren't worried about it?

BABA - No.

KOMOZI - How come nobody else did that before you?

BABA - I guess it was the fact that people wasn't made aware of it or people just accepted it. After sitting with, we had a pretty, a lawyer there that was pretty up on these things. His name was Leroy Jordan and he was out in politics and.....

KOMOZI - Black lawyer?

BABA - Yeah, he was a Black lawyer. In fact, he was the head of the organization that we finally formed, the Democratic organization there and he was the head of it and he created so much problems to the Whites there that they finally got him a job as assistant attorney, state attorney in Trenton.

KOMOZI - Got rid of him, huh?

BABA - Yeah, got rid of him so we wouldn't have the leadership. They took our leadership away from us.

KOMOZI - About what year we talking about, about before Roosevelt?

BABA - We're talking about just around about that time.

KOMOZI - What about, do you remember, did the CIO do any work around here during that period, or the union.....?

BABA - No so far, not to my knowledge, no.

KOMOZI - Okay. So when did you move to Newark?

BABA - I moved to Newark in 1940.

KOMOZI - Why did you make that move?

BABA - First off, see I lived in Newark when I was a boy. I went to school in Newark and then after the war I went back to, I settled in Montclair and I married up there and then finally the government sent me to school in New York, around New York, I moved to New York for about five or six years then I came back to Elizabeth.

KOMOZI - You were in Newark in the '20's? I mean New York?

BABA - I was in New York in the '20's, yeah.

KOMOZI - What was happening, so you were over there when Marcus Garvey was coming out?

BABA - I was over there, well he wasn't so much in evidence after I was there but he had been there prior to that. But, at that time, " I noticed the way that they operated in New York, the way politics was played there by Blacks. It was for self, self-motivated, what a person could get by aligning themselves with this politician and that politician, and it was mainly clubs, that they would be allowed a club where they would be allowed the gambling privileges and the revenues from that. That was the main thing. "

KOMOZI - Baba, what school did you go to over there?

BABA - Where?

KOMOZI - In New York.

BABA - City College.

KOMOZI - Okay, what were you training to be? Anything in particular?

BABA - Yeah, I was a dental technician.

KOMOZI - I didn't know that. Okay, what was the life for Blacks like in New York in those days? The good life or...? Was this during prohibition?

BABA - This was during prohibition and.....

KOMOZI - Maybe you can tell us what the flavor was of life over there at the time.

BABA - The thing at that time life was in Harlem where the majority of the Blacks settled. It was pretty good providing you wanted to adopt to certain things.

KOMOZI - Like what?

BABA - Well we might say you want to have parties and like that....

KOMOZI - Cotton Club and those things?

KOMOZI - Were there any notable victories they won or struggles they accomplished back then? What were we up against...

BABA - Well, for instance we went up against the fact that Budweiser getting black salesmen. We insisted and went to black taverns and tell them don't buy this beer unless they get some black salesmen. We were able to force that suit and the funny part of it was, the strange part of it was I had a nephew that was working for Budweiser and he was pretty up in there and they sent him up here as a troubleshooter to find out what he could do. I guess he figured he could buy some people or something like that but when he found out that he had met a group of people he said that he would go back there and tell them one thing, that the black tavern owners will not buy your beer unless you hire a black salesman and they did.

KOMOZI - What about Prudential? Were there many blacks at Prudential then?

BABA - There were blacks working in Prudential at that time?

KOMOZI - Banks, big banks downtown?

BABA - Well they did have minor jobs but not...

KOMOZI - What about places like Woodworth's? Haynes?

BABA - Woodworth's and Haynes during that time they had predominately white help.

KOMOZI - Blacks could shop in Woodworth's?

BABA - Oh yes, you never had no problem of shopping and spending your money.

KOMOZI - But could blacks eat at all the restaurants downtown in the 50's?

BABA - In the 50's? To my knowledge.

KOMOZI - Were there any fights, someone told me one time there had to be a fight to desegregate Woodworth's. That must have been a long time ago?

BABA - It could have been, yeah.

KOMOZI - I've run out of questions. What was Elizabeth like before World War I when you were coming up?

BABA - Well, it was like the usual small town and there was not very much work to be done there. In fact, we use to go out to Union to work on the farms out there, picking berries and things like that.

KOMOZI - Was there a big downtown area there then?

