

Oral History Project: Black Newark in the Making

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Russell Bingham (Baba Mshauri)

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C.E.: Could you state your name and when and where you were born?

R.B.: "My name is Russell Bingham, my organization name was Baba-Mshauri. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in the year 1898."

C.E.: When was your first experience with the Black Freedom Movement?

R.B.: "My first experience with the Black Freedom Movement was in 1967."

C.E.: Do you remember Marcus Garvey?

R.B.: "Yes, I do."

C.E.: Could you tell us how you met him?

R.B.: "I met Marcus Garvey in New York years ago when I was going to school in New York, the government had sent me to school and I met him there at that funeral."

C.E.: Do you also remember Paul Robeson?

R.B.: "Yes, I do remember Paul Robeson. I met Paul Robeson in - before

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the first world war in Montclair. He used to come to visit a family that I was very friendly with."

C.E.: Do you also remember Malcolm X?

R.B.: "I do remember Malcolm X."

C.E.: Could you tell us how you met him?

R.B.: "I met Malcolm X in New York in the 60's."

C.E.: Which of these had the deepest impression on you?

R.B.: "Well, Paul Robeson impressed me at the time when I met him, a very deep impression because of the - I got to talk with him, you know, personally and exchanged views and ideas and I could say that that was one the reasons why that I joined the Army in the first World War."

C.E.: Could you tell us about your experiences in World War 1?

R.B.: "Yeah, I can. I was in the 369 Infantry, which was the whole fifteenth National Guard out of New York City and I joined up and went up to Tenafly. They were up in Tenafly and I went up to Tenafly to join up there with them and I was inducted in the Service at Tenafly. I was on the boat, I didn't even have a uniform on when I got on the boat, I

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had my civilian clothes and I was given a uniform after I got on the boat and I left here in 1917 and landed in France in 19 - on New Year's day 1918."

C.E.: What can you tell us about the political history of Irvine Turner in the early 1950's?

R.B.: "Well, Irvin Turner in the - in the 19 - I met Irvine Turner in 19 - I became involved with Irvine Turner in 1954, 1954."

C.E.: Were you part of that original campaign?

R.B.: "Right."

C.E.: Who was involved in that - back then in putting that campaign together?

R.B.: " Well at that time there was - Coggins, Lorraine Hays, _____ . These were some of the leading people out there at that time."

C.E.: Was Morris Parker back then?

R.B.: "Yeah, Morris Parker was in that year and -"

C.E.: What about Tim Stills?

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R.B.: "Tim Stills, he was involved in it. The thing of it was what they were doing at that time was you know, trying to get organized Black people together politically. That was the intention that I had and that Black people be able to serve in positions where they should be because of the fact that they had the numbers, you know, like - "

C.E.: Was that a certain ward?

R.B.: "Yeah, that was the Central Ward and the Councilman, you know, the Central Ward and we felt as though that we should have Black people such as councilmen and also should have Black leadership so far as the Ward chairman was concerned and that's what we set out to do."

C.E.: So the leaders at that - who was the mayor at that time?

R.B.: "At that time - Coggins was the mayor at that time."

C.E.: What ethnic group was running Newark politically?

R.B.: "At that time practically the Irish had you know, were pretty strong at that time, you know."

C.E.: We want to back up the history a little bit, because we skipped a little bit, we want to ask you what some of the big differences are between Newark now, and Newark when you were coming up, like what - if

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you came downtown Newark or an area, what would they have seen then compared to what they see now?

R.B.: "Well at that particular time, you would have seen mostly White people down there then in the majority at that time, you know. The difference down there now, you see mostly Black people because Newark has become practically a Black city."

C.E.: Back then what were the Ethnic groups in Newark?

R.B.: "At the 50's the Italians started to come on pretty strong, you know and -"

C.E.: Who are some of their leaders that we should - we might remember?

R.B.: "Well, you had Addonizio."

C.E.: Addonizio was back there in '54?

R.B.: "Yeah, Addonizio was out there in '54. I remember right after in the mid-fifties when we ran - we were running Turner for Congress."

C.E.: Tell me, I am missing this, what year did you all run Turner for Congress?

R.B.: "'56 it must have been."

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C.E.: How did that go?

R.B.: "Well it went strong enough so - to frighten Addonizio so that he figured he would eventually be beaten so then he decided to come out and run for the Mayor of the city of Newark instead of his Congress because he didn't think he could make it."

C.E.: Was it the same group that put Turner in originally that was behind him?

R.B.: "Yeah, the same group, the group."

C.E.: How would you have compared how organized you all was the second time around compared to the first time?

R.B.: "Well at the - you had people, you know serious people that worked hard and understood the need for organization fellow like Clarence Coggins who later on became the chief political aide of Mayor Gibson."

C.E.: When we were young and we came out there for Gibson was there still a whole cadre of people who had that basic experience from back in the fifties with Coggins that worked in the Gibson campaign?

R.B.: "Yeah, there was some of , there were still some of them people. In fact what we did you see, Coggins lived in Jersey City and after it was a forgone conclusion that Gibson would be the candidate, that what

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we did was to get Coggins to tie, to "bundle up" you know so that we wouldn't have any big problems you know any power struggle within the group."

C.E.: Let's go back for a moment Baba, let's go back to - when did you first meet Imamu Baraka?

R.B.: "Imamu Baraka, I met him - well I knew him when he was young, when he was a youngster but you know to - organization wise, I met him in '67."

