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### Barbara Brown Simmons (BA 1969, JD 1974)

UNM Black Alumni Chapter Oral History Project

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UNM Black Alumni Chapter Oral History Project  
Interviewee List

1. Angela J. Jewell  
Retired District Court Judge

2. Barbara Br...

***UNM BLACK ALUMNI CHAPTER  
Oral History Project***

3. Rev. Charles Becknell Sr.  
PhD American Studies,  
Pastor of Immanuel Missionary Baptist Church

4. Charles P. Roberts  
Former UNM Dean

A UNM Black Alumni Chapter and  
African American Student Services  
Research Project

5. Harold Bailey  
PhD American Studies  
Former Executive Director, New Mexico Office of African American Affairs

6. Ira L. Hargis  
New Mexico Sports Hall of Fame  
UNM Logo  
Conducted by the  
University of New Mexico Oral History Program

7. James P. Lewis  
State Treasurer of New Mexico from 1955-1960 and from 2006-2014  
2015-2016

8. Gordon Maly, PhD  
Albuquerque's first black school principal in 1964, first black elected state  
representative in 1968 and Ber... first black county commissioner in 1990.

Funded by:  
The University of New Mexico  
Center for Regional Studies

9. Alex Ann Purley Powell  
Director of the Board of... and Cultural Center  
Owner/Manager at Mr. Powdrell's Barbecue House

10. Tommie Jewell Sr.  
Retired Educator



# BARBARA BROWN SIMMONS

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*(Tell us your name and title.)*

My name is Barbara Brown Simmons, Attorney at Law.

*(Tell us about your early childhood.)*

Okay. I was born November 29, 1947, in a place called Littlefield, Texas. I moved to Hereford, Texas, in 1954. That was the year of the Supreme Court decision Brown vs. Board of Education. And schools all across America were ordered to desegregate with all deliberate speed. And that was for Black and white students to go to school together. Well, Hereford only had a white school. So what they did is they called a meeting of the Black families, there were only about six or seven in the city, and they offered to give them a school for the Black children. And so they accepted because they had said you can't go to school with the white students. We know we have to implement a plan, but we're not there yet. So for the first two weeks of school, I was a little girl, six years old, and they had us to come to school down in the basement of the white school. And it was only years later that I realized just how brave my father was, because every morning he would get out of the car.

We would park. He would walk down this sidewalk to the door of the basement. And he would watch me go down the steps. And then he would turn around and go back to his car. But what I also noticed is this crowd of white people on each side of the sidewalk, saying things. I don't remember exactly what. And every day, he did that for two weeks. He made sure I got to the door safely and back to his car. And later on I found out there were even objects thrown at him. And while we were down in this basement, we could hear the students walking above us. We could hear the bells ring and it was very dark. We could barely see. And they had a white teacher who came down. And mostly all we did was color and just write little things. She didn't teach us anything. So, after the two weeks was up, they decided to give us the clubhouse at the golf course. So they moved us into the clubhouse. They recruited a Black teacher from another city, and that's where we had school. And it was grades one through twelve. But of course, there was only one through three there. There was nobody above the third grade there. And so, I stayed there until I was in the fifth grade. And the classes did grow. By the time I left, we had junior high students, but they were all in the same room. They divided with two teachers. You had teachers that taught 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup>, and then the others was 1<sup>st</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>. So, I moved from Hereford to Amarillo, Texas...

*(Everyone is in the same classroom?)*

Everybody is in the same classroom and one teacher is teaching us all. So what she did is by grade she would set us apart in the room, and she would go around and teach this group for a few minutes, this group for a few minutes, and this group for a few minutes. And that's the way she had to operate.



*(How many students?)*

About twelve. I would say about twelve. And then a little girl, when I imagine it, it's like maybe 30 or 40, but I would say maybe it's twelve. I thought it was a full classroom. That's the way I remember it. But I would say it was probably about 12.

*(But you said it expanded before you left?)*

And high school. It was about, I would say, 40 students.

*(So it did grow?)*

Right. The only thing they did was they got another teacher to teach part, and then the elementary and then the junior high.

*(In one room?)*

In one room. As I said, it was the clubhouse for the golfers. It was a pretty big room, but it wasn't really big enough to teach that many students.

