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P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0005
Brandon Lewis
14 October 2013

ABSTRACT – Lewis Brandon

Interviewee:	Lewis Brandon
Interviewer:	Joshua Davis
Interview Date:	October 14, 2013
Location:	Greensboro, North Carolina
Length:	Approximately 1 hour and 51 minutes

Lewis Brandon co-founded Uhuru, a Pan-Africanist bookstore in Greensboro, North Carolina in operation from 1972 to 1983 and founded in cooperation with the Greensboro Association of Poor People (GAPP) and through a seed grant for the Foundation for Community Development (FCD). Born in Asheville, North Carolina in 1949, Brandon moved to Greensboro in 1957 and was instrumental in the city's chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1960s before his employment with the FCD as a community organizer. In the interview, Brandon recounts Uhuru as site of black culture and politics in Greensboro. Topics include: Nelson Johnson, founder of the GAPP, director of the Beloved Community Center, and member of the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU; which later become YOBU); Brandon's service in the US Army (1964-1966) and protests around mandatory ROTC enrollment at North Carolina A&T State University; FCD interest in economic development and leadership training in African American communities; FCD funding of several NC community organizations including Malcolm X Liberation University, Fayetteville Area Poo Peoples Organization (FAPP), SOBU, GAPP, etc.; opening Uhuru in consulation with Una Mulzac of Liberation Bookstore (NYC) as well as other connections to the pan-African literary world; Joyce Johnson, manager of Uhuru; Bookazine, NYC wholesaler of paperback books, which supplied Uhuru with inventory while the store established credit to order hardcover books direct from publishers; the ethos of black determination that informed Uhuru's business practices; resistance to GAPP and Uhuru from city leadership; surveillance of inventory by Uhuru's landlord; cultural and political activities at Uhuru including a Maya Angelou book signing and several art shows and music performances; the November 3, 1979 murders by the Ku Klux Klan at an anti-Klan rally organized the Communist Workers Party in Greensboro; Uhuru's inventory including children's books by Lucille Clifton and John Hope Franklin, literature and poetry by James Baldwin and Richard Wright, "Third World" titles, Marxist works like Lenin's "Left-Wing" Communism, black magazines like *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Sepia*, and black newspapers like *The Black Panther* and *Afro-American*; the 1970 Black Christmas parade and first Kwanza

celebration in Greensboro; and Brandon's thoughts on contemporary black politics like Reverend William Barber and the Moral Monday protests.

TRANSCRIPT: Lewis Brandon

Interviewee:	Lewis Brandon
Interviewer:	Joshua Davis
Interview Date:	October 14, 2013
Location:	[Greensboro, North Carolina]
Length:	1:50:53

START OF INTERVIEW

Joshua Davis: Okay. I'm sitting down with Mr. Lewis Brandon. It is October fourteenth, 2013. I'm Josh Davis of the Southern Oral History Program. We wanted to talk about Uhuru Bookstore and other things that were going on with activists in the 1970s in Greensboro. Like I was just saying, because you've done some really good interviews already that are focused on the 1960s, I think we can probably skip some of the great work you did with CORE and with the sit-ins. Honestly, there's too much to fit into a single interview.

Lewis Brandon: Yeah.

Josh Davis: And so, your youth and your upbringing is covered a little bit in the other interviews, too. If I read correctly, you were born and raised in Asheville.

Lewis Brandon: Right.

JD: In 1939?

LB: 1939.

JD: Okay. So, I thought maybe a convenient starting point could be to talk about GAPP, the Greensboro Association of Poor People.

LB: Yeah.

JD: And maybe that's a good place to start this conversation.

LB: Yeah. Okay. Actually, the person [laughs] who started that, the GAPP, was Nelson Johnson, who is also the director of the Beloved Community Center, and so—

JD: Right.

LB: But I came back to Greensboro in 1966, after serving in the U.S. Army, and immediately picked up where I had left off when I left in '64, trying to become engaged in social change movements in and around Greensboro, even some of the activities that were going on on campus. Nelson had come to A&T in 1965 from the Air Force. And at A&T we had mandatory ROTC for the first [two] years for all able-bodied males, and so, there was a protest against mandatory ROTC. And so, I joined the picket line, and that's where I first met Nelson.

And so, from that point on, we began to run into each other. He had become engaged in an organization called YES, Youth Educational Service, which was doing tutorials and community organizing in various neighborhoods in the community. And so, he hooked up with Howard Fuller, who later became Owusu Sadaukai, and Owusu was working with the North Carolina Fund at that time. And then, later, he and Nathan Garrett, who was a CPA in Durham, who was also working with the North Carolina Fund, organized a Foundation for Community Development. And so, out of the Foundation for Community Development, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, an

intern program was started, a summer intern program was started, with Howard Fuller being the director of community organizing.

And so, one of the sites was Greensboro. And so, the work that Nelson and students did—Chuck Hopkins, being one, and his first wife also being one of the students. I think it was about twelve or thirteen students who came to Greensboro to work, and they organized various neighborhoods. Outside this window here was a community that was a part of their organizing. You wouldn't recognize the community now, because it's all been torn down. But the neighborhood communities that were organized by those interns came together to form an association, and they called it the Greensboro Association of Poor People.

And from that point on, there were mass activities in the communities to make some changes with welfare rights, housing problems, problems in education. I was not a youth. I was working at A&T in the biology department, but I was engaged with what was happening in the community because I was still interested in the social change movement. [0:05:00] When GAPP was formed, it was housed in the office of the NAACP, so they actually shared an office. The original office had been a CORE office, and then NAACP took over it after CORE went out of business.

So, that's kind of how GAPP got started, and it, through the late sixties and early seventies, was very engaged in all kinds of activities in the community. Labor issues—there weren't unions here, but a lot of the work they did with the line workers, with the [rent] strikes and those kinds of things, the garbage workers, all of that, the community came together. The community actually became the unions because they helped support the workers who were out on strike.

But one of the things that I was working—Nelson originally had been the organizer for FCD, the GAPP in Greensboro, and so, when he left to form SOBU, Student Organization for Black Unity, I took over. I was working as a schoolteacher, and I left the public schools and went to work for FCD as the community organizer based in Greensboro. And one of the things that—there were two things, two departments in FCD. One was leadership development and training, and the other one was economic development. And so, I was working with economic development. And one of the things that we were encouraging all of the groups that were formed around the state to get into economic development. And so, our first project in Greensboro was the bookstore. We had looked at some other things, but Uhuru Bookstore was the thing that we got off the ground here.

JD: Okay. Well, just to review a little bit for the transcript, FCD stood for Foundation for Community Development.

LB: Foundation for Community Development, right.

JD: And that was Nathan Garrett's group in—

LB: It was based in Durham, yeah.

JD: Howard Fuller had helped to found it.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: So, the foundation of GAPP was roughly 196—?

LB: '68, '69.

JD: Okay. And Milton Coleman talked a lot about SOBU in his interview, but if I'm correct, that was founded in 19—?

LB: '70? '69, '70, yeah.

JD: And for a little bit of context for the interview, I believe FCD had been very closely linked with Malcolm X Liberation University.

LB: [Laughs] Actually, FCD *funded* MXL, Malcolm X Liberation University. It funded SOBU. It funded GAPP. It funded FAPPO. It funded United Durham. All of the seed money came out of the foundation.

JD: Fayetteville Community—?

LB: FAPPO was Fayetteville Area Poor People's Organization. So, [Wilson Improvement]. So, there were a number of these organizations around the state. And FCD provided the seed capital for each of these projects. In fact, the money that they had—they owned the major stock in GAPP—I mean, not in GAPP, but in Uhuru.

JD: Okay.

LB: So, that's how we got the money.

JD: So, like you said, FCD had two major objectives. One was economic development, and the other was—?

LB: Leadership training and development.

JD: Leadership training.

LB: Yeah. And what we would do as community organizers who were organizing these for-profit organizations that were attached to nonprofit organizations, the thing was that the for-profits would generate the funds that would support the nonprofits. That's how they would get their money. And so, once we would form Uhuru, then the leadership development department would come in and do the training with the new corporation and help them in how to operate and run boards and that kind of thing.

JD: Now, where did you get the idea to found Uhuru Bookstore?

LB: Well, it was my job to help create [0:10:00] in this community an economic venture that was controlled by the community, in particular, you know, GAPP, with the idea, again, with whatever funds that we generated, the profits would go into the funding for GAPP. I was paid by the foundation. And so, and then, there was a small staff initially at GAPP that was being paid. Their salaries were being paid by the foundation. So, the thing was to be able to create a self-sustaining operation. And so, thus, Uhuru Corporation. Now, that meant that we could go off and do a number of things. We just happened to begin looking at developing a bookstore as one of the possibilities, yeah.