C.E.: What was your first impression of Imamu when you met him as a man?

R.B.: "When I met him, as a man I found that here was a sincerely dedicated person that wanted to actually help his fellow man and he was not motivated by something for self and that impressed me because as a rule, when you meet people when they get, especially when becoming involved in politics, they have some ultimate goal that they want for themselves and this was the difference - the difference of the politicians that I had met prior to that, and I met quite a few."

C.E.: Was he in any trouble when you first met him?

R.B.: "No, not to my knowledge."

C.E.: '67, where you at the Black power conference down on Rector Street-

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when H. Rap Brown and Karenga and everybody came?

R.B.: "Yeah I was there."

C.E.: Was there a group then or was it still yet to be formed, was there a United Brothers back then in '67 or was that later?

R.B.: "No, at that time it was the United Brothers then later on Karenga felt as though that that name seemed a little sinister and he thought that it would be better to name the group, The Committee for A Unified Newark."

C.E.: You mentioned Karenga, now this is Maulana Karenga? (Yeah) When did you first meet Karenga?

R.B.: "At the Black power conference."

C.E.: What was your impression of him when you first saw him?

R.B.: "Well I was very much impressed with him, he was very intelligent and he had a pretty good idea about political action and - in fact he had worked with some of the politicians, Black politicians out of Washington."

C.E.: So he wasn't green?

R.B.: "He wasn't green, no, he had it."

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C.E.: What did you think of the - did you meet any other people from the West Coast that impressed you at that time with Karenga and was it just mainly Karenga?

R.B.: "It was mainly Karenga."

C.E.: At that early time, what role did he play in Newark?

R.B.: "Karenga came to Newark, he was able to help us raise funds and help us to get organized politically."

C.E.: At that time was there any headquarters?

R.B.: "502 High Street."

C.E.: About what year would you say we got 502 High Street?

R.B.: "We must have gotten that in '67 or '68."

C.E.: Pretty early on. Was the United Brothers Leadership and later CFUN, The Organization, a one man leadership or a collective leadership?

R.B.: "Well, I would say that it was a - I would say it was collective."

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C.E.: How so?

R.B.: "Well, because we sat together, it wasn't one person's decision, we sat together collectively and decided what we thought was best for The Organization."

C.E.: Was one of the first task you had trying to get ^{AMIRI} ~~Midey~~ off that charge there, what was that - the judge was trying to put him in jail from the rebellions? Did that take a lot of energy?

R.B.: "It took a lot of energy, and a lot of energy and a lot of you know, struggle."

C.E.: Did The Organization grow during that period there?

R.B.: "Oh yes, they did."

C.E.: How would you describe that early growth there, you went from - about how many people would you say, was it just five people that started the United Brothers?

R.B.: "From what I understand, I was told about a meeting that they were having upon Avon Avenue near Church Street, that's where they used to meet first. Avon, yeah, up here, at some labor headquarters you know, and Eulius Ward told me about it."

C.E.: The Longshore Men, the Longshore Men's Headquarters?

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R.B.: "Yeah, and Eulius Ward told me about it and he said that he thought that it was a good idea because Black people were trying to get together to get something for Black people and I was interested in that, and I went with him to the next meeting and after that we had a couple of meeting after that, we met down in - what's the street where he lived in - Sterling Street yeah."

C.E.: Did you meet at Spirit House?

R.B.: "Yeah, we met at the Spirit House there."

C.E.: Alright. So who was involved in that early period, people like Gibson and Harris _____?

R.B.: "No, at that particular time, it was Eulius Ward, Harfold Wilson, and -"

C.E.: Was Dave Barrett back by then?

R.B.: "Dave Barrett came in and then there was -"

BuGG
C.E.: John Bug?

BuGG
R.B.: "John Bug and -"

C.E.: Ralph Grant?

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R.B.: "No, Ralph Grant came in later, what's his name now, he died here a few years ago, I can't think of his name now, he ran for Mayor too you know."

C.E.: Okay, I know who you talking about, he became the head of Manpower under Gibson, very articulate, his name will come up when we get to that '68 convention.

C.E.: I want you to back up a little bit and ask you what is the Spirit House and what does it represent?

R.B.: "The Spirit House was the home of Baraka and a meeting place for Black people that - you know, to congregate there and express their ideas and views and help towards organizing a Black outfit."

C.E.: How would you characterize Gibson's first attempt to run for Mayor in '66?

R.B.: "Well, Gibson's first attempt - he did not - he had people, Black people wanted to support him at that time the majority of the people that had been Harry Wheeler's fellows."

C.E.: Did he support him back in '66?

R.B.: "No, in '66 he didn't but we - a group of us from the Turner Organization went to Gibson and asked him if he was going to run in

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'66. He told us that he was not going to run and then the next thing we do, we turn around and the advisor for - what's this guy's name, you know you must forgive me, these names slip me, he was a District leader and then I think if I am not mistaken, he was an Assemblyman, George Richardson, it was through the advice of George Richardson he ran."

C.E.: What was your _____ back there, you think he had, Freedom?

R.B.: "Freedom-Democrats, right there, but he - see George encouraged him to get out there and at the last minute, he got out there, but when he got out there, after telling us that he was not going to get out there then we turned our support to Addonizio - with Addonizio. We went to him first and after he said he said he wasn't going to run then we turned our - gave our support to Addonizio."