*(How hard when you can hear everything going on at the same time.)*

Right. They were teaching at the same time. So we could hear them and they could hear us. And another thing, I'm glad you brought me back there that I forgot is that they brought us what you call a food truck every day. They would drive out in this big white van and they would feed us soup and bread and crackers and milk. And they brought us food out every day. That was another issue: they didn't have a cafeteria. And most of the time I remember it was soup, and milk.

*(What are your memories of Littlefield?)*

Very little. Very little. I just remember playing in my grandma's front yard, playing little games and that's it. And my grandma. On my mother's side, we called her "mother." And all I remember is playing in my mother's yard and we used to make little mud pies. We used to make, and we'd build little pies, and she had a date tree, and we would put little dates on the pies for decoration. That's my memory of Littlefield.

*(Was it a racially mixed community?)*

Well, let me just say this. Back then, there were no mixed communities that I was aware of. In Texas, they were all segregated. We had our part of town, they had



their part of town. And the only time I saw white people is if maybe I was on the street and I saw them passing in cars.

*(So you went from segregated to...was it integrated?)*

No. It was still separate. It was only then that I knew it was a separate. When I was back in Littlefield, I didn't know. But when we moved to Hereford, I understood that Black and white people had to live separate.

*(How long were you in Hereford?)*

I was ten.

*(What happened from there?)*

We moved to Amarillo, which is considered a big city in the panhandle part of Texas, next to Oklahoma. When I moved there, there were Black schools in existence. There was an elementary school with all Black teachers. There was a high school, junior high together with all Black teachers. So it was very different from Hereford. It was an actual school with maybe two or three hundred students in the elementary and maybe a little bit more than that in the high school and junior high. But we were still a very separate community. My doctor was Black, my dentist was Black, all my teachers were Black, we had a Black movie theater, a Black skating rink, everything was Black. And just as somebody else described before, there was a street, a huge street, and you knew that once you got past there, that was the other side of town. We didn't consciously not go over there. I think it was own choice. We had everything we needed on our side of town.

*(People knew, though.)*

Right. We knew that. And white people decided, but I think we went along with it. I don't think it was our decision. I think white people decided this is where you are to be, and we went along with it.

*(What was Amarillo like?)*

Fabulous. I liked, it was a sense of pride. That's where I learned to be Black and proud. That's where I learned about Black history and Harriet Tubman was my favorite person. Our Black teachers taught us Black history; they taught us Black pride because our teachers were very formal and very strict. You had to say yes ma'am, no ma'am, you had to sit up straight in your chair, you couldn't say anything improper. They could paddle us. I remember in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade I got a paddling. Because this guy and I played the dozens. If you don't know what the dozens is, you talk about each other's mamas. And I got caught playing the dozens and the



principal came and hit me one time and I thought I was going to die. And he didn't hit me again because I think he thought I was going to crumble and die. And so, they could use corporal punishment. But the thing about our Black teachers is they taught us that education is invaluable.

See, we couldn't come to school without homework. If you came to school without homework, you got a paddling. If you didn't do your best, if you flunked the test, you were going to stay after school until you got that test right. So we were forced to be good students, forced to do our homework, forced to be the best that we could. But we knew that it was not out of being mean, it was out of love. And they taught us about life. I had a biology teacher that used to gather all the young girls together and say, look, and I guess I can say this on film. He said instead of opening your legs, and closing your eyes, you need to close your legs and open your eyes. That's what he said. And he talked about boys and what all they would tell you to get you to try to have sex and things like that. And he preached to us and we listened to him, too. But I got that preaching at home, too, from my father. But it wasn't just homework and academics, it's about life, too. And they taught us to always be polite, just things that you don't get these days. So, how to be a gentleman, how to be a lady, what you should wear, what you shouldn't wear. We couldn't wear things like they wear today. You had to cover up. So it was a fabulous experience for me. I loved my teachers. I loved school. And learning was fun to me because of that environment. And most of all, living in a segregated community, I was so proud of my parents. And especially my father. My father, like I heard Harold and Dr. McNeil talking about their mothers, well, that's the way I feel about my father.