BABA - Well yeah, Broad Street.

KOMOZI - When did Singer come there?

BABA - Oh, I don't know. Singer has been in Elizabeth from my memory.

KOMOZI - Were there a lot of black people employed there in the beginning?

BABA - I don't know about the beginning but I know finally there were quite a lot of blacks employed there. I worked down there as a messenger in one of the departments when I was a youngster. That was before the War.

What did you do as a messenger?

BABA - From different departments you carrier messages from one department to another.

KOMOZI - Coming back up just a little - how big would you estimate the Turner organization at its peak? How big an organization was it?

BABA - Well, active members you might have had 20 active members. Then finally it got to be about 60. Nearly all the First District leaders were from the Turner organization.

KOMOZI - Baba, were you in it when the Democratic Party as you know it now was set up in Essex County? Were you involved in the beginning?

BABA - I was involved in the blacks becoming an important part of the Party and taking some sort of leadership role.

KOMOZI - Did you do that - What other blacks were involved in that, in getting blacks involved with the Democratic Party in the beginning?

BABA - From Newark? You had Eulius Ward, you had Lorraine Hayes. Noah Nora Marshall and you had Morris Parker. What I was enthused about was that these people worked and after they got through work they would come into the headquarters and look for their assignment which was going out and connecting people and getting people to come in and run for different districts. They would do that, come in and find out what their assignment was, pick it up and go out and work as late as was necessary.

KOMOZI - A lot of dedication.

BABA - Real dedication.

KOMOZI - Then the blacks have much clout and say-so in the Democratic Party?

"
BABA - The blacks say, around about - got quite a lot of clout around the mid 60s.

KOMOZI - We didn't have the numbers in the 50s, right?

BABA - No, in the 60s they became a real force in the Democratic Party.

KOMOZI - Now is this when you told me that Honey Ward ran?

"
BABA - We ran Honey Ward for County Chairman.

KOMOZI - When did you get the first black Ward Chairman?

"
BABA - We got the first black Ward chairman around '56 or '58.

KOMOZI - Really, who was that?

"
BABA - Eulius Ward was the first black Ward Chairman?

KOMOZI - When did Honey Ward stop boxing, was it a long time before he got involved in politics.

BABA - Oh, yeah. He had stopped boxing quite some time.

KOMOZI - In your experience, what is the main way they divert the demands of the community, they usually buy the leaders off, put them in jail or what type of techniques do they use?

BABA - What they would usually do if somebody would speak up and say what blacks wanted, if you had someone forceful enough to do that wherein they didn't have that in the Turner organization. You had some good spokesmen and there that come out and say this is what we want. Unless we get it you have a struggle and then they could understand that. " The first thing they did was to challenge Dennis Carey who at that time was the County Chairman, Essex County Chairman. They supported another white against him. They had a meeting down in this place, down opposite the park where there was a hotel, down by the park - Industrial something, down opposite

Lincoln Park. They had a hotel down there and they use to have the meetings there.

KOMOZI - I'll look it up. You use to have meetings at the hotel?

BABA - Yeah, they use to have the Democratic meetings, the County meetings down there?

KOMOZI - You use to meet in Newark?

BABA - At that particular meeting we had a group that challenged Dennis Carey and Dennis Carey who was a very shrewd politicians recognized that rather than have problems in the Democratic Party that he had to give the blacks something. The first time we went to him with something of importance was when they had a position for four senators and he had selected four whites.

KOMOZI - State senators?

BABA - Yeah, and we went to him and told him that we couldn't understand why that they had four spots and they wouldn't put one black up there. After suddenly he considered, he said you fellows are right but I will have to hurt a fellow that I promised this spot but he said that's my job. And he did at that time give us the privilege of selecting a black to represent us.

KOMOZI - Who did you pick, Baba?

BABA - Dr. ...

KOMOZI - You are not talking about Mrs. Lipman?

BABA - No, no that was before Mrs. Lipman?

KOMOZI - Before Mrs. Lipman, I didn't know that.

BABA - He told us at that particular time to give him a name and we threw out several names so he said, why don't you give me somebody that has ^{been} being doing something for the Democratic Party and he

said, why not Eulius? And at that time we said okay. We gave him Eulius and Eulius Ward was supposed to run for that spot but Hughes, there was one of the fellows, Charlie Matthews that notified Hughes that Eulius Ward had a prior record and Hughes said he wouldn't run with Eulius because of his criminal record.