C.E.: How did Gibson do in '66?

R.B.: "Well, he didn't do anything, he was poorly organized, he wasn't organized."

C.E.: Well, how did Gibson get so organized by 1970? Can you explain that process?

R.B.: "Yes, of course, see the fact - it was a known fact that he had already tried the water, you know, that he had tried and people took it for granted that once we had this good organizational push and with him

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behind that we would be able to make it."

C.E.: Okay.. Well, maybe you could describe to me, how did this small group of people, United Brothers, get the reputation of being so good politically, what kind of - how did that thing develop so that -"

R.B.: "Well, it developed because this was what people were looking for, they were looking for an avenue to travel, you know, because they were becoming more conscious of Blackness and organization - organization of Black people with me and how it could further their interest politically, they were becoming more aware of that everyday, so it wasn't hard to rally Black people for him with Richardson."

C.E.: Would you say the people were more active back then than they are now? Politically active? Tenant organizers, PTA people? Or the Organization basically made the difference?

R.B.: "The Organization made the difference. The fact that they had these young people out there ready to give of their time and their services and everything, it got people wanting to become more involved and wanted to be more helpful."

C.E.: Well, about how much time did it take back then, how long did people work, what was a regular day?

R.B.: "Well, you had no time. You worked whenever was necessary as

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long as was necessary."

C.E.: Well, what do you mean, they work up to dinner time?

R.B.: "No, there was no such a thing as working up until dinner time you worked whenever was necessary.

C.E.: You mean they might work into the night?

R.B.: Yes, oh we did work in the night, in fact we used to be out some of our things was like we wouldn't leave the Headquarters until 12 o'clock at night, putting up posters and things like that, you know."

C.E.: Some people are saying we won these elections by luck?

R.B.: "No, hard work."

C.E.: Were there many planning meetings for these elections?

R.B.: "Many planning - yes."

C.E.: What kind of things did they talk about in a planning meeting there, would it be strategy and tactics or ?

R.B.: "Strategy and tactics and how to get more people involved and how to let people as though that they were actually a part of it, you know."

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C.E.: Who's idea was it to hold the Black Political Convention at West Kinney Junior High School in 1968? What was the idea behind that? We got Karenga, Baraka.

R.B.: "Well, that was the group, the group of them."

C.E.: And what was the intention, what did we plan to happen there -?

R.B.: "Well, they figured at that time, to hold a convention there that they would get Black people more involved, more conscious of the fact, of the necessity of organizing Black people politically."

C.E.: Did your group grow any from - after that convention?

R.B.: "Oh, yes."

C.E.: Picked up a lot of people who came there?

R.B.: "Yes, we did, yes."

C.E.: How many people would you say were involved in the group before the Gibson election, the fore group, the Organization? What would you - would you like to guess at what the membership number was back then, 100 people?

R.B.: "Well, I would say at that time about 100 people."

C.E.: And how many supporters would you say, active supporters?

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R.B.: "We had active supporters from the - around the country, I might say that we had different organizations, White organizations that understood what we were all about. They thought it was a worthwhile endeavor and they donated money because without that, you know, we would have been in pretty bad shape, you know."

C.E.: Was there any other kind of support that you got from around the country?

R.B.: "Financial support? We got it."

C.E.: What role did Jesse Jackson play in the Gibson elections? Did he help out any in terms of resources?

R.B.: "Well, I think -"

C.E.: Someone told me something about entertainers, he helped get entertainers in here?

R.B.: "He might have, I am not clear on that."

C.E.: What was the difference between 1968 political convention and that Black and Puerto Rican Convention in 1969 at Clinton Place Junior High?

R.B.: "Well, it was more widely attended, you know."

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C.E.: There was, if I remember right, a slate came out of the '68 convention and ran the Council Mannex Seats. You care to comment on the results of that election, the '68 election.

R.B.: "Ewing got in but Ewing was on the - he wasn't with us."

C.E.: What would that be - what about the ticket that came out of the '69 convention?

R.B.: "Out of the '69 convention, we did make more headway, you know, it would seem."

C.E.: What do you remember most about the Garry Convention and the National Black Political Convention in 1972?

R.B.: "What do I remember most about that? I remember mostly about it that the people went there to take care of business and that they were not there in the interest of one simple - one particular person. They were there as a group, in fact, just like I told you before, at one stage, when it seems as though that some of the Black political figures, Congressmen and a sector, they tried to take over the show and the people raised up in protest against that and said, we are here to unify, the people said that, we want unity, we do want to be involved in no power play, by any individual."

C.E.: Were there many people from Newark at that Garry Convention?

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R.B.: "Oh yes indeed, yes."

C.E.: What did you all take, a busload out or a plane load?

R.B.: "We took a plane out."

C.E.: Did the local people here, community people have any role in planning the Garry Convention?

R.B.: "The local people?"

C.E.: Like - what we had, they had the CFUN Community Council?

R.B.: "Yes, we did have - yeah."

C.E.: And they played a role in building up that, the whole movement there before there was even a Garry Convention as I remember?

R.B.: "Right."

C.E.: What do you remember about Jesse Jackson from that Garry Convention?

R.B.: "Jesse Jackson at that particular time, said one thing that kind of confused me because of the way he said - I am sure that he said this as though that politics, the Democratic politics was a nasty

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thing - but he said, 'Cut us out or cut us in'.