JD: Um-hmm. And one thing that's interesting to me is there were quite a number of black-owned businesses in Greensboro, especially along East Market. There were the restaurants. I'm forgetting some of the names, but the ones that were very popular with students, the hamburger spots.

LB: Yeah.

JD: There was—I've interviewed Curtis Moore several times. He owned Curt's Records.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, one thing that is particularly interesting to me is that you all made a decision to start a particular kind of black business. I guess if I took a step back, could you tell me a little bit about your encounters with books and with bookstores up to that point?

LB: Well, actually, I had none. And the board, GAPP's board and eventually the Uhuru board, had none. And I don't know where the idea came from originally, you know, but we were looking for various things to do. But the bookstore idea was there.

And it may have been coming from—well, I know Milton Coleman used to sell books out of the trunk of his car [laughs], you know. He used to call himself "the dealer" or something of that nature.

JD: That's right. He mentioned that in the interview, and I forgot about that.

LB: Yeah. So, I mean, that was—so, you know, we hit upon doing that, and it took off. And through the work of the foundation and our work here with our board, we proceeded with the notion. But we had to prove to the board, or to the foundation, that this was a viable project and we went through all kinds of hoops to do that. So, I mean, I wish I had the plan that we had to develop in order to get the funds to do this. It was very extensive. We had to do all kinds of marketing analysis, you know, profit forecasts, pro forma statements, all of those things, in order to get the funds. They just didn't give us a check and say, "Go open a bookstore." And then, we had to bring in a consultant. We brought in Una Mulzac from Liberation Bookstore in New York to consult with us on that.

JD: Right. And Una Mulzac was—she had founded Liberation Bookstore in Harlem, I believe, in 1967. Her bookstore was one of several, I guess what we could call PanAfricanist bookstores in New York.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: She was growing or expanding upon this tradition that people like Lewis Michaux had had. This is just for the transcript. Her father, of course, was Hugh Mulzac, famed black Merchant Marine and Communist. But how did y'all get linked up with Una Mulzac?

LB: Well, we looked around for—I mean, you know, she was kind of the store. [Laughs] And so, we needed a consultant. The store was a—it was there, it was well-known in progressive circles, and so, we invited her. We asked her if she would come,, and she did. She spent maybe three days here with us, helping us to think through the marketing, [0:15:00] and ordering inventory, and those kinds of strategies, yeah.

JD: What do you remember—or what were her main conclusions or recommendations?

LB: [Sighs] That the store had to be people-oriented, that it wasn't something that just served one segment of the community, that it had to be broad-based in terms of its outlook and its services to the community. And so, we did not try to specialize in any one segment, in terms of books. We had a very strong children's section. And history—we did have Third World materials and things of that kind of thing, but we broadened out. And then, we did various cultural kinds of activities at the store, you know, readings and that kind of thing, you know, to draw people in, and that was something that Liberation did a lot of.

JD: Um-hmm, okay, interesting. Can you remind me again—what year was this that you were planning this?

LB: Well, we started in '71 and we opened in February of '72.

JD: Okay.

LB: And Don Lee, who is Haki R. Madhubuti, who was with Third World Press, actually came down and did the opening, the dedication of the store.

JD: Oh, wow. Okay. So, did someone from SOBU or did someone from—just to clarify, it was GAPP who founded it, or it was—?

LB: It was GAPP.

JD: Okay. And they were the board who wanted things like a business proposal?

LB: Well, not only that. The foundation, who was giving us the funding, the seed money, demanded that of us.

JD: The FCD?

LB: Yeah.

JD: Okay.

LB: Nathan, as a CPA. [Laughs]

JD: Right.

LB: And Allard Austin, who was head of the economic development arm of FCD, demanded of all of our organizations, all of the economic development components, that they have sound financial planning and that kind of thing. So, it wasn't just giving people money and you go out there. You had to prove and justify the business, yeah.

JD: What was the name again? Alma Austin?

LB: Allard, A-L-L-A-R-D, Austin.

JD: And was he related to Lewis Austin of the Carolina Times?

LB: No.

JD: Okay.

LB: Allard, I think, was originally from Columbia, South Carolina. He graduated from Duke Law School. Well, he was a Yale graduate, and then I saw recently where he had gotten his law degree from Duke. But he was in charge of the economic development program, yeah. So, no, it wasn't—no, we just didn't go out and set up a business. You had to—and there was another—I mean, in Asheville, there was Afram, which was in the

business of making hospital disposable sheets and things. United Durham, Incorporated, which is still in existence, has a—so, I mean, no. [Laughs] Yeah.

JD: Afram? A-F-R-A-M?

LB: A-F-R-A-M, Afram.

JD: Okay, and that's a black-owned business, right?

LB: Well, it was. It's not in existence now, yeah. The thing is a lot of these businesses depended on government contracts.

JD: Right.

LB: And when that kind of dried up, people—things went to the—went away.

JD: Had you been to a black-owned bookstore before?

LB: Ahh, no, because there weren't any, to my knowledge. I mean, not in—even Drum and Spear wasn't in existence when I—that I can remember.

JD: You mentioned there was another one in Greensboro.

LB: Yeah, a fellow by the name of Bryant. I can't think of Bryant's first name right now, but he had a store. And that may have been where we got the idea, because when he closed up. He had a store on East Market Street. Oh, I can't think of Bryant's first name. But [0:20:00] he was there for about two years, maybe. And, yeah, that's probably where we—when he closed, we maybe hit on the idea of taking up where he left off, yeah.

JD: So, that store had preceded Uhuru. It had actually opened earlier.

LB: Yeah, yeah. Bryant was kind of a—what's the word? I don't know. He moved around a lot. So, he was here, and then he'd be gone, you know. And so, he did

the store, and then the next thing you know, he was in Mississippi somewhere, you know. And so, the store closed, yeah.

JD: Was that his first name or his last name?

LB: His last name was Bryant.

JD: B-R-Y—

LB: Y-A-N-T. And I can't think of his first—it'll come to me.

JD: Okay. You don't remember the name of the store?

LB: No, I don't. It was on East Market Street. Redevelopment came through and bulldozed all of that down. But he was right next to—there were a couple of restaurants that he was next door to, but I don't remember the name of the store. I don't remember the name of the store, yeah.

JD: So, why did y'all think—well, also, just to clarify, who else was involved with the foundation of the store? Who were the kind of key players, in terms of proposing Uhuru?

LB: [Coughs] Well, there was the GAPP and the Uhuru board of directors, I as a staff person for FCD. And so, when the board made the decision to do it, then Joyce Johnson, who was connected to GAPP and SOBU, the board decided that she would be the manager. And so, she and I did the bulk of the work, you know, going through financial training. [Laughs] We had to learn bookkeeping and accounting techniques, but also the sitting down and doing the design of the store, what kinds of materials would go in, the inventory, the staffing of the store. We went to—there's a place in, a wholesale warehouse, in New York called Bookazine, and we went there and did our purchasing and brought materials back to the store, to supply. And then, we got students from

Malcolm X Liberation University to build the bookshelves for the store, yeah. And we bought, we purchased the furniture for the store, the casing and all that stuff, from people who were going out of business because of redevelopment, so, yeah. But we were the two main people in overall planning and development of the store.

JD: You mentioned Bookazine. I was interviewing Judy Richardson. She was a SNCC veteran and she worked at Drum and Spear Bookstore in D.C.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And she had also mentioned Bookazine and interestingly she said one of the reasons why they went to that wholesaler in particular was that there was someone who worked there, a black guy, who was very, very interested in black literature and black books, and he was very eager to help black bookstores establish themselves. And that probably wasn't the case at all book wholesalers. And I think also she said that that place, well, of course, because of its name, it specialized in magazines, but also a lot of paperback books, I think.

LB: Yeah, mostly paperbacks.

JD: Yeah.

LB: Because the hardbacks we got from the actual publishers.

JD: Okay.

LB: But once we got the initial stock from Bookazine and established a line of, established credit, we were able to go to the major publishers [0:25:00] and purchase books, and we had credit lines with all of them.

JD: I'm sure at the time it was kind of annoying being held to this really high standard, and the boards were requiring all these documents, but it's interesting to hear

you talk about that, because I think a lot of bookstores, in general, and a number of black-owned bookstores, they didn't go about it that way. You hear stories of someone opened up a store, you know, pretty spontaneously, often not from the angle of an entrepreneur, but more from the angle of someone who loved to read. So, it's interesting that y'all were doing all of these very methodical steps on the business side.

LB: Well, you know, that's true, because it wasn't my store, you know. It was the community's store, and it was the community's funds and things. So, you know, we couldn't take a cavalier attitude about operating this business, and what we were trying to do was create—I mean, this whole notion about sustainability and self-sufficiency in the black community was a big thing back then, you know, black determination, and this thing was about trying to build an economic base. So, we weren't just doing this to be having a bookstore, because we were looking at other opportunities to invest in and to expand the operation of Uhuru. So, yeah.