KOMOZI - Is that Governor Hughes?

BABA - This is Governor Hughes, yeah. So Eulius instead of, as a rule we would never let him go any place by himself because we knew that he had a fiery ^{per} temple and it might boil over but this time he went by himself. There was nobody to keep his feet to the fire to have him to say, all look, I don't care what you do down here, I'm a candidate from Jersey and I insist I'm going to remain a candidate. So he didn't take that stand, he backed off of it.

KOMOZI - So they knocked that down?

BABA - They knocked it down. So in the meantime, Charlie Matthews who was seeking a spot and once we found out that Charlie Matthews was seeking a spot we said, No, no Charlie Matthews, anybody but him. So we finally picked this Doctor, I'm trying to think of his name. He was the first...

KOMOZI - Did he win?

BABA - Yes, he won.

KOMOZI - Okay, we can look that up. So he was the first, uh, we're talking about detectives?

BABA - Yeah.

KOMOZI - Do you think that Honey would have been a more representative candidate at the time?

BABA - I'm positive.

KOMOZI - Do you think that's one of the reasons they knocked it down?

BABA - Well no, the main reason why was because of jealousy. Charlie Matthews's jealousy? He notified Hughes and told Hughes that he was a former convict.

KOMOZI - So you fixed it so...

BABA - He didn't get it either. Yeah, we made sure that he didn't get it.

KOMOZI - I can understand that. Okay, I'm getting ready to ask you about Adam Clayton Powell in a minute but I want to ask you - so how did Mrs. Lipman get into politics?

BABA - Mrs. Lipman got to run because of the fact that she belong, you see we finally formed what they called a black bloc in the Democratic Party and she was the, say they have a Chairman in the district and they have a male and a female.

KOMOZI - District leader?

BABA - Yeah and she was the assistant leader there in Montclair and we contacted her. The leadership was white but we contacted her and the rest of the black leaders up in Montclair and all through the county to get them to join the black bloc and she did.

KOMOZI - So the blacks in Newark and...

BABA - All in the county, they go together.

KOMOZI - Was it hard putting that together?

BABA - No it wasn't. You would be surprised how readily they came into it. They could understand the necessity of it.

KOMOZI - Well, what kind of abuses were you catching before you formed that black bloc?

BABA - Well before that it was just like anything else without any leadership, or without any coordination, without any group functioning you get nothing.

KOMOZI - You didn't have any clout?

BABA - No we didn't have any clout until we got that. And then once we...

KOMOZI - Whose idea was that, Baba?

BABA - Well that was Eulius and myself and George Richardson.

KOMOZI - Then what happened, how did Mrs. Lipman get nominated?

BABA - Well after - Mrs. Lipman was a person - we felt that the first opportunity for her was to run for Freeholder and we selected her?

KOMOZI - This is in the 60s Baba?

BABA - Yeah. We selected her to run as the freeholder on the Democratic ticket.

KOMOZI - Any difficulty inside the Party getting her in there?

BABA - No we didn't because at that time we had an understanding that for different positions we would select the black person that would run for it.

KOMOZI - So did she win the first time?

BABA - Yeah, she won?

KOMOZI - She's been in office ever since?

BABA - She's been in office ever since.

KOMOZI - Baba, let me go back just a minute to the Irvine Turner organization, okay? Were there any full-time people in that organization?

BABA - What do you mean full-time?

KOMOZI - Full-time people working politically. You told me most people came after work.

BABA - Yes, most people worked, came after work. We had people there in the daytime, a few people that volunteered that kept the place open.

KOMOZI - This leads me to my next questions. How far back have you been working in politics full-time?

BABA - Full-time politics? Well, say well, when I came out of New York I was working in politics in New York to a degree. So I learned how it was operated, that's where I got my basic training, in New York.

KOMOZI - Harlem?

BABA - Yeah.

KOMOZI - Okay, this leads me to my next questions. Did you, how was seeing Adam Clayton Powell rise in politics? Was that anything new at the time for the kind of politics that Adam Clayton Powell was talking about up in Harlem or was that the same old...?

BABA - No, what Adam Clayton Powell did in Harlem, like in the stores around 125th Street where they did not have any black clerks, that he insisted and he was the instigator of them getting black clerks in those different stores around 125th Street.