C.E.: What are your personal feelings about Jesse Jackson as a person and as a political figure?

R.B.: "What do I think of him? Well, I imagine that he has tried to rally Black people together, to unite them together in this Rainbow Coalition, but I don't know as a politician how he stands so far as the masses are concerned."

C.E.: Did you work in Jackson's campaign in '84?

R.B.: "No."

C.E.: What do you think about his voter registration efforts, the amount of people who registered to vote in '84.

R.B.: "I think that he was very helpful in getting Black people to register."

C.E.: Was there any similarity with that big record turnout for Jackson and the kind of voter registration campaign you had in Newark for the Gibson election?

R.B.: "Well, you see during that election, the Banner registration, if I am not mistaken came around about in '63 in 1963 when they registered

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eighty-some thousand people in th county of Essex."

C.E.: Who was instrumental in working on that campaign?

R.B.: "At that particular campaign, Eulius Ward had me appointed Director of Voter Registration in the County of Essex."

C.E.: So you had a lot of experience in voter registration by time Gibson came along?

R.B.: "Oh, definitely."

C.E.: Were you - who was in charge of voter registration for the Gibson campaign?

R.B.: "I was practically in charge of that."

C.E.: How did you feel about Mr. Jackson's campaign for the Democratic nomination?

R.B.: "Well, I felt as though it was necessary and I felt as though that he did a good job, you know, of course - actually he knew that he couldn't, you know, make it but to arouse the people and get them unified behind the candidate, was a good idea, a good effort."

C.E.: Did you think in the beginning, a year ago, that he would have went as far as he did with that campaign?

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R.B.: "Well, I saw the possibility of it."

C.E.: So it wasn't a surprise to you?

R.B.: "No."

C.E.: Do you think Jesse Jackson would be successful as a president?

R.B.: "Well, that's a little hard to say, that's a little difficult to say."

C.E.: What was your favorite program in the organization, the African Free School, the Spirit House Players, the Singers and Dancers or the politics?

R.B.: "Well, I was more involved in the politics than anything else."

C.E.: Well, looking back on it now, would you say it was - you got a great deal of satisfaction from that work there, the success in that area?

R.B.: "Yes, I would say so."

C.E.: And what about the people around you, did you train many young people in politics back then?

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R.B.: "Yes, we did."

C.E.: Do we see any of them around these days or what?

R.B.: "Yes, we see a few of them around here."

C.E.: How would you compare the level of organization and the quality of leadership in CAP as an organization to other organizations in the country in the early '70's?

C.E.: "CAP? Our organization? Well -"

C.E.: Would you say it was like less organized than other groups, more organized or about the same?

R.B.: "I would say it was more organized than the other groups."

C.E.: Than any group in the country at the time?

R.B.: "I think so. The fact of it that we had associate groups all through the country."

C.E.: Now, let me ask you, after the Gibson elections, did the Organization grow right after the election or did it decline?

R.B.: "Well, after the election, I'd say the Organization -"

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C.E.: I am talking about right after the Garry Convention - I mean the Atlanta convention and stuff like that.

R.B.: "I think it declined. You want to know why?"

C.E.: Tell me why?

R.B.: "I think there were a lot of things, issues brought up that people didn't understand and weren't able to deal with it and that's why, it -"

C.E.: So you think it dealt with much more immediate issues before the elections?

R.B.: "Yes, I think so."

C.E.: And people responded to them?

R.B.: "Well, I think people weren't able to handle it, because it wasn't up to that, the next step they weren't up to it - ready for it."

C.E.: So, did the people you know in CAP, do they miss the organization or - and the supporters, the members in the organization, did they miss the organization?

R.B.: "Yes, they do."

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C.E.: How - in your experience, how did your experience with the Organization end?

R.B.: "Well, I would say it ended in a favorable attitude with respect for people's thinking, even though it might have not have, you know, been, just what I wanted it to be but I still respected their thinking in fact, I feel sometimes that perhaps I was educated to the degree that I could go further."

C.E.: These are some background questions, I would like to get? When Balozi Zayd, when the BCD was still in Newark, after they split, was there much difficulty in rebuilding the basic organization after the East Orange bunch split?

R.B.: "No, no."

C.E.: Because I see that somehow you guys managed to build that organization up in less than a year, to win that election in my estimation of it. How early was Gibson, Harris, involved in the United Brothers?

R.B.: "Well, let me see - Gibson and Earl Harris they started attending the meetings in '69 I think."

C.E.: About '69, so even - that's even after the West Kinney convention?

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R.B.: "Yes, to actually, you know, to attending the meetings."

C.E.: And were they part of the core of the group at the time, were they part of the core group, United Brothers at the time, or did they just sit in?

R.B.: "They only used to sit in at the meetings, you know, and express their ideas, like that you know."

C.E.: How did Earl Harris get involved in this whole campaign, can you tell us some early experiences you had with Earl Harris? How did he even get picked to run for counselor?

R.B.: "Well, how he got picked, I think I had something to do with that at that particular time, because we were all sitting around in a group and we were discussing candidates, so at that time we were talking about Earl Harris - I mean Harry Wheeler was considered for the Mayor, but he had a job in Washington and he wasn't ready to give that up and we told him that we didn't have time, we couldn't wait until he got through in Washington, that if he decided he was going to run, he would have to come out right then."

C.E.: Excuse me, is this 1969 we are talking about?