JD: And so, that's what you mean when you say the store had an obligation to the community?

LB: Um-hmm, because we saw it as a community venture, you know. FCD's thing was CED, Community Economic Development, and whether you were—you were creating ventures to do two things. One is to create economics in the community, but also to employ people, put people to work.

JD: So, did the store have a corporate charter?

LB: Oh, yeah.

JD: Yeah?

LB: You had to—[laughs] we did everything that a business—we had to file our federal taxes, all of that.

JD: Yeah.

LB: Yeah. Workers comp, unemployment, yeah, we had to do all of that.

JD: So, why a bookstore instead of a different business? That, to me, is a very interesting decision.

LB: Well, you know, I can't—again, you know, it's—that was the decision. And I don't remember all of the details of that now, why we chose that, you know, and thinking back about what the other store, you know, "Hey, maybe this is a good idea." I don't know. I don't remember. But we, you know, along the line, we looked at other things and we tried other things. Our second venture was trying to open up a daycare center.

We had problems in—well, because of GAPP and its role in the community, we were persona non grata, really, in the community. And so, there were, and given our support of other things that were happening in Greensboro, like supporting—and I'm talking about GAPP—supporting the students at Dudley High School when the revolt came, so it was difficult for us to—there were major attempts by the city of Greensboro to keep us from opening up this store.

JD: Oh?

LB: Yeah.

JD: And what did they try to do?

LB: Well, they would go around to potential landlords and say, you know, "This is this organization," so we had a very difficult time finding space. In fact, we had leased space from a lodge over on—next to A&T's campus, had already laid out the design and

everything, and then, we found out that the zoning was wrong. You couldn't have—well, originally, the zoning was commercial before redevelopment came through. But then, when the redevelopment came through, most of the area around A&T was rezoned to institutional. Well, the city had this thing where you couldn't have a bookstore in an institutional zone. [Laughs] [0:30:00] So, we went to—we tried very hard to try to get a variance through the board of adjustments, and they just wouldn't do it.

So, Major High, who was our attorney, spent days, weeks, trying to find us a location. And we finally found a place down on East Market Street. The sign is still up on the building down there, Uhuru Bookstore.

JD: It's still—?

LB: The sign is still up there, yeah.

JD: Now, what was the address?

LB: Uh, 1412 East Market Street, yeah.

JD: 1-4-1-2?

LB: Huh? 14—

JD: 12.

LB: Not 14. 412. I'm sorry.

JD: Okay.

LB: Yeah. But we got it, but the landlord would come every week, or send somebody in to see what we had on the shelves, [laughs] you know. So, that went on for a while, yeah.

JD: Because they thought—they wanted to—?

LB: We were—"they were these radicals, Communists," you know, all these things that people think. Now, when we went to get the—when we started working on the daycare facility, it was already operational, and so we were going to take over it. Well, [sighs] we had to drop it, because building inspectors would come in and say, "Well, you need to do this." And then, the next time around, you get another building inspector to come around and say, "You need to do this," and it kept going on and on and on. And we were eating up money, so we just—we dropped it, so, yeah.

JD: Wow. Now, was your landlord at Uhuru, was he white or black?

LB: He was white.

JD: He was white, okay. And your attorney, you mentioned the name, but I—it was—

LB: Major. Major High.

JD: Major, like in the military, M-A-J-O-R?

LB: Uh-huh, yeah. He was a—he's black, and he was a Chapel Hill graduate. He graduated in the mid-fifties from Chapel Hill law school.

JD: May be the first black graduate of UNC Law School.

LB: No. He was in partnership with the first black, Kenneth Lee.

JD: Okay, interesting. And the last name again was High?

LB: High, H-I-G-H.

JD: Okay. Now, Uhuru means "freedom" in Swahili.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: Obviously, there was a thought process behind that name.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: You've been describing this idea of economic self-determination.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: But did the bookstore link up to other political goals? You said that the bookstore was perceived as radical.

LB: Well, we were very much part of what was happening in the community. And the bookstore was a cultural—became not only an economic venture, but a cultural site. So, it was open for—you know, black artists weren't able to show their works in Greensboro, because Greensboro had this view and still has this view that black artists are outsiders, outside art [laughs], you know. And so, we would have major art exhibits sometimes. One of the people, Ed [Hale/Hill], who used the name [ ], his first showing was at the bookstore. He later became very popular in the community. We would do those. We did book signings—Lance Jeffers, who was a teacher at State, who was a poet. Linda Brown, who lives here now, did her first book there. We had children's story hours on Saturdays. We had music in the store. We had Maya Angelou to do a book signing in the store.

JD: Oh?

LB: Yeah. But also it was a place where people could have, hold meetings, you know, community meetings. And when, in 1979, when the Klan killed people, and people had no place to go, we opened the store up for them to have meetings and to hold press conferences and that kind of thing, yeah.

JD: Right. I read about that. And you're referring to, [0:35:00] of course, when the Communists Workers Party was holding the anti-Klan rallies, the Klan and some Neo-Nazis arrived and killed a number of people.

LB: Right, five people.

JD: Yeah, with the knowledge of the police.

LB: Right.

JD: And tell me a little bit about that, because I read briefly in Signe Waller's book about how the bookstore opened its doors to the CWP.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: So, what convinced you to do that?

LB: Well, I had a relationship with all these people.

JD: Right.

LB: I mean, I knew them, I worked with them on other projects in the community, I respected them, I respected what they were doing, and so they were my friends. Nelson and I have had this long relationship. So, you know, I couldn't turn my back on them. I mean, they needed my support, as well as the community's support. And so, we had the space and so we decided to allow them use it. And at this time, I was the manager, the sole manager of the store, so I was making these decisions, yeah.

JD: I believe Signe Waller—I sometimes mispronounce her name.

LB: Yeah, Waller.

JD: I think in her book she said this was the first CWP meeting after November third.

LB: Yeah.

JD: Okay. Were you fearful at all?

LB: No. I wasn't, no, no, uh-uh. There were some repercussions. I mean, there were people who—I remember—I don't know if you've read Eugene Pfaff, who has

done—he's done a lot of the interviews, oral interviews, [here]. Well, he and I were supposed to do an interview, and I get this phone call from him, saying that he couldn't come to the store to do the interview because people had told him that I would—he would be assaulted, you know, stuff like that, rumors. There was a rumor that I had Sandi Smith's body on display in the bookstore. And so, you know, some people were fearful, didn't come, but I wasn't afraid to go there, yeah, no.

JD: Sandi Smith was—?

LB: The young lady from Bennett who was killed.

JD: On November third, 1979.

LB: Um-hmm, and was a good friend of mine.

JD: Wow, that's just a terrible rumor for someone to spread.

LB: [Sighs] Well, they did more than that. I mean, you know, they really tried to drag her through the mud.

JD: Yeah.

LB: You know, so, yeah. So, you know, we lost some friendships because people were fearful. But we kept the store open another three or four years before we closed it.

JD: Now, it wasn't just the Klan that was critical of the bookstore. You seem to be referring to other people in the city.

LB: Oh, yeah! The city fathers, the city leadership, people who saw us as a thorn in their side. We kept raising issues, you know, and we made the store available so people could do that, you know. You know, Greensboro has this notion that somehow we don't have any problems. And so, if—as long as we're around, we remind them of what they really are, you know.

JD: Right. I mean, Greensboro, like Durham, had kind of seen itself as a moderate Southern city, right?

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JD: For decades?

LB: And still tries to, but it's still one of the—we are third in population only. [Laughs] The backwardness of this city, and the struggles that are still going on in this city, is—you know. And the city never learns the lessons. You know, when the sit-ins first occurred, after the opening of a few places, people went down to Raleigh to try to get the state legislature to pass bills to stop students from demonstrating. And this city has done all kinds of things. [0:40:00] After '69, what they did, they bought more guns [laughs], you know, and in '79, there's a whole denial. I mean, so it goes on. It never stops in this city. We're right now in a fight with them about the police department.

JD: That's right. I was seeing that on the website. And also, there are similar actions going on in Durham right now.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: I was struck by that, how—yeah, Beloved Community, one of the main goals right now is to advocate for structures to supervise the police force.

LB: Right.

JD: Which clearly has resistance in the community, although there's a lot of people who support it.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And I was thinking about how, you know, these longstanding battles. Of course, the role—the very questionable role that the police played in November third, 1979.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And I even thought of this as just a kind of tangential anecdote, but I went to grad school at UNC. And in 2008, some friends and I came to Greensboro. I think it was for this concert called SuperJam they have at the Coliseum.

LB: Right.