My father was my hero because I never saw him be submissive. I never saw him do the step-and-fetch-it walk for any man. He was always a proud Black man. And he was an entrepreneur. He owned his own nightclub, and he owned a hotel when we were growing up. And people would come to our house after a concert, like James Brown, Ike and Tina Turner, Etta James, Sam Cooke, you know, all of these famous people would come, these are the kind of people, I guess he was on the, what you call the Chitling Circuit. So he had the biggest Black nightclub in town. And so we got to see all these people and he provided really well for us. But when I saw he was a proud Black man, I saw two incidents.

We had an insurance man. The insurance man used to come to the house to pick up your premium. And he was a white guy. And so, he came unexpectedly; he was supposed to come another day. So my father said he had to go get the money. I don't know if my father trusted banks, the safe, or whatever. And the man said, "Boy, you can't waste my time," or something like that, "Boy." And he was standing in our house, and my father literally picked him up and pitched him out in the yard, and said, "Don't ever come to my house again. You don't call me a boy." And my mother was all scared. She thought the police was going to come and arrest him, and I heard him tell her, "I will never let anyone disrespect me in front of my daughters



and my son. They will never say that I was a coward." He didn't that again in a grocery store. We were in the line and the man came up and got in front of my father and said, "Boy, you can't stand in front." No, he didn't say "boy," he said "Nigger, you can't stand in front of a white man." And my dad punched him right in the face, and he hit the floor, they called the police, and there were some white ladies in the line. And when the police got there, they told the police that he hit my dad first. They took up for my dad. And once again, my mother would be all nervous. "Oh, you could have gotten hurt, you could have gone to jail." But once again, he was saying to her, I will never let my daughters look at me as a coward. I would rather die." But we didn't understand then that he could have gotten hurt in Amarillo, Texas. And that's just the kind of person he was. He always took time. He took us the circus, he took us to the rodeo, he took us out to eat, he took us on picnics, it was always a family thing. And he always, and he had four daughters, never depend on a man, never depend on anyone, get your education, and become independent. Never depend on anyone but yourself. But you've got to get an education. So he was always really, he was my hero. And he always, anything we did something good at school, we got a good grade, he showed so much love and so much enthusiasm until you just couldn't wait to bring the next good grade home and do something positive.

So when I came, well, I don't want to skip Amarillo, because I wanted to talk a little bit more about the community, because we had Black doctors, Black teachers, Black everything, we had a good well-rounded community. Well, my dad decided to move to Albuquerque because he had bought a business there. And he had been called to preach. So he had been started preaching. So to get away from all of his old partying friends from the nightclub, he thought he had to relocate because they were always trying to get him to go back into the nightclub scene. So he came to Albuquerque. And he had a mechanic's shop out on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, off of Candelaria. So, we came to Albuquerque. And that fabulous life ended.

The first time I knew what racism was, I knew what discrimination was, I knew what hate was. I didn't know that then. Because when we started at Valley High School I was a junior in high school. That was the first time a white person called me a nigger. And I couldn't believe it because in Amarillo, we was pretty brave. We thought white folks was scared of us. We said, they're not going to mess with us. They know Black people will fight. So I couldn't believe a white person had the nerve to call me a nigger. And it wasn't just the students. I remember when on Sadie Hawkins Day, these boys wore Ku Klux Klan outfits to a high school. And we complained to the principal and he said it was all in fun.

And so, it wasn't just the students, though. Two teachers, one was a history teacher and he referred to Martin Luther King as a nigger during one of his lectures in class, and I got up and walked out and went to the principal's office. And the principal didn't want to do anything about it. So my mom and my dad got involved, and the principal instructed him that he couldn't use that term again in my presence. He didn't say



"again." And then, when I came to Albuquerque, I was a real smart student, I was on the honor roll based on my foundation from Amarillo. So, they couldn't understand why this and I heard one say, "how did that nigger get to be so smart? I never seen a smart nigger before." They used that word quite often at Valley. When I came to Albuquerque, I heard people talking about they were integrated, they didn't have race problems, well, Valley was one of those exceptions, okay?