R.B.: "Yeah, and he didn't you know, so therefore we threw our support to Gibson. Well, Earl Harris was sitting around the table, and I asked

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Earl, I said Earl why don't you get out there and run and his answer was, "I can't afford it. I owe a lot of money from my prior election and I am broke." And I told him, I said, well we are going to financially support our candidate and he said "Okay." He agreed to run."

C.E.: What was Earl Harris doing before this - what was he doing for a living at that time?

R.B.: "I am not too clear on that."

C.E.: Is it after he was running that restaurant called Piggy Wiggies?

R.B.: "No, this was before that."

C.E.: What do you think of Earl Harris in his earlier days?

R.B.: "Earl Harris in his early days was always a fellow that tried to get over in my opinion. He was trying to get over, trying to make a go of it, in fact he was a Republican and he ran for Freeholder, he ran for Freeholder on the Republican ticket and the Black people decided that they would support him even though he was a Republican and they supported him and they elected him, but after that - the Republicans found out that he was leaning more towards the Democrats than his own party, they decided to put him in the spot where he couldn't win so that - they ran him for a position where they knew he couldn't win - it wasn't the Assembly, could have been for Congress, I don't remember I am not clear on that, but I know they ran him in a spot where they

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knew he couldn't win, he lost."

C.E.: Getting back to the United Brothers, how did they start and what was their purpose?

R.B.: "The United Brothers started - it was a group of fellows that decided to get together and further educate Black people politically so that they would know that in unity there was strength and be able to get some of the things that was necessary for Black people."

C.E.: Earlier on in the interview, you said Gibson was disorganized, how so?

R.B.: "Oh, in '66, yes I would say he was disorganized because he wasn't clear on what he was going to do, in fact he told some people that he wasn't going to run in '66 and then did get out and run after they had placed themselves with somebody else, the White candidate."

C.E.: What would you say was the difference - did the Organization make a difference in Newark's politics, I mean looking before and after the organization?

R.B.: "Oh, definitely."

C.E.: What would you say the major, some of the major differences are between when the Organization was here, before the Organization

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and after?

R.B.: "Well, at - they made a difference politically, so far as politics was concerned inside - and that was an off-shoot from the Committee for Unified Newark."

C.E.: Do you think there is an organization such as the United Brothers that have a great impact on the people in the community? Now, an organization like the United Brothers in any part of the world?

R.B.: "No, I don't think so but I think there is a need for it."

C.E.: Do you feel that there ever could be one?

R.B.: "Oh, there is a possibility."

C.E.: Okay, what kind of people were in the United Brothers, men and women, young and old or -?

R.B.: "Mostly young people in the United Brothers. They were high school and young college youngsters, you know."

C.E.: And where did they come from, did they come from all over the country?

R.B.: "No, mostly they came from around this section Newark."

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C.E.: Being as experienced in the Black Freedom Movement as you are, would you say that it has really progressed over the years?

R.B.: "Yes, I think so. I feel as though it has. In fact right here for instance, the s_____ off here where we have the senior citizens and we have our meetings and we have these politically involved people to come in and talk to us, you know, and we talk to them and tell them what we expect them to do as our representatives, I think that is all and an off-shoot of the Organization, where we have a tenant leader like Mrs. Holman who is involved in the Civic endeavors here in the city."

C.E.: What was the Black political representation like before the elections - were they - I mean before the organization, was there much Black representation in the government around here."

R.B.: "No, it wasn't too much, no."

C.E.: What would you say - what would you say how far we have gone now, in terms of Black just in terms of skin representation, color?

R.B.: "Well, so far as Blacks are concerned, naturally you have more Black representatives now at this particular time than you ever had before, but not as many as you should have. We should have a Congressman."

C.E.: Why - can you go into the background of how this new Congressional

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District was formulated, the new Lines, the ones -2

R.B.: "Well, after all the new Lines didn't hurt us so far as the group is concerned but when you got a person like - we say that we don't believe in prejudice, you know, and say that when a person is capable and able, I think that's the attitude that a lot of people take so far Rodino is concerned because even though he is White, he definitely tries to serve his constituents who are Black, in fact he's even involved with the Black Caucus in Washington."

C.E.: Has he gotten more involved since there is Black power here?

R.B.: "Oh definitely."

C.E.: Were you in the meeting when Martin Luther King came to Newark in 1968, I think a little before he was assassinated, he met with Baraka, were you in that meeting?

R.B.: "Right, I wasn't in at that meeting, no."

C.E.: Do you remember what came out of that meeting, what did King have in mind?

R.B.: "No, I am not clear on that."

C.E.: There were some rumors that he wanted to call a Black Leadership

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Conference, some kind of unity?

R.B.: "I am not clear on that."

C.E.: Who influenced you the most when you were a child, because you have done so much, who was it that encouraged you?

R.B.: "Who was it that encouraged me? I might say that a person that had a lot of influence on me involved in the Black political set-up was Eulius Ward, who happens to be the Democratic Chairman of the Central Ward."

C.E.: How so? When did you first meet Eulius Ward?

R.B.: "I met Eulius Ward in the fifties, with the Turner Organization in '54."

C.E.: Was that fairly militant community based organization?

R.B.: "Yes, it was."

C.E.: How would you compare that original Turner Organization to the kind of movement we saw in the sixties with the Organization?

R.B.: "Well, of course this was just a small replica of the United Brothers."