JD: This was probably June, 2008. The idea was to register voters, and especially to register voters for Obama, who at that time had just become the Democratic nominee. And we were kind of walking around the Coliseum, and the police constantly were kind of pushing us out of this parking lot. And I remember one of the people in our group had the nerve, or I don't know what it was, she had the courage to ask a police officer, "Hi! Do you want to register to vote?" And maybe she was wearing like an Obama tee shirt or something. And the police officer said, "Oh, we don't support people who don't support us."

And I remember just being shocked by that comment. And the more I learned, the less I should have been shocked. But at the time, I was thinking, you know, "This isn't—we're not in the middle of nowhere. We're in Greensboro, North Carolina. It's 2008, and this person just was claiming that a presidential candidate doesn't support police officers, based on nothing, basically."

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JD: Or based on some things, but probably not his record with police.

LB: Yeah, yeah. But this city never has learned a lesson. I mean, it's always this, you know. And I've been here fifty—I came here in '57, so fifty-six years or more. I don't know of any social change that has taken place in this community without struggle.

JD: Right.

LB: People don't do things simply because it's the moral thing to do or it's the right thing to do. You have to challenge them on everything in order to get change.

JD: Yeah. I mean, obviously, in the context of our state's politics right now, it's becoming clear again that there is really aggressive resistance to change. And even there's a lot of energy from the right to *reverse* change right now, which never went away, but it's become much more forceful in the last few years, I think.

LB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JD: This is interesting. I wanted to think back a little bit to the bookstore, though. Can you tell me some about the books that you sold or the magazines, I mean, actual titles that you remember?

LB: Yeah.

JD: I mean, you told me a few of the catalogues.

LB: Yeah, but we—

JD: But what were the big sellers?

LB: Our children's books was one of the big sellers. We had—you asked me the names of people. Lucille Clifton, we had her books. Keats, you know, just all kinds of children's books that we'd get. And we would, you know, shop around to get them. And we had a whole series on history. We had John Hope Franklin. You know, we had people like Chancellor Williams. You know, you could go down—E. Franklin Frazier. [0:45:00]

These are the people, I mean, the books in that category. And then, we had poetry and literature, you know, all of Baldwin's books, Maya Angelou's books, Richard Wright, James Baldwin. And then, there was the third world stuff. We got books from—China books. We had the *[Little] Red Book* [laughs], you know, and *"Left-Wing" Communism* by Lenin. So, we had, you know, that Marxist-Leninist stuff. And then, we had sports, you know, biographies of people like Jackie Robinson and some of the other sports figures.

And then, in magazines, we had *Ebony*, and *Jet*, and *Sepia*. And these things would come and go. *Negro Digest* became *Black Digest*.

JD: *Black World*, I think.

LB: *Black World*, yeah. And we even had a black *Playboy* [laughs] magazine. And I've got all of these books—I've got copies of all of these things at my house.

JD: Oh, wow.

LB: You know, they're out of print, but I—you know, *First World* was another magazine that replaced *Black World*, I think it was, yeah. Hoyt Fuller.

JD: That's right.

LB: Yeah. So, I've got all these books at my house that I have saved over the years. But, yeah, so, you know, it was an eclectic kind of thing. I don't know. We may have had one or two religious—we had Eric Lincoln, C. Eric Lincoln, and a few people, yeah. So, we tried to cover the gamut.

JD: Yeah, C. Eric Lincoln, the sociologist who wrote about Nation of Islam, for example.

LB: Yeah, and—all these titles now escape me. I'm getting old. Yeah. But, no, we—and then, we had J.A. Rogers' stuff.

JD: Right, J.A. Rogers, the famed historian.

LB: Yeah.

JD: *Sex and Race, [World's] Great Men of Color*.

LB: *Of Color,* yeah.

JD: *Autobiography of Malcolm X*?

LB: Yeah. Oh, yeah, and we had *Simple's Uncle Sam*.

JD: What was that?

LB: Simple. That was a series by—Langston Hughes had this series. So, we had, I mean, you know, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston. So, yeah, we carried all of those books.

JD: I was curious if the store carried *The Black Panther* newspaper.

LB: Yeah. We had that newspaper. We had *Afro-American* newspaper. We had—

JD: Out of Baltimore.

LB: Baltimore, yeah. One or two other papers. We couldn't get *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. We tried to get all of those papers, but people wouldn't, distributors wouldn't—[laughs] even—greeting cards was one of our biggest sellers, too. So, we tried to get Hallmark or one of those, American, but they wouldn't supply us, either. So, we ended up getting—there was a company called Freedom Cards out of New York, and we got cards from them for a long time. And Christmas, Valentines Day, and Mothers Day, it was a big deal, and we made a lot of money selling cards. But then, other people got

interested in black books and the black culture, and so it cut into what we were doing. [0:50:00]

JD: Other businesses?

LB: Yeah, bookstores and things decided that there was a market. So, that really, really hurt the store. So, then Freedom—I remember we had an order, I guess it was for Valentines or something like that, and by this time, Belk's department store and some other people were getting cards—and they sent us the leftovers. It was trash! [Laughs] You know, it was that kind of thing.

JD: These were black-themed—?

LB: Cards, greeting cards.

JD: Greeting cards, right?

LB: Yeah.

JD: Okay. So, they were white-owned businesses that were beginning to discover this demand for black-themed books or cards?

LB: Yeah, yeah. They—that was kind of our demise, you know. And then, those people who kind of forced us out eventually were forced out because Barnes and Noble came on the scene [laughs], you know.

JD: So, you're talking about even—the demise came in the eighties, or in the late seventies?

LB: We closed up in '83, I think it was.

JD: Okay. Now, how about things like the *The Carolina Peacemaker*? Did you sell that?

LB: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had local newspapers. And I was trying to think if we at some time or another had *The Carolina Times* or something like that.

JD: Right, out of Durham.

LB: Yeah. But, no, we—and there were others—like, we had—it wasn't *African World*, but there were other Marxist papers, like WVO, so then we had to struggle with—Workers Viewpoint Organization.

JD: Which was the predecessor of the CWP?

LB: Yeah, yeah.

JD: Or maybe I have that reversed.

LB: Yeah, it was. WVO became CWP.

JD: Okay.

LB: But then, we would have these people would come in, like SWP and some of the other organizations, wanting us to—and so we had their newspapers, too.

JD: Socialist Workers Party.

LB: Yeah.

JD: And actually, if I remember correctly, Hugh Mulzac had been connected to SWP, I think maybe before the bookstore, but that was really a New York—

LB: Thing, yeah.

JD: Organization.

LB: Yeah, and it's still around Greensboro.

JD: Yeah.

LB: Around Greensboro, yeah.

JD: Now, going back to Una Mulzac, I was just going to ask you: What was she like personally?

LB: She was real nice. I mean, she stayed with me when she came, you know, and she was very talkative, easygoing, and enjoyed the Southern breakfast that fixed for her. [Laughs] I have seen her on—every time I'm in New York, I go by. And I went back—I've been twice, but the last time I was there was during—when was the last Olympics held in the United States?

JD: Not the Atlanta Olympics?

LB: No.

JD: It was more recently. [Note: Last Winter Olympics in U.S., Salt Lake City, 2002]

LB: Yeah, in somewhere—but anyway, there was a torch run. And my sister and I had gone—I have a cousin who is an artist. And he was doing a showing in the Adam Clayton [Powell] Building in New York on 125th Street, and so we were around there. And Una was out on the steps, sweeping at her store and fussing about the torch run. There was—Coca-Cola was in the thing, and she was ranting and raving about them being in the parade. And I got a picture of her, but that's the last I've seen her. But I talked to her sister or somebody, and I think she's not in the store now. Somebody—I don't know if the store is still open. This was several years ago.

JD: Well, I think I heard that she's deceased.

LB: Who, Una?

JD: Yeah. Just—

LB: She was ill when I last talked to her sister, yeah.

JD: Quite recently, within the last year.

LB: Okay.

JD: I'm sorry to say.

LB: Yeah.

JD: She was a very impressive woman, just from her biography and from all she had—

LB: Oh, yeah, yeah. No, we had a—she was good. It was nice. She spent three days here in Greensboro, yeah.

JD: Yeah, that's really interesting. Because, to me, one thing that's interesting is how black bookstores all over the country networked with each other. It was—there weren't a whole lot of them.

LB: Um-um.

JD: Even at the height of the Black Power movement, there were maybe fewer than a hundred in the whole country, and probably a lot fewer than that.

LB: Okay.

JD: But there were connections, [0:55:00] obviously, that went through activist connections.

LB: Yeah. Well, you know, the big deal for us was SOBU, which became YOBU.

JD: Yeah. Can you tell me more about that?