*(What year was that?)*

That was 1963 through '65 I went to Valley High School. And so, I had a teacher, and I used to get the highest grade in World History. And so one week, we had a test every week, this white girl got the highest grade. He brought a cake to school, and they celebrated her getting the highest grade. He didn't say, by getting a higher grade than me, but they celebrated because he got the highest grade. So it was incidents like that. But you know what, it didn't make me feel inferior. I thought they were trying to make me feel inferior or somehow on the outside. It didn't. It made me strong. So, when I got to Albuquerque, I was already Black and proud, so it was nothing they could do. I was real Black and proud. I knew my history, and that's why I think history is important. I knew my history. I had a Black doctor. He didn't kill me. I had a Black dentist. He didn't kill me. So I just wasn't buying any of it. But I became a militant. The principal told my mom that I needed to see a psychiatrist because I was too aggressive. My behavior was abnormally aggressive? No, I'm defending myself. So, that's the way my principal described me.

So, I graduated from Valley in 1965. And I applied and I got in to the University of New Mexico. And my first year at the University of New Mexico I was too busy, I was so happy to be out of the house because my parents didn't allow us to go to parties and all that. They were kind of strict. So I was just happy to be out of the house and be able to do anything I wanted to do 24 hours a day. But, in 1965 when I came to the university, I noticed that Black students were almost like the invisible students. There was nothing for us. Nothing culturally, nothing socially, nothing in the classrooms, no Black history, no Black faculty, no Black, it was like there was nothing there except this handful of Black students. And so, at that time, the Civil Rights Movement was going on nationally. And I'd go home and I'd turn on the TV and I'd see the people getting beat and the dogs and the water hoses and all that. And then, about 1966, some people who were organizing Freedom Riders to go down in the South came through Albuquerque. And we sit down and we talk to them on campus. And they were talking about going to Mississippi. And I call my dad and he said no way are you going. I still felt like I had to get my parents' permission. He said, "No way are you going." But listening to them about what was going on and the fact that the movement had become a lot of young people, I was inspired to do it.

And I need to back up a bit, because my last year of high school, just when I was getting ready to go to college, I met a person here in Albuquerque by the name of



Hannah Bess. Hannah was the president of the Black student union, the NAACP. And she came to our church and she spoke to us about joining the junior NAACP. And she talked about all the things that were going on. And so of course I had joined. But I don't want to sound like a racist: when I went to the meeting, it was all white folks running the meeting. And I don't care how liberal they tried to be, they really didn't understand what it was all about in terms of being Black. You know, I just felt like you had to understand from this position what it was to be Black. It was okay for you to be involved, but you don't understand the way we understand what needs to be done. Sometimes you need to go through people you know. Sometimes you got to go and go against your friends. Maybe you got to go against your family. Are you willing to do that?

And so, by the time these Freedom Riders came through Albuquerque, I already had this passion. And so when they left, the Black students on campus started talking about a Black Student Union. And so, our first meeting was in December, and I believe it's December the first, 1967. And the reason I know is because we got, like Charles said, in the newspaper the next day. We were in the newspaper the next day. We were down the sub and we had this meeting. And we were talking about what we wanted to be called. Did we want to be called Negroes? Did we want to be called Black? Did we want to be called African-Americans? And I tell you, the one that was hardest to sell was Black. At that time, it was Black students, "don't you call me Black." It was a negative connotation to the word Black. And so, it was a year before we called ourselves the Black Student Union.

But anyway, there was a white lady that came in and sit down and she was taking notes. And so, Joe Long was our spokesperson at the time. He was up front and was talking about what we were going to do as an organization. What kinds of goals and purposes should we have? Should we let white students join? So Joe Long asked her what was she doing? She said, well, I'm with *The Lobo* and I'm taking notes. So Joe told us that maybe we should end our meeting and meet at a house because we really didn't want that kind of exposure. So she got up and stormed out and the next day we were on the front page. It said, "Black group throws the reporter out of the sub." They said, "we told her to leave." The title was *Black Power Meets*. That's what it really was. It talked about us throwing her out of the sub. So that's how I know when our very first meeting was.