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C.E.: It was a pretty dedicated core of people?

R.B.: "Yes, it was."

C.E.: Was Mrs. Holman involved in the Irvine Turner campaign?

R.B.: "No."

C.E.: About when did she come into the -?

R.B.: "Well, she came into the organization, you know, when it was down on High Street."

C.E.: In that period there?

R.B.: "Yes."

C.E.: I would like to ask you, what was your relationship with Eulius Ward?

R.B.: "My relationship was that I worked with him in the political arena and at that time, he was busy working in the daytime and I used to try to hold the fort down in the day until he arrived there at night."

C.E.: Getting back to Newark, do you feel that Newark has weakened in the past few years? Basically the Black people.

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R.B.: "Weakened? No, I don't think so."

C.E.: What kind of impact did the organization such as the United Brothers have on Newark as a whole?

R.B.: "I think it had a very good impact on them. It taught them pride and respect and the need for organization."

C.E.: So you think it was a lasting one? Do you think the people who you managed to reach passed it on to their kids, managed to pass it on?

R.B.: "Well, I would hope so."

C.E.: How would you describe the situation inside the Democratic Party in the Central Ward between med-school crisis and Gibson's election, was that party pretty much unified with the Essex County Democratic Party, or was there some fighting going in there based on the med-school crisis?

R.B.: "There was a fight going on because of the med-school crisis, is why at that particular time that we turned on - when I say we which was mostly the Turner organization then- turned on Addonizio and told him that we no longer would support him."

C.E.: Was that - why was that such a big fight?

R.B.: "Well, because it uprooted people, they said people had to get

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out because they were going to build a med-school but they gave no place to go, they didn't supply housing for them, just uprooted them."

C.E.: Who was the Chairman of the Party - the Essex County Democratic Party then? County Chairman?

R.B.: "The County Chairman was -"

C.E.: It was the guy before Lerner?

R.B.: "Yes."

C.E.: Did this fight here have anything to do with Lerner coming in there after that?

R.B.: "No, the Chairman decided he was going to resign and I asked him why and he told me that it was a smart man that knew when to quit."

C.E.: Did he give you - now how come the Chairman didn't try to mediate that med-school crisis and keep the party together during that period there? He didn't take you all seriously?

R.B.: "No, at that time it was more of a city thing, it was a case of who was going to get this and that, there's always some, you know, grass being given out when they build these big places and this was an opportunity of Addonizio to get feathered and he didn't want to hurt Addonizio."

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C.E.: Now, wait a minute, Addonizio must have been a pretty shrewd politician, didn't he know that you all was going to come up against him if he did that whole med-school thing?

R.B.: "Yeah, but he said, he took the attitude that this is what he wanted and there was a reason why, you understand, but the fact of it, when we told him, so he said well if you don't like what I am doing vote against me, and we said we will, we'll get you. "

C.E.: He didn't think you would get him?

R.B.: "He didn't think so, no."

C.E.: Well how many people, in terms of the political establishment, who thought that we could beat Addonizio in 1970, were people - did many people think that we could beat him?

R.B.: "The former - I sat with the former Dennis Carey, Eulius Ward, and George Richardson, myself sat with Dennis Carey down in Spring Lake and Dennis Carey told us that he thought we should support Addonizio because Addonizio had more to offer, and I told him that we under no conditions would we support Addonizio because of his stand with the hospital thing and so he said, well what are you going to do, I said, well what we gonna do, we gonna run Eulius Ward for the County Chairmanship, he said you can't win it, I said I know that, but we can solidify the Black votes and get all the Black votes together and then throw them where we want to throw it at the last minute, we

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will beat Addonizio."

C.E.: You guys were taking a pretty big chance back then weren't you?

R.B.: "We had nothing to lose and we did that and we organized the Blacks, we went all over the county and got all the Blacks and they called it the Black Block and we went up to Bloomfield School and the Black Block was decisive that time in who was going to be the Chairman, we threw all our support to Lerner."

C.E.: He was a new man?

R.B.: "Yeah. We had an agreement with Lerner that we would be able to pick the Black candidates that run for office and he agreed for that, and he stayed with that."

C.E.: What would you say were the odds politically - like for a betting man when you went up against this, basically you went against the whole establishment and had faith that you could rally these people? Right?

R.B.: "Well, I had faith in Black people because Black people -"

C.E.: I mean the other side had all the money right?

R.B.: "Yeah, but we had the numbers, once we had a Black solid vote, we could line them all up one way, then that constituted the bulk and

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once we could move that in any direction we wanted it, then we were home free."

C.E.: Okay, now, when you first met Baraka did he know much about electoral politics?

R.B.: "Well, I don't think so."

C.E.: So where did he learn to become so astute?

R.B.: "Well, he became involved, for one thing he was sincere, you know in his purpose in his endeavors and he read a lot, you know, and he listened and he learned that way."

C.E. Who would you say - if you named five people, or maybe I am naming too many, that were his chief political advisors in the early years, who would you say he learned the most from during that crucial period? Eulius Ward was pretty much involved?

R.B.: "Yeah."

C.E.: Would you put him -?

R.B.: "He was one of the people yeah."

C.E.: Yourself?

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158 R.B.: "One of them."

C.E.: Who else would be very influential?

R.B.: "Harry Wheeler."