LB: Well, here again, they were—you know, Nelson and folk organized this student movement, basically, the various black studies programs on various college campuses. And in that was some SNCC people, people from various organizations, and so, they were based in Greensboro. So, a lot of people were in and out of Greensboro. But

they had all these connections, because it was a nationalist movement. And so, people were in touch—you know, Jim Turner out of D.C., and Cornell, and then, Haki and folks.

JD: Haki R. Madhubuti in Chicago?

LB: Yeah. And Cleve Sellers, LeRoi Jones, who is now—what's LeRoi's name? The poet. Lives in Jersey. Amiri Baraka.

JD: Oh! Right, of course! LeRoi Jones! I don't know why I wasn't thinking of—

LB: [Laughs] I couldn't think of it.

JD: Amiri Baraka.

LB: Yeah.

JD: For some reason, I was thinking of—yeah.

LB: See, now, I had his books. His material was in the bookstore, too. You know, Sonia Sanchez—yeah, but we had his stuff, we had Sonia Sanchez, and then we had—oh, what's the other poet's name?

JD: Nikki Giovanni?

LB: Nikki Giovanni, all of her books, yeah. So, there was this network, and so, you know, they were writing and selling books and stuff, I mean, you know, had materials and stuff. So, we were hooked up, and then Broadside, and then Third World Press in Chicago, Drum and Spear, and then the bookstore in Atlanta, uh, they're still in existence—what's their name?

JD: Shrine of the Black Madonna.

LB: Shrine of the Black Madonna. So, we were getting—we would get a lot of the materials and stuff from them, yeah.

JD: Yeah. That's interesting. You know, one thing that's been difficult for me is to distinguish between SOBU, the Student Organization for Black Unity, and Malcolm X Liberation University.

LB: Yeah.

JD: They were closely connected, right?

LB: Oh, we were all the same thing. We just had different names.

JD: Yeah, okay.

LB: [Laughs] Well, yeah, some difference, but not—but people were back and forth between the things. And I was kind of—I was in all of it, but I wasn't a student or anything. But I was there and available to help them and assist them with issues in the community, you know, and help them to come into the community when they were moving here. Like Milton, before he got here, I drove Milton and his wife around to find a house. You know, I did those kinds of things, but I wasn't really a student. But my connection was GAPP. And see, Nelson had been in both FCD, GAPP, now SOBU, and had a relationship with Howard Fuller, who started Malcolm X. So, I mean, there's a kinship.

JD: Before I forget, Howard Fuller is going to be in Durham for several talks in early November, if you have any interest.

LB: Yeah, I saw him a couple of weeks ago.

JD: Oh, was he down here again?

LB: Well, we were at a funeral. One of our—one of the people who worked with us at FCD died.

JD: Was that [ ]? No.

LB: No. What do you mean? Charles [ ]? No, her name was—no, it was a female that died, and she lived up near the Virginia line, Thelma Miller.

JD: Okay.

LB: So, Owusu is coming to—yeah, he speaks. I mean, he's very—yeah.

JD: He's active, yeah.

LB: Yeah, still the activist [1:00:00] and whatnot. So, I saw him. He was there. And I see him when he comes to town.

JD: Okay, yeah.

LB: I see him. Yeah, we're in touch, you know, because his children grew up here and went to school here, high school and A&T.

JD: Oh. Okay, I didn't realize.

LB: And his ex-wife still lives here, yeah.

JD: I did not realize that. Okay. Uhuru most have sold *African World* newspaper from SOBU.

LB: Oh, we probably gave it away, yeah, you know.

JD: Okay.

LB: Have you seen the paper?

JD: Yeah.

LB: I've got a box full in there. [Laughs]

JD: It's a really impressive paper. It's—

LB: Yeah. And, actually, the first one was called the *SOBU Newsletter*.

JD: That's right, I saw that. And this is—to me, it's just so amazing how everything was so connected. But the newsletter is such an interesting window into the

philosophy of this kind of PanAfricanist circle in North Carolina. And what to me, as a historian, is so interesting is how you'll have stories side by side, one on Guinea-Bissau, one on South Africa, and then one on something that happened in Greenville, North Carolina.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, it's constantly jumping from the international, especially Africa, and then to an intensely local—it's a very unusual kind of perspective for a newspaper, and that was totally this idea of connecting black struggles worldwide.

LB: Yeah. Well, I know the people who helped put that paper—worked on the paper is Gladys Robinson, who is a state senator. [Laughs]

JD: That's right! And I am in the process of trying to reach out to her if you have any tips. I've called her office, but I'm sure she's very busy.

LB: Oh, no, you just call her at home.

JD: Okay. Maybe I call talk to you about that afterwards.

LB: Yeah.

JD: But, yeah, that was why—

LB: She and Sandi Smith, who was killed in '79, also worked on the newspaper.

JD: I didn't know that Sandi Smith—okay.

LB: Yeah. See, Sandi Smith had her start in—both Gladys and Sandi had their start with GAPP. And then, when—they were still students, so when YOBU started, they—and both of them [lived] with Nelson and Joyce Johnson [at the time].

JD: Yeah. I just—it's interesting, I mean, another person—not to go too deep into this, but someone that this project interviewed very early on was Jim Lee.

LB: Jim Lee?

JD: I don't know if you remember him. He worked at Malcolm X University.

LB: Jim Lee, yeah. He was with us at the funeral, yeah.

JD: Exactly. And so, he had worked at MXLU, and then he and his then-wife Valeria founded the radio station in Warrenton, WVSP.

LB: Yeah, but before they did that, Jim was working with us at FCD in the leadership, took over the leadership training of FCD.

JD: Oh? See, I didn't know that.

LB: Yeah, and then, he left to do the radio station. But they also—before that, he went to do a cooperative down in Warren County with black farmers.

JD: Right. I think that was called Andamule.

LB: Yeah, well.

JD: As in "forty acres and—"

LB: "And a mule," yeah.

JD: I mean, he's another person where his life and career is so dense with activity that I probably talked to him for an hour and a half, and that was *just* on the radio station and a little other stuff.

LB: Yeah. But they lived here for a long time. I mean, see, they lived—X was right down the street here, the building.

JD: Right. Now, what was the address of that again?

LB: It was called Asheboro Street. Now it's Martin Luther King. But it's a few blocks down. It's a vacant lot now, because the building burned down. But the place

where—the house where *The African World* was produced is still in existence. It's now a real estate office or something.

JD: Oh?

LB: Yeah.

JD: And that's also on MLK?

LB: No, that is on McConnell Road and Washington Street, right across from the old L. Richardson Hospital.

JD: Uh-huh.

LB: The Sebastian House.

JD: Okay.

LB: Yeah. So, no, Jim and Val lived here. And then, when X closed, Jim went to work for FCD for a while.

JD: Now, were you involved with the publication—did you ever work at the newspaper?

LB: No. Which newspaper?

JD: *African World*.

LB: No. [1:05:00]

JD: What about—one thing I came across recently was the *African Peoples' Cookbook*.

LB: Yeah.

JD: And it lists Uhuru as the publisher.

LB: Yeah. All of that stuff is—some of that stuff is in this box, yeah.

JD: Can you tell me about the story behind that?

LB: Well, again, Barbara Kamara, who—and her husband, Musa Kamara—Barbara had at one time been the chairman of GAPP, the board. And her husband, Musa, was a graduate of A&T and worked, but they became involved in GAPP during one of the rent strikes. I guess, I think it was Triple-A [rent strike]. But she was also the executive director of LINC, the Learning Institute of North Carolina, and they did early childhood development training. And they—well, Musa was from Sierra Leone. And so, we were always eating and having these feasts and festivals, like Kwanzaa and stuff like that, and people were preparing dishes and stuff. Barbara had lived, had been a Peace Corps worker in Liberia. And so, they had these recipes, and so we decided to put this book together, this publication together, and it was called *African Peoples' Cookbook*. So, it was recipes that they had, yeah.

JD: Did the bookstore have its own press?

LB: No. We had to farm it out. We did another—and I couldn't run across, I couldn't find it today. We did a—in '70, just before the bookstore, the blind workers in Greensboro were out on, the [shelter workshop] was out on strike. And one of the people close to us was Jim Barnes, who was a pharmacist. And so, we decided to have a—in support of the blind workers during Christmas only, to have a Black Christmas. And so, we decided to have our own Christmas parade, got Santa Claus, and went through the community.

But what Jim did was to—we put together this list, since we were boycotting the businesses, where black people should go and shop. And then, we also developed these gift certificates and we gave them to merchants to give to people when they came into their stores, you know. So, from that list of businesses that we put together, when we

opened Uhuru, we put together two different editions of a black business directory out of the store, yeah.

JD: Interesting. Were there any black businesses that didn't get to appear in the book?

LB: There may have been some, but *then* I knew just about everybody who was in business or had a service, yeah.