KOMOZI - And that was more than the old politicians had been doing?

BABA - That's right. The old politicians, the ones that were supposed to be in like Jimmy Hines who was the noted leadership, white leadership of Harlem - he would have a small coterie of blacks that he would cater to that wanted very little. All they wanted was a club where they could operate or something like that.

KOMOZI - Business operations? So okay, this was the black republicans at the time? This must have been the black republicans in Harlem?

BABA - No, no at that particular time Hines was in the Democratic Party.

KOMOZI - They had some black haunchos at the time in New York, right? Didn't they have one black who was the head of the Republicans for blacks and another one headed the Democrats? Black Democrats and Black Republicans, they had their heads in Harlem?

BABA - They might have, I wasn't too well aware of that because it seems that everybody was in wanted something specifically for themselves. There was nobody that I could see at that particular time that I could call a dedicated person that was operating for the best interest of black people. "

KOMOZI - I gotcha. So they represented more of the party organization than the people at the time?

BABA - Right.

KOMOZI - What impression did people like Powell make. Was the party afraid of him at the beginning or what?

BABA - Well he was a wonderful spokesman and he had the church as a base, the leadership. Because of his eloquence in speech he was able to attract people.

KOMOZI - So did he influence the politics in Newark?

BABA " Oh yeah, he came to Newark when Turner was running!

KOMOZI - Really, I know he came during the Gibson campaign, I didn't know he had a history of...

BABA - Oh yeah, he came over. He was here during the Turner organization and we went over there to support him from Newark.

KOMOZI - And this had been going on for almost 30 years, the friendship between.. Wait a minute, you said that most of the politicians were in there for self, so what was Rev. Adam Clayton Powell getting for coming over here?

BABA - Nothing. He was motivated by the fact that he supported black leadership. He felt that we should have black leadership.

KOMOZI - So he's been for black power before they started calling it Black Power?

BABA - That's right, that's correct.

KOMOZI - Well what role did he play in the Gibson election?

BABA - Well he didn't play very much of a role in the Gibson election but nationally known politicians from all over the country rallied around that Gibson election. They came in here and made speeches, toured the area with us to help us.

KOMOZI - What is your opinion of how Gibson paid those different people back when a black politician like Mayor Hart needed an endorsement from Gibson to run for Congress in 1972? What was Gibson's attitude toward Mayor Hart?

BABA - Well it was a friendly attitude. He did whatever he could.

KOMOZI - Did he support Hart for Congress?

BABA - Yes.

KOMOZI - Do you think that Gibson has made blacks in the Democratic Party stronger in Newark?

BABA - Well there is no question about the fact that he does wheel a lot of power.

KOMOZI - So we got more power now than before Gibson?

BABA - I think so.

KOMOZI - Would you say it is because of Gibson's leadership or Honey Ward's leadership or...

BABA - I would say it is a combination of black leadership.

KOMOZI - How much influence did blacks have in the Democratic Party when Imamu Baraka was leading some of these efforts? How much black clout inside the Democratic Party? Wait a minute. You told me about a period when the black bloc inside the Democratic Party would pick candidates. How was that different than when the Black Convention was picking candidates?

BABA - The difference was that this was locally here and that which they tried was nationwide.

KOMOZI - Did you talk to many powerful Republicans in the state and democrats in the state during the period that Baraka organization was in existence, the United Brothers?

BABA - Yes, I did talk to Republicans and Democrats.

KOMOZI - Now what was their opinion of the strength of the organization back then?

BABA - Well they recognized the strength of it and they recognize the need for it and the good that could come out of it. They recognized that. Republicans would come to us too for support, black republicans.

KOMOZI - And Democrats.

BABA - Oh yeah.

KOMOZI - Did that happen before or did this start happening during the organization days?

BABA - That happened after the organization came. After the beginning of commitment to blackness so far as politicians were concerned come out of the black bloc, the Black Democratic Bloc.

KOMOZI - Statewide, Republicans and Democrats - what did they look for in terms of strength of the organization? Voting patterns?

BABA - Yeah, voting patterns. They would come - different groups would send people in to the United Brothers for support.

KOMOZI - Who directed the United Community - UCC elections after the Gibson elections? When Mtetezi ran for president of the UCC? Who was basically leading the strategy for an election fight like that? Was that still the CFUN Community Council?