And so, we elected Joe Long as the president. I wasn't really called Vice President, but I was like second-in-command to Joe Long. And we did a lot of stuff together for the group. So we got past the name. And then we got the issue is some of the athletes wanted their white girlfriends to come to the meetings. Now, we were saying to them, can we just get organized as a Black group first? But the Black sisters didn't want the white girls in the meeting anyway, I'm telling you. They were competition and they were winning. They were competition for the guys and they were winning. So anyway, we had a hassle about that, and then finally we decided as a group our



goal is not to separate or segregate, but we felt like as a group that Black people need to get together, define their own agenda, before we bring other people in who we wanted to help us with that agenda and meetings and whatever. But we wanted to organize first. And so, within that next year, we were a cohesive, solid group. The athletes was on board not bringing their white girlfriends. We were on board with being called the Black Student Union. And we said that our basic purpose was for racial equality, to eliminate racism at UNM, and to be included at all levels of the university experience. Because we were excluded at all levels. And that was our goal. To make sure that we accomplished these goals.

And how we set about to do it is we formed coalitions. We were a small group. With the Hispanics, with the American Indians, and the wild white people we had on campus. They were a lot more radical than we was. SDF, and a lot of different white organizations who didn't go along with the war. There was some napalm production that they were against, and just against racism in an institution, freedom of speech, they felt that was being limited, so we had a coalition of people. So that when the Black Student Union, one of our first moves, well, 1968 was the BYU protest at a football game.

Let me tell you about BYU. Brigham Young University, we were told, was run by the Mormon church. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints. Long name. And they had a practice that was discriminatory. They had policies. They were saying that Black people couldn't get married in their church, even if you were Mormon, you couldn't join the priesthood. But the thing that bothered me...

*(Black people couldn't go to heaven.)*

That's right. That's not what bothered me, because I have to earn that anyway. What bothered me is when a Mormon told me that this was a curse. My Black skin was a curse and I was going straight to hell. It didn't do me any good to go to church; I was going straight to hell. That was it for me. That was it for me. Your Black skin is a curse. So, one of the protest's agendas was the protest against the Mormon church. Well, we weren't alone. All of the schools in the WAC conferences, the Western Athletic Conference, that had Black Student Unions, were organizing against BYU. We wanted our schools to sever all ties with BYU and not have our team go to BYU and they not come to our campuses. It started in UTEP, University of Texas at El Paso. The track team, the members refused to run in a track meet at BYU. And then it escalated in Wyoming when the 14 football players who did not protest, but just went to the coaches' meeting with black armbands was almost kicked off the football team.

So everything became an uproar in the Western Athletic Conference, and that's when our Black Student Union in support of UTEP, in support of the Wildman 14, decided that we were going to protest at the football game. So, we didn't have any



problems at the football game. We marched around the field, we had our signs and our Black armbands, and we held up our fence and then after the game started we marched out of the stadium as everybody clapped for us leaving the stadium. Okay, so that was in '68. Then, we began to go to our Senate, our Student Body Senate, and say, we want you to stop funding programs that has to do with BYU and we led that struggle. Well, by then, I had become a senator. I was elected as a senator and I was on the Senate and I was encouraging white students to sever all ties. And in fact, they voted to sever all ties as a part of the entire student body government. And so then there was the next protest.

But before I leave 1969, a lot of stuff happened. Dean Roberts came to the University of New Mexico. So Dean Roberts came to the University of New Mexico in 1969 as a dean of students. Well, we heard that they had just hired this Black Dean of Students, so we all speculated that it was some little old man that was an Uncle Tom. A lot of Black people know what I mean when I say Uncle Tom. It means somebody that the administration handpicked and he was going to do everything they told him. So me and my roommate at the time, Linda Mitchell Bell, got a little plan, and we were going to welcome him on behalf of the Black student union. So we walk in, and we look, and our mouths fell open. There was this just simply gorgeous man.