JD: And they were supportive? Well, I'm assuming black businesses in Greensboro, they had a lot of different opinions about Uhuru.

LB: Ahh, some did, some didn't—yeah, had opinions.

JD: Were they supportive?

LB: Some were, yeah. And, actually, in the publication of the directory, yeah, because they took—many of them took out ads in the book. So, that's how we financed it was to get them to purchase ads in the book.

JD: Now, just as a side note, do you remember Curtis Moore, who owned Curt's Records?

LB: Yeah.

JD: Okay. I've done two or three interviews with him now.

LB: Um-hmm, yeah. Yeah, I don't know—I guess Curtis is still around, but I haven't seen him in a while.

JD: He is. He's been sick some. He was in the hospital earlier this year. But he actually lives in Winston now.

LB: Oh, okay. But, no, he had all kinds of little shops where he operated out of, yeah.

JD: Yeah. Now, what year was the Black Christmas parade?

LB: That was 1970 during Christmas. And Santa Claus was Oscar Johnson, who was a member of the Uhuru board. And so, once we opened up the store, people wanted a black Santa Claus, so Oscar was that. And then, [1:10:00] Musa Kamara was a black Santa Claus. We all had beards. And then, eventually, I became the Santa Claus, and I'm still doing it. [Laughs] I still—thirty-some years, I'm still doing black Santa Claus.

JD: Okay.

LB: But we would have—set up at the store. People could come in and bring their kids and take pictures with Santa Claus.

JD: I mean, that's really interesting to me because, again, it's a different take on Black Power, I think. It's about black economics. It's also about black cultural self-determination. Obviously, Kwanzaa was another interpretation of the black December holiday.

LB: We started the first Kwanzaas out of the bookstore.

JD: In Greensboro?

LB: Yeah.

JD: And as a side note, I think Durham also had a Black Christmas celebration in 1969 or so.

LB: They may have, yeah.

JD: Now that you're mentioning this, I have a strong feeling that FCD was involved with that.

LB: We had all kinds of cultural activities, yeah, dances, festivals, a lot of food, a lot of dancing. When Malcolm X moved from Durham to Greensboro in '69, yeah, big

celebrations. I mean, people—and since many of these people, the students at X, came from various parts of the country, you know, people were always coming through, so, yeah.

JD: How did people respond to the store, the customers?

LB: You know, [laughs] I get my hair cut at the barbershop right next door, and the guy tells me, he says, "You know, people come by here looking, always coming by looking for the store, thinking it's still there," you know. [Laughs]

We had—I remember one Saturday. Saturdays, because I worked at A&T, and Saturdays were my day to be in the store. I was there most all day Saturday. And one Saturday, this guy came in and wanted to know—you know, he was talking to me. He had gotten on the bus. He had heard about the store. He lived in Mississippi, had heard about the store, and got on the bus and drove all the way to Greensboro just to buy books. [Laughs]

JD: From Mississippi?

LB: Mississippi. I mentioned Barbara Kamara, who did the cookbook. They did Head Start training, so they were all over the Southeast.

JD: Who was all over the Southeast?

LB: Barbara Kamara. She was the one who was in charge of LINC, Learning Institute of North Carolina, and they did Head Start training all over the Southeast.

JD: Now, is this the same—?

LB: They were based in Greensboro.

JD: Is this the same LINC that still exists today?

LB: No.

JD: That's in Chapel Hill?

LB: No.

JD: Okay.

LB: But anyway, during her trainings, she would—I would pack up books and put them on a bus or something and send them to the area that she was going, so when she got there, the books would be there for display.

JD: Okay, so LINC would work with teachers? Or, you mentioned Head Start, but what kind of people—?

LB: Head Start teachers, yeah, teachers for Head Start programs.

JD: Okay.

LB: Yeah. And when she was doing training, a lot of times, there was training through here. A lot of Ford fellows and people would come through. And so, they were—you know, she would [farm] them through the store. But, no, we would pack up—a lot of our money came from going to festivals and to conferences and that kind of thing.

JD: Yeah, book fairs.

LB: Yeah.

JD: Yeah, I think I've heard that from a number of other bookstore owners, black bookstore owners especially. I had a question, and it just escaped me for a second. Okay, what do you think the role of black publications—by black publications, I mean by black authors or at least black-themed—what role did they play for people in this period?

LB: [Sighs] Self-awareness, identity, and also an opportunity to know one's history, because the textbooks and the books that I was reading, growing up as a kid, didn't have very much about us. [1:15:00] And so, people for the first time—I mean,

reading John Hope Franklin or some of the other historians, you know, E. Franklin Frazier and folk, sociologists and stuff—people got a sense of who we were, you know, and what we really had contributed to this country, you know. One of our biggest sellers was *Roots*.

JD: *Roots*, yeah.

LB: I mean, that was a huge seller.

JD: I've heard that, that it was just a tremendous seller, and obviously it helped because it became a TV show.

LB: Yeah. We used to go around—I would go around to the other booksellers and buy up the books [laughs], *Roots*, you know, and sell them.

JD: And you could mark them up at your store?

LB: No, I never marked them up.

JD: Okay.

LB: I'd get them at a discount from them and then would sell them, yeah.

JD: Okay.

LB: No, we never marked up. What was on the jacket was what was on the jacket.

JD: Okay, that's interesting. Well, we've talked a lot. I wanted to just think a little bit more before we wrap it up. Can you describe what a typical Saturday was like in the store?

LB: It depended on the season. If it was during Christmas or just before Valentines or Mothers Day, there would be a lot of movement, people coming, grabbing cards and getting gift items. We had a big supply of African artifacts and African art, you know. We did a good deal of business in that regard. And when we initially opened up,

we sold cloth with, you know, African print and that kind of stuff. So, you would have—I mean, you would be there all day Saturday just before. And if it was like the Christmas holiday, right before Christmas, I mean, people would be coming in, buying gifts and stuff. And then, we would do free gift wrapping, [laughs] so we would be busy.

And then, like in the summer, there would be down time, you know, unless there was some event going on. And, you know, like I was saying, with LINC, if some of the Ford fellows or some of the other people were coming through, they would come in the store. And we would host them, you know, have a little reception for them or something like that.

JD: By Ford fellows, you mean Ford Foundation?

LB: Yeah, people who—yeah, Ford fellows.

JD: Now, were there a lot of students who came through? I mean, I'm wondering just because of—

LB: Yeah, initially—see, the thing was, a part of the marketing and selling of this, we had to prove to the FCD that we were going to get the schools and all of that stuff. Well, that worked for a while, because we had professors who we would purchase books for. Well, the kids decided, "Well, we don't want to walk all the way down to the bookstore. So, we'll go to A&T's bookstore and ask them." And then, so A&T began to buy and purchase the books. So, we got stuck a lot of times with books, you know, so that began to cut into our inventory, our sales.

JD: I'm guessing that MXLU was supportive at first, too, like their students [would buy books].

LB: Oh, yeah, yeah. And as I said, they built the book shelves, the shelving for the store.

JD: That's interesting.

LB: Yeah.

JD: What do you think the store achieved?

LB: [Sighs] It was—we several things. One, we showed to a group of people that economic ventures could work if you just spent the time at it. The other thing was that the—our opening up to the community a cultural world that a lot of them hadn't seen before, didn't know existed, particularly the whole PanAfricanist kind of thing. Kwanzaa—we introduced Kwanzaa. We had celebrations. [1:20:00]

So, the real thing was that we were really a cultural center, a cultural center, and it was open to the community, all segments of the community. I tell people there was—and you didn't know where stuff would be coming from. One day, this gentleman came in, and he was covered in cement, from head to toe, and he wanted—

JD: Covered in—?

LB: You know, he was a concrete worker.

JD: Oh, cement, yeah.

LB: He was covered, you know, with dust and stuff. And he wanted to know did I have a book by James E. McGirt, and I had never heard of James E. McGirt. So, I went back to *Books In Print*, and there, sure enough, was James E. McGirt. Well, he was a poet, a dialect poet from Greensboro, that had lived in Philadelphia, had run a newspaper and a magazine, and had written these books. But he grew up over here in Warnersville, the first black community in Greensboro.

But this man remembered James E. McGirt. There's a library now named after him, McGirt-Horton Library. But he was a, at the turn of the—in the late 1800s and 1900s, he was a—but he remembered the book. So, I found a copy of one of his books at Bennett. It was titled *Avenging the Maine*.

JD: What was it called?

LB: *Avenging the Maine*, M-A-I-N-E.

JD: The U.S.S. Maine?

LB: [Laughs] Yeah. But you had people coming in, I mean, who wanted to—just all walks of life, you know.

JD: And it sounds like it was a cultural center, correct me if I'm wrong, and you didn't have to buy books to come into the store.