C.E.: (How come Irvine Turner was not involved in this thing, was he still as militant by - "

R.B.: "Irvine Turner had become a sick man during that time, you know, and he couldn't function any more."

C.E.: But his organization -

R.B.: "His organization had split."

C.E.: And some of them had went with Baraka?

R.B.: "Right."

C.E.: Would you say that Baraka - his organization - the Organization inherited a lot of the political experience from all the groups that came before, like the Coggins - the Turner group, the Garveyites and stuff like that or were people usually green when they came into the Gibson campaign? The people generally had political training?

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R.B.: "Some people had some political experience and some were new. The new people were easier to get along with."

C.E.: How so?

R.B.: "Well, because they would take directions."

C.E.: What did the other people do?

R.B.: "Some of them thought that perhaps they had a little more knowledge and wanted to go this way instead of coming around this way."

C.E.: I would like to back up and ask you, what was the med-school crisis?

R.B.: "The med-school crisis was where this land over here where we have the med-school, over here, (The College of Medicine and Dentistry) at that time there was Black people living all around there and they decided they were going to take that land and put the med-school there and uproot the people that lived there, without making any arrangements for them to - you know, for where they were going to live and that we- we became up in arms about that. The group got together and we started to fight them, at that time Harry Wheeler, Eulius Ward, Lorraine Hays, myself -"

188 C.E.: Was Connie W _____?

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R.B.: "To a degree but no much."

C.E.: What about some of those labor people? Were any of those -?

R.B.: "We had some of the - we had a small group of White people that was with us in that."

C.E.: Was the Tom Hayden group with you on that struggle there?

R.B.: "No, Tom Hayden group was with Richardson, whatever Richardson wanted to do."

C.E.: What role did Richardson play?

R.B.: "Richardson played no role in the med-school crisis."

C.E.: Do you think that the med-school crisis may have happened so that the rebellion happened in the '67?

R.B.: "That's one of many things."

C.E.: Was Newark easier to organize politically before or after the rebellion in '67?

R.B.: "Well, Newark was easier to organize after the rebellion."

C.E.: Could you describe? What were some of the differences, was it -?

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R.B.: "Well, the difference was that people found out that the best you could do was by running out there, you know, burning in the -

204 _____ is to get killed."

C.E.: So everybody decided to do what after that?

R.B.: "They figured that politically - that would be the best way, political strength, that you gain more by becoming more politically sophisticated than they could by running out in the street, hollering and raising _____."

C.E.: In what year was the med-school crisis?

R.B.: "The med-school crisis came around about '64 - '65, right around that time."

C.E.: So that the Black wards in a Democratic Party were alienated from that County machine for a little while during that period?

R.B.: "Well, not exactly because there people that were in sympathy with us, you see, because otherwise we couldn't have won it if it had been a Black on White thing, but there was a lot of Whites went along with us, you know, and supported our candidates."

C.E.: You must have come up against a lot of racial discrimination, can you give us an example and tell us how you handled it?

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R.B.: "Well, the army for instance, when I was in the Service, I remember after I was wounded and I was in the hospital and they had - the personnel there was from down South and I asked one of the fellows there to hand me something and he told me that he never waited on a nigger in his life, that was pretty tough, you know, when you are laying in bed after you have been wounded, you know, fighting for your country and have that slammed at you. We had problems in France we had more problems in France with the Crackers than we had with Germans actually. We felt as though that some of them like the Alabama group and the Fifth Marines, they were more enemies to us than the Germans were."

C.E.: Were there any instances of fighting?

R.B.: "Oh yeah. When we came to Saint Mazaya on the day after New Year's, we arrived in Saint Mazaya and that was - we were _____ there and they had the Fifth Marines there, section of the First Marines and they opened the door that night, and told us to put out the lights and then shot in place - shot in the barracks, shot in our barracks, but we got together and got some ammunition together the next night, when they were riding them donkeys, we shot at them so they moved them out of the camp."

C.E.: Was this in Europe or in America?

R.B.: "This was in Europe, yeah, after we left here."

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C.E.: How was it after the war, when you came back as a Veteran, how did the country, White America greet you when the Black Veterans came back from World War 1?

R.B.: "Well, after we came back, of course the Government sent me to school to further my education and that was it, you know, but so far as conditions were concerned, the Veterans, there was still discrimination like riding on trains and eating in restaurants, you still hadn't broken that down, you know."

C.E.: You mean in Newark?

R.B.: "In Newark, yeah."

C.E.: There was segregation in Newark restaurants, segregation in the Newark theaters."

C.E.: You mean you couldn't go in Woolworth's down town in Newark?

R.B.: "Woolworth's you could go but they didn't have the restaurant part like we have now, in the theaters like down the Newark theater, you had to go upstairs, in the Paramount, you had to go upstairs, you couldn't sit downstairs, so what happened at - I remember that they had a group from the Cotton Club _____ to come over, and I had told the group about it and they insisted on me sitting downstairs in the orchestra or otherwise they wouldn't go on."

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C.E.: You were active back then?

R.B.: "Yeah."

C.E.: How big was the Garvey movement in Newark in the '20's? I mean we hear about it in New York, was their a big - did Garvey have a big following in Newark?

R.B.: "I don't think he had too big a following in Newark."

C.E.: Just a small group?

R.B.: "Yeah."

C.E.: What about when Paul Robeson came through, did he have many followers in Newark?

R.B.: "No, he didn't have too many followers in Newark, he had people on a different level you know."