*(A young man.)*

I cannot describe how good-looking Dean Roberts was. We were sitting there for a minute, just unbelievable how good-looking, and he was real pleasant. And we introduced ourselves, and he said, "Well, I'm glad you came in," he said, "I was going to get in touch with you," he said. "We need to sit and talk and let me know is there anything I can do for the group." And so I immediately said, "We need a faculty advisor," because none of the other people on campus will be our faculty advisor, and we can't become a legitimate organization within the university without a faculty advisor. He said, "You got it. I'll find out what I have to do." So he became our faculty advisor. And so... and this is the good thing about Dean Roberts. We never had to go and say, "We need this." He'd say, "Do you all have an office, or do you have a center where you can gather? Where do you go?" We said, "To the sub." You know, we sit around in the sub. And so he said, "Well, we need to change that." And the next thing we know, he had put in all the requisitions and we had a room. It was a nice size room, we had all the furniture we needed, and then he said, "I got three student work-study jobs." And he hired me, Sam, and Don Walton to keep the center open. So it was really a blessing because students that didn't come to the Black Student Union meetings, students who weren't athletes, students who were loners, would end up coming there for different services or just to hang out, read, study. And so it really became a place for all students. It really did. And we owed all of that to Dean Roberts.



Another thing about Dean Roberts is a lot of Black students would go to him. To talk about things that were going on in the university. And he'd look at you like this: I'll get back to you. And you'd look up, and Dean Roberts had picked up the phone or walked across the hall, and those issues are resolved. There were Black students who would tell you that. And a lot of Black students would go to him if they had financial problems. And if he couldn't get it from Student Aid or some fund, he'd give it to you. He was very helpful like that. He was very involved with us. He really wanted to make sure we'd succeed as students. He advised us all. If a student was a Black student was about to quit, he would sit down and talk to them, long and hard, about why they should stay and what is it, what can I do to help you stay in school. And he became a legend among us. Right now, everybody talks about Dean Roberts with fondness, which is why when we got the fellowship, it was no issue as to who we wanted to name it after.

*(Hold on to the fellowship. Let's go there later. I want to set the timeframe. What year was the BYU incident?)*

Okay, '68, because there's another big one.

*(So, you mentioned the black armbands, the summer of '68 was the Olympic Games when we first saw the Black Power fist on the podium. How were you all feeling about the connection between what you were doing and what was happening?)*

Let's just back up to Tommy Smith and John Carlos. I think among us Black students, we thought, wow: on a world stage, with all that you're going to have to lose, money, recognition, fame, you became infamous after that. So, it kind of gave us courage.

*(That was the Olympic Games you're talking about?)*

Yes. The Mexico Olympic Games when John Carlos and Tommy Smith stood up, I don't know if it was silver and gold, or one won silver and one won gold and they bowed their heads and they raised their fists in front of the world. And it gave us encouragement and a responsibility. We felt if those guys can do that we need to take notice and do what we have to do to fight racial injustice, to fight for racial equality and inclusion in this university, and eliminate racism, whether it's Black, white, or green. And so, they gave us inspiration. So yeah, we did come home with that idea from them. It became a symbol of our Black movement, the raised fist. It became a symbol all across the nation, all across the WAC conference, it became a symbol. And a lot of times, for years after I graduated from university, we'd see each other and we'd do the power pump.

But you know, to do that, it was empowering. To see all of us standing there unified together with the fists raised, to us, it was empowering. And let me just say this: not



only did white people didn't like it, some Black people didn't like it. Okay, they called us troublemakers, stirring up the good white folks. And so, there was some Black preachers preaching about us in their pulpits on Sunday. So, but we felt like we were right that we were riding on the backs of the people who were out there getting bit by dogs, sprayed by water hoses, going to jail, and that the price we were paying was minor compared to the price that some people were paying. We knew that at some point we...

[pause to wait for noise to subside]

It was a much bigger price. Even though we knew that we might get kicked out of school and our parents would be devastated, and it might be a bad career move, we felt that was minor compared to what Tommy Smith and John Carlos did, and what Martin Luther King was doing, and the Student Non-Violent Committee was doing down in the South, we thought it was minor. And we felt obligated. And you know what, it also, for me, gave me a sense of pride that we could come together like that.

So after that game in 1968, in 1969 a lot of things happened. I started with when Dean Roberts came to campus. But it was also the year in April, April 2, 1969, that the Black Student Union marched into the office of Ferrel Heady and had ten demands. And one of them was for a Black Studies program. But the one that was ironic was the tenth demand: if you don't grant us the other nine demands, we demand you resign. So anyway, he looked at them and he said, "I'll take them under advisement." But he said, "the one about the Black Studies program, I'd like to meet with you immediately." The thing about Ferrel Heady, he didn't get hysterical, he didn't react in any kind of negative manner, he just listened to you. He'd just sit there and he listened and he studied and he was always cool, calm, and collected. And we could respect that. Not like some of the past presidents. But anyway.