LB: Oh, no, no! Just come to one of the activities. And we had people just come in to talk, [laughs] you know, just come in and talk.

JD: Talk about what?

LB: Politics or whatever was happening in the community. Or they would come in seeking information about something. Young ladies would come and want to learn how to do a gele, how to do a head wrap, you know, that kind of thing. How do you do a boubou, you know?

JD: Which is the robe—

LB: Yeah, the wrap, yeah, yeah. So, we'd have that kind of stuff, people just coming in and they were not necessarily buying. They were just wanting information, wanting, oh, one of the big things was names, African names.

JD: Right.

LB: You know, and where could they find a name? And we had some naming books, you know, we'd share with them. And how can you do the ceremony and that kind of thing?

JD: The naming ceremony?

LB: Yeah, and so we'd turn them over to Barbara and Musa Kamara. [Laughing] They knew just about all of the people in Greensboro, because Nelson and Joyce's kids have African names, Cleve Sellers' kids have African names, everybody—you know, we'd have these big naming ceremonies and then a big spread with meals and that kind of stuff, yeah.

JD: And Cleve Sellers was in Greensboro for a bit, right?

LB: Oh, wow, a good while. Both of his—well, two of his kids graduated from Dudley High School. And then, the youngest boy was a state senator, left here when he was about seven.

JD: Oh? Where—in South Carolina?

LB: Yeah, he's at—he left and went to the University of South Carolina, but he now is the president of Denmark.

JD: Oh, the college in Denmark?

LB: Yeah.

JD: Voorhees.

LB: Yeah, Voorhees, yeah.

JD: That's interesting. I mean, it sounds like the bookstore was this institution of black politics, black economics, especially of a radical kind. I'm thinking MXLU left, I think, in '73.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: Do you know when SOBU left, or when they folded?

LB: What happened was when people moved from—there was the change from PanAfricanism to ML that was kind of a merger of all of the forces came together, what was left of Malcolm X, SOBU, and GAPP, into this organization, [1:25:00] Revolutionary Workers League, and then there was this diversion away.

JD: Right. Now, the little I know, SOBU shifted, especially from PanAfricanism to Marxism, right?

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: Nelson Johnson shifted some, Howard Fuller shifted some, and that really—

LB: Well, initially, we were altogether.

JD: Okay.

LB: And then, there was a split.

JD: Between the Revolutionary Workers League and—who was the split between?

LB: Well, [sighs] it took place up in the Revolutionary Workers League, the split. One faction went off and went with the October League. The other people stayed and eventually became WVO.

JD: Okay. I read something on the internet by Slim.

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: Washington? Is that his name?

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: It was a very personal and in some ways political—

LB: [Laughs]

JD: But it was a very good overview of—

LB: Of what happened.

JD: Revolutionary Workers League, and I had not known a lot about it.

LB: One of the people you might want to—and he's here. He's not here right now, but, I mean, he's working with us—is Claude Barnes.

JD: I have actually interviewed him several years ago, and it was actually about his experiences going to Curt's Records and also listening to WVOE Radio.

LB: Yeah, but he—part of his master's or doctoral thesis was on the change, the split in the group, and the demise of GAPP.

JD: Yeah. I should. Yeah, that would be interesting.

LB: He'll be here next week.

JD: Okay. Tell me a little bit—I think we're about ready to wrap up. This has been a great interview. Can you tell me why the store closed?

LB: I was the only person trying to run that store, and we weren't making any money, you know. And it got to the point where I was using my resources to keep the store open, to pay the bills, yeah. Everybody who had worked there had gone back to school. Claude had gone back to school. All of these people had gone off and got PhDs, and I'm still around here. And I just, you know—it was too much for me.

JD: Now, the store was initially successful, right?

LB: Yeah.

JD: Financially? Did it make money at first?

LB: It never made money, but we were able to keep the doors open for about the first seven or eight years. And then, after that, I began to subsidize the store.

JD: Why do you think sales decreased?

LB: Well, you know, we lost the student trade at A&T. We had all these other stores come in, bookstores now cutting into our market. And then, there was a de-emphasis on black nationalism and culturalism, yeah.

JD: And why do you think that—that's kind of one of the big questions historians are struggling with: What happened to Black Nationalism in the 1970s?

LB: You mean in the eighties.

JD: Or in the eighties, especially?

LB: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I think that people began to think that somehow, you know, that was the past, and we don't need that now. We have these other avenues and opportunities. And particularly the generation that came after this, whose experiences were totally different from our experiences, you know, with segregation and that kind of thing. You know, they were products of desegregated schools and that kind of stuff, so their experiences were totally different, and they just don't understand. I hear sometimes, you know, "Well, that was in the past, you know, and it's not now," so, yeah.

But [1:30:00] there was a shift away from it. You know, I was reading something the other day. I can remember when jazz was very popular on A&T's campus when I was growing up, when I was there. I went into the Army and I came back to a concert in '66, just in a two-year span, '66. It was a Cannonball Adderley concert. People were getting up and walking out! [Laughs] You know? So, I don't—you know.

JD: That was when soul music was coming in.

LB: Yeah.

JD: James Brown was getting big.

LB: Well, James Brown was already big. But, yeah, you're right. I mean, there was a whole different music genre coming in. And so, I don't know. I guess somehow or another those of us who were engaged in the Black Power and the PanAfricanist movements didn't do a good enough job of transferring to young folk our legacy or our lineage.

JD: Your legacy and what else did you say?

LB: Lineage.

JD: The lineage, yeah. That's interesting. Yeah, just a fascinating story. To me, one of the kind of interesting ironies is Uhuru Bookstore for some years was closely linked to Marxists. It was an entrepreneurial enterprise that had connections to people who professed Marxism. But it still continued.

LB: Yeah.

JD: And I think that's kind of a really interesting story.

LB: Yeah. If you operate—regardless of what your ideological perspective is, if you're operating a business in this country, you've got to use certain business principles, and you have to pay taxes, and you have to do all those things, yeah.

JD: What do you think of black media or black literature now? I mean, do you think about it at all?

LB: You know, I read stuff and I don't—when I read now, I'm looking for information. I'm not just sitting down, reading something for entertainment. [Laughs] You know, I'm looking for information. And so, I'm learning to use the internet, so I

spend a lot of time on Google, looking for stuff. I've got books. People are always giving me books. But I don't know when I've set down and read a book. It's been a while.

JD: This is just a side note, but also I saw the picture over there, and I came across it online. Is it called Council of the Elders?

LB: The Council of Elders.

JD: Yeah. A really impressive lineup, looking in there, you know: you, Nelson Johnson.

LB: His wife, Joyce, is in there.

JD: Jim Lawson.

LB: Um-hmm. Phil Lawson, Vincent Harding.

JD: Yeah. Grace Lee Boggs signed the declaration.

LB: Yeah. She's too—she's ninety-five now, so she's not traveling. But Charles Sherrod, Shirley Sherrod, are in that picture.

JD: Yeah.

LB: Who else? I mean, yeah, there were some—

JD: Speaking of lineages, that's just—you know, SNCC, the Civil Rights Movement, and then, you know, Grace Lee Boggs at Detroit, you guys here, SOBU. And here it is, I mean, that picture was taken in—

LB: Well, it was summer before last, yeah.

JD: Yeah, and these networks still exist.

LB: Yeah, and we have—I mean, there's a strong tie between BCC and Grace, the Detroit people.

JD: Oh, right.

LB: Yeah, spent a lot of time with—Joyce and Nelson [1:35:00] spent quite a bit of time with them.

JD: Are you guys involved with the U.S. Social Forum?

LB: Oh, yeah. We've been to both of them, the one in Atlanta and the one in Detroit. Yeah, we were there with Grace, and Vincent showed up. So, we had a good time.

JD: Yeah. That's good. I know people my age who were involved with them. One of my friends, he works in the technology side, and a lot of what he does is try to improve the—

LB: Yeah. We went to Atlanta and we carried interns with us. And then, we did the same thing in Detroit. So, yeah, we were there the whole time, yeah.

JD: What do you think the one or two most important struggles are right now in the U.S.?

LB: [Sighs] The economic structure and trying to create sustainable, viable work. We have gotten off into community gardening and helping other people to see the value in going back to being self-sustaining in that regard. And right now, hopefully next week, Claude Barnes—I mentioned him—he has been working on putting together a package for us around what we could be doing and what we should be doing in economic development. So, that.

But the other thing, you know, we say here, "Our work is to build community." That's what we see our work as, and so that's what we try to do. And we have been working heavily on the immigration question. We have a strong relationship with FLOC, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee. We work heavily with them. Labor is a major

issue. Right now, Joyce and Nelson are at the UAW conference in Cincinnati. So, yeah, immigration, labor, the economic picture is some of the things that we're really concerned about.