BABA - Yes.

BABA MSHURI - DEBRIEFING

Vanessa, can you tell me how did you feel about the interview?

VANESSA - Well we interviewed Baba, Russell Bingham and like last time he gave us a pretty exclusive interview and he gave us a lot of information still that we didn't know of.

What kind of information?

VANESSA - He told us about how Newark was before World War I and how it has changed and the racial population in Newark before World War I and how he heard, wait how he got his political experience, etc.

What do you mean by et cetera?

VANESSA - He told us what they assumed. And some of those things was things about the organization that he was in such as the CFUN and the United Brothers?

Can you tell me a little bit about what specifically he said about before World War I?

VANESSA - Well he said that before World War I Newark was made up of not just all black people but blacks and whites. They had their different sections and stuff and Newark had different things like

for instance some of the buildings that are in Newark now were never there and that some of the movies before World War I were segregated. When I say segregated I mean that some black people had to sit in a different place other than white people.

Can you tell me what kind of jobs they were doing?

VANESSA - Well, before World War I? He said it was a lot of factories, mail and factory work.

What political party was this in?

VANESSA - He said most the blacks were republicans, Republican Party?

What school did he attend when he went to New York?

VANESSA - He attended the New York City College.

How long was he living in New York?

VANESSA - He was living in New York for about 5 or 6 years.

Before he went to New York, can you tell me where he was at before then?

VANESSA - Well he was living in Newark but it was like...

Well then, why did he move from Newark to New York?

VANESSA - He said the government sent him to New York to attend college and he was majoring as a dental technician.

What part of New York was this in?

VANESSA - This was in Harlem, I think. No it was in New York City, the college was in New York City, right? But he lived in Harlem, I think that it. Okay, let me rephrase that. The college was in New York City, the City College but he lived in Harlem. Sorry about that.

He commented son something about Liberty _____ and Elizabeth. Can you tell me something about that?

VANESSA - Uh - about the segregation? He said that some people that the blacks were not allowed to sit with the whites in the theatres and I think he said that the blacks couldn't sit in the orchestra.

Why wasn't they?

VANESSA - Why were they not allowed to sit in the orchestra?

Because they were blacks and it was segregated.

How do you feel about that?

VANESSA - I think that blacks and whites are the same, man. They are all people and I think they should have been able to sit where they wanted to sit just like the white people.

If you were living back in that time what would you do to help the black people sit with the white people?

VANESSA - I would do like Baba did. Protest. He didn't really protest but he stood out him and the NAACP and some other people stood out for their rights. Like they said one time when they were told to sit somewhere else they said that they wanted to sit where the white people were sitting. And I think that it was right for them to stick up for their rights if they wanted to sit on one side of the room they should be able to sit on one side of the room if they wanted to because they paid their money. Everybody paid their money to see the same thing.

And when they didn't move from the spot they was supposed to, what happened then? Do you remember what he said?

VANESSA - He said they were taken to jail and they were arrested. But later on the deputy or chief of the department had said that the person that had arrested them shouldn't have arrested Baba and his friend, they should have arrested the management for telling them they couldn't sit where they wanted to sit!

Was Baba at the political full-time while he was in New York?

VANESSA - No he wasn't really in political full-time but in New York he had learned his basic training in politics with political activities that were going on in New York.

He mentioned something about Adam Powell helping people work in stores in New York. Can you tell me something about that?

VANESSA - He mentioned that many blacks were working in stores on 125th Street. He said that Adam Powell caused some black people to start working in stores on 125th Street.

Do you remember some other things he said during the first interview?

VANESSA - Well during the first interview he mentioned that some of the people that were involved in the organization such as United Brothers and CFUN that they were Marcus Garvey, Irvine Turner and a lot of important people and he told us about where the organization started which was the Spirit House which was the home of Baraka and many blacks met there to talk about the different political problems.

Can you tell me did the NAACP help them with the black problems in Newark?

VANESSA - Yes he said that the NAACP helped the segregation in the movies in Newark. That the NAACP would send a person in the movie theatre to check to see if blacks were allowed to sit where they wanted to sit.

Going back to the beginning of the Debriefing, when the black people were working before World War I, about what year was it?

VANESSA - About the year 1932..

Thank you.