C.E.: National and International. So what would you say is the first great movement that stirred the people in Newark? Irvine Turner's or the Organization, the United Brothers?

R.B.: "The first to stir people in Newark, I would have to say was the Turner Organization because I remember when they had an uprising there

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and they had a newspaper - they picketed this newspaper's place there, I am trying to think of the fellow's name, I don't remember his name because he seemed to be catering to the White Strata, you know, and so they picketed his office and gave him a hard time and they tied traffic up from Washington Street up to Belmont Avenue, that was the first demonstration that I remember."

C.E.: This was before he was elected, Turner?

R.B.: "No, Turner was elected then."

C.E.: So Turner was still pretty militant even after he got elected?

R.B.: "His group was militant, let's put it that way."

C.E.: How would you say - now that we look back at history - was Turner a politician or was he a political leader?

R.B.: "He was a politician, in fact they - the people took - the people around Turner took this position that this is what he should do and they actually forced him to do the things that were necessary."

C.E.: So you had a pretty strong group then?

R.B.: "Oh, yeah. Even to the extent that if they wanted something done and he didn't do it, they would go there and turn that table over, turn his desk over on him, they would definitely do that."

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C.E.: What kind of dream of Newark, of Black Newark, did the people in the Organization have? ^{What} did they think this town was going to look like after the election of a Black Mayor?

R.B.: "Well, they had hopes, people were dancing in the streets, they thought things was going to be so much different, you know, but after when they gave, when the business organizations gave that dinner for Gibson to bail him out, when I came back from the dinner, I told Imamu one thing, I said well we just lost our man."

C.E.: Well, wait a minute, did it take a lot of money to elect Mayor Gibson?

R.B.: "Well, he owed 50,000 dollars, he was 50,000 in debt and they bought tickets and gave the tickets out you know, 50,000 was _____ so it would be clean."

C.E.: How much debt would you estimate the Organization went into behind Gibson's election?

R.B.: "Same amount."

C.E.: The Organization freely bankrolled Gibson?

R.B.: "Yes."

C.E.: Do you think the Organization got much back?

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R.B.: "No."

C.E.: You think Gibson broke the basic trust that some benefits would have come out of that election for the Organization or was it just not a clear understanding?

R.B.: "First off, when we - after he was elected, we used to meet every Saturday afternoon down on Broad Street, next to the Federal Building, where the Federal is, in one of those little buildings there, we used to meet, so finally he decided that it wasn't necessary to meet anymore?"

C.E.: This was after he was elected?

R.B.: "After he was elected."

C.E.: You think he would have made that decision before he was elected?

R.B.: "No."

C.E.: So did things change after -

R.B.: "Oh, definitely, definitely did change between him and the Organization."

C.E.: If the Organization and Gibson had been able to work something

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out and stayed as one unified political thing, do you think we would have much more political power in Essex County in New Jersey now?

R.B.: "I think so, but see politically, it always seems to follow this route, once a man is elected, I find it this way, be he Black or White, that he tries to disassociate himself from the people that elected him and the reason for that is he feels a responsibility to them that he doesn't want to, so therefore he - Turner was the same thing, after he got elected we had to fight with him tooth and nail to get him to do the small things because the first - what he did, he tried to label some of his workers like Coggins and Lorraine and them as Communists, they tried to label them and said he didn't want to associate with Communists anymore."

C.E.: Didn't they call Turner a Communist when he first ran? He was running during the McCarthy period?

R.B.: "No, they didn't call him that but what he did, we finally tried to get rid of him and ran a fellow against him, District Leader, he died, and we ran this guy against him and he got out there in front of - we had to put a beautiful sign up there on Belmont Avenue, Springfield Avenue, and he got out there and called the man a Communist and everything. Well, he would do that, Turner was something else."

363 C.E.: So that's a general pattern that these _____ put these people in?

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R.B.: "As a rule, you can find out that once they get in, they want to sweep away the people that put them there, because they figure they owe them, there's a certain allegiance and they don't - they are not willing to pay it, see like Gibson, with the big business, big business got him off the hook, so naturally he catered to big business."

C.E.: So speaking to this next generation, is there some sure fired way they can prevent that or is this just part of the - something they are going to have to figure out the answer to?

R.B.: "They have to fight against it, they have to fight against it."

C.E.: Got to have an organization?

R.B.: "Yeah."

C.E.: Earlier on in the interview we asked you how did your experience with the organization end and your feelings about it, could you tell us - we asked you your feelings about it - I would like to know Imamu Baraka's feelings about it?

R.B.: "Well, that's hard for me to say because after all there was his philosophy and different ideas, you see, and they went on - and I say for myself so far as concerned I don't think that I was educated to the degree that I could go any step further because I joined the outfit for one thing and involved in it and that was for Black people the betterment of Black people and I wasn't willing to - this Socialist.

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thing that they were talking about - like this - I wasn't ready for that. But I didn't have any ill feelings towards anybody in the outfit, I still greet them, see them - always glad to see them still."

C.E.: Do you have any last comment, you would like to make about the making of Black politics in Newark, to include in this interview?

R.B.: "No, I don't think so."

C.E.: Is there any advice you could give to our generation regarding the Black issue?

R.B.: "Yes, my advice to give to the Black issues, is be a part of it, work for the betterment of it and try to help in any sense - in any direction that you can, help Black people."

C.E.: "Thank you."