JD: Did you go to the FLOC conference this weekend in Durham?

LB: No, I didn't, but the young guy, Wesley Morris, does that. I mainly just do the historical stuff, trying to keep track of what it was that we were doing in the past and how it can aid and support what it is that we're trying to do now. I do a lot of things with tours, with young people coming through, wanting to know about the Movement.

JD: I'd like to do one of those.

LB: Yeah. I carry them to the different sites in Greensboro, but also talk about the various struggles that we have had here and how they can help us with future struggles and that kind of thing.

JD: Yeah, that's great. What did you think of Moral Mondays, the work that Reverend Barber has been doing?

LB: Yeah, well, [laughs] underneath all that is, again, BCC, because Joyce has worked closely with Reverend Barber helping him. In fact, she was the chair of the state meeting this past Saturday.

JD: The NAACP?

LB: Yeah, state meeting. But so, a lot of our efforts have been in helping to support, you know, in a technical kind of way. No, so we've been very engaged in what has been happening with that.

JD: You know, it's interesting. Moral Monday, obviously, was a huge media story during the summer, locally, statewide, nationally, even internationally, and a lot of people

were introduced to Reverend Barber. Maybe they had heard of him a little bit [1:40:00] before, but a lot of people, I think, *mistakenly* interpret Moral Monday as a one-man show.

LB: Oh, yeah. [Laughs]

JD: And I'm in no way belittling what he has done, Reverend William Barber, because he has done an incredible job. I'm not belittling what the organization has done. But I think that—it even took me a while to realize, with multiple conversations with different people, how many different groups have been involved with Moral Monday. It's not even just the people who are standing on the platforms.

LB: Oh, no.

JD: But the last ten, fifteen, twenty years, people in Chapel Hill who have a breakfast group that I think Reverend Barber has been attending for a while, the BCC.

LB: Well, you know, he has been involved. He's been going to Detroit, talking to Grace and folk. There is this MIT CoLab. So, he is just—he's out there.

JD: MIT?

LB: Yeah, MIT, Massachusetts—

JD: Yeah. CoLab?

LB: CoLab, C-O-Lab.

JD: What does that mean?

LB: It's a gathering of people from around the country who are working on these economic issues and things and working on—they provide the White House with information about things that they need to be working on. Yeah, it's easy to think—but

then, when you look at it, there have been other Moral Monday activities, and Barber is not there, I mean, around the state.

JD: Right.

LB: You go to, I mean, in western—out in Franklin, North Carolina. I mean, that's the western part of the state that's highly Republican, and these people are organizing Moral Mondays. Weaverville. Yeah, so there are a lot of—this HKonJ Street a big thing, because there are a lot of different organizations that are part of this whole thing.

JD: Yeah, and for the tape, HKonJ is Historic Thousands on Jones Street.

LB: On Jones Street, yeah.

JD: Where the General Assembly is located.

LB: Yeah.

JD: Maybe—was last year the first one, or is that two or three?

LB: Oh, no, this is about the fifth one. [Note: First HKonJ assembly was in February 2007; the eighth was February 8, 2014]

JD: This is the fifth one, okay, excuse me. And are they in February, or when are they?

LB: Yeah, in late January or early February. Yeah, it's cold out, though.

JD: Yeah.

LB: Yeah, but, I mean, the coalition—I mean, there's over a hundred organizations that have signed on to that.

JD: Yeah. I mean, it's exciting what's going on right now. It's very, very frustrating what's going on in the legislative level, obviously, but I think this summer,

especially, bringing the media's attention to all this work that's been going on, I think has been a kind of glimmer of hope. And also, just—I'm thinking about, you know, I think another thing is Reverend Barber is very, very charismatic. He's a great speaker. But, again, even all the work he's doing and all the work his organization is doing is not visible. It doesn't show up in the stories a lot of times. And so, yeah, he's going to Detroit to meet Grace Lee Boggs. He's going to Boston to the MIT thing. I think I heard recently that he got to meet Anne Braden in Louisville before she—

LB: Passed, um-hmm.

JD: Passed away, and so—

LB: You know, he had a history. When I first met him, he was working for the State of North Carolina, the Human Relations Office, or Human Relations Council—I don't know what the exact title was, but he was working actually for the State of North Carolina before the NAACP. Now, this was long before. I met him back in the late eighties or early nineties.

JD: Oh, goodness. Okay.

LB: And, you know, he was—and that was in his state role, you know.

JD: I didn't know he was that old.

LB: Oh, he's not old, but he's—[laughs] I guess he's in his forties.

JD: Okay. So, he was quite young when you met him then. Maybe he was in his early twenties or something?

LB: Yeah, yeah, late twenties.

JD: Okay.

LB: But, no, he was working for the State of North Carolina.

JD: Yeah. [1:45:00] Well—

LB: So, he was out there, you know, long before this NAACP thing. When he decided to run, it was a good move for the state, because it—

JD: Run for the NAACP leadership?

LB: President, yeah. Because it reactivated that organization.

JD: Right. That's another thing I don't think people realize is that NAACP has a great history, obviously, especially at the national level, but today—well, in the civil rights era, too, each state chapter was pretty different.

LB: Oh, yeah.

JD: In that it really came down to leadership—you know, people like Robert Williams down in Monroe, [laughs] the head of his local NAACP chapter. And the people in the national office didn't like what he was doing. And so, there's always been variations between what—

LB: Yeah. Yeah, we were different. I mean, can you imagine GAPP and the NAACP working out of the same office?

JD: Right!

LB: And people didn't know the difference between the two, because, depending on what the issue was, it could be—you know, if it was on civic engagement and stuff, then it was NAACP. You know, if it was on welfare rights or something like a housing issue, then it was GAPP. But we were the same people! [Laughs]

JD: So, people would come in and not even distinguish between the two groups?

LB: No, the same telephone number, same address, everything, the same office in a space about this size.

JD: Oh, okay, I didn't realize that. And then, that was an interesting detail that you mentioned that that was also previously had been the office for CORE.

LB: Yeah, I set it up before I went in the Army—a woman, Elizabeth [Lizener], she was a German refugee, and I. We were part of CORE and we set the office up. This was in the summer of '63.

JD: Was she Jewish?

LB: Yeah.

JD: And did she work at A&T?

LB: She worked at Bennett.

JD: Okay.

LB: And I have an exhibit downstairs and I've got some pictures of her. But she was from Austria. And so, her family fled and went to Canada. But she taught French and German at Bennett and then she left. When she left Bennett, she went to Shaw. She worked at Shaw for almost twenty—Shaw University for almost twenty years.

JD: That's a very interesting history. I don't know a lot about it, but I've heard bits and pieces, this history of Jewish refugees from Europe coming to the American South and working at historically black colleges. And I think most HBCUs had at least—I don't know about most, but a lot had one or two faculty members who had that kind of life story.

LB: Yeah. She was very active in CORE, part of the executive committee and all.

JD: Well, this has been a great interview. I really appreciate you sitting down with me to do this. Is there anything that I left out, or maybe you can think of things that I should have asked more about?

LB: I don't know. I think you covered it. But, you know, we had an impact. And people are doing things now—you know, I'll hear people saying, particularly, "Well, this has never happened before." I always tell people, you know, "Never say this is the first time that something has ever happened," you know. They go around talking about Kwanzaa, and I go back and show them pictures. [Sound of sirens in background] I say, "Here. [Laughs] We were doing this," you know. People, you know, they don't say "PanAfricanism" now. They say "Afrocentric." Well, I was wearing dashikis. I've got a closet full of dashikis. [Laughs]

JD: Yeah.

LB: Yeah, so.

JD: This is an interesting point about social movements, in general, and historical memory. I recently read Harold Cruse's book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*.

LB: Yeah, we had that book in the store.

JD: Yeah, big seller back then.

LB: Yeah.

JD: Very impressive work. And he's an interesting guy because he was born in, I think, 1916. He got to New York when it was very Communist. He had his period of Communism. He became disaffected, aspiring artist.

LB: [Clears throat]

JD: And he was, you know, a Black Nationalist before it became cool again in the sixties. And that's one of the things he says in his book, is—all the Black Power activists [1:50:00] were mostly in their early to mid-twenties at that time—he said they still

needed to learn more about previous Black Nationalists. You know, they knew about Garvey a little bit, but he would talk about people like Martin Delaney—

LB: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, that was one of his big points was that this is not brand new and historical consciousness would be a tool.

LB: Yeah. I remind people of that all the time, yeah, that, "No, I can show—you're not the first to have done this." [Laughs]

JD: Yeah. Well, thank you. Great interview.

LB: Okay, appreciate it.

JD: I'm going to turn this off now.

LB: Okay.

JD: Thank you.

LB: Okay.

JD: Okay.

[Recording ends at 1:50:53]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council