So, he called us the next week. He called us in. He called me in first. And I was shocked because I thought he would call Joe Long in who was the leader of the group. And he said, "How would you like to write the Black Studies proposal?" he said, "the Regent, or whoever is over the money, is not going to give me permission to have any staff people do it, but how would you like to do it? I will pay your expenses to wherever you want to go. We'll pay you during the summer." And I'm looking at him like, why does he think I can do it? I'm thinking, "can I do this? This is a lot on me. I'm still kind of a kid." So anyway, I said, "yes, but I got to talk to my Black Student Union members," and they said, "of course." So I had their endorsement.

So what I did, I stayed the summer, I went to California. I went to Berkeley, talked to their Black Student Union and people involved with Black Studies. UCLA, USC, I went to Merit College and they were closed. I went there because that was the school of Huey P. Newton of the Black Panthers, and I wanted to hear some Black



Panther stories. And I went around in California and I came back with a lot of information and I sat down to write the proposal. And I said, but they all say there's three components: you have to have a community component because no Black Studies will survive on a campus unless you have community support. And then there was the academic component that says that you must be autonomous and you must become a department. And then, there was the rationale component. You've got to explain to the university why you need a Black Studies program. And I thought and I thought and I called Dean Roberts because I said, "maybe Dean Roberts can help me with this. He knows about the University and statistics," and he said, "don't worry. I'll do it." And one of the things he had to do is he had to talk with coaches over at the athletic department. And he was able to get them to respond to him. I wasn't able to. And Dean Roberts wrote the rationale provision of the Black Studies proposal. He won't take credit for it, but he actually wrote it. And when they were reviewing it to approve it, that was a big part. We had to show why there was a need. That was a big part. You couldn't just say because we were culturally deprived or whatever. You had to show that it had an impact on Black students on campus and what was happening in terms of graduation rates and things like that.

The next big thing was I had gotten on the entertainment committee. And on the entertainment committee I got the university to contract with Aretha Franklin and Sly Stone for entertainment. But I also got them to bring Mohammad Ali, who was on his speaking tour. And as a person on the entertainment committee that invited these people, I got to host them when they came. So for a whole week, I hosted Mohammad Ali. That's when he was getting ready to go to court for draft dodging and they had taken his belt. And the thing that I noticed about his trip here, everybody wanted, we went to the reservation, we sat down and had lunch with the chief, we talked to somebody in Martin's Town who was in charge of something, the mayor's house, everybody was real cordial to him. Even though he talked a mean game. When it came to White people he talked a mean game. He was a Black Muslim, you know. And it was a very interesting visit because what I saw in him was not being afraid of the repercussions of bucking the system. Just not being afraid. Being very strong. Being very proud of who he was and willing to sacrifice for what he believed in. And those were some very strong characteristics that stuck with me.

And so, like I said, that was a very good year. And also, just one last thing, the Black Panthers came through town. And at that time, it was Bobby Seals and some others, but I remember Bobby Seals, and they spoke. Not that the university, but a group of white kids, the Student Democratic Society, who were radical white kids group, had invited them in to speak. So afterwards, their plane wasn't going to leave until the next day, and so my roommates and I invited them to stay with us. So they came and they spent the night at our apartment and we talked all about, because you know, they had us thinking the Black Panther party were gangsters.

*(The media's portrayal of them?)*



Yeah. And so when we sat down and we talked to them and talked about their 10 point program, we really understand that they had been misrepresented.

*(Let's talk about their program. Were you able to see the vision they had?)*

Not only was I able to, after talking to them, I used to visit my sister in California and I would go to their meetings, and I actually went out to some of the locations where they were feeding. And I went to some of their rallies when Eldridge Cleaver was still around and involved, and I got to see Eldridge Cleaver, Huey P. Newton, they would have rallies and 103<sup>rd</sup> and Central in the park in L.A. And everyone could just come out and listen. And Stokely Carmichael was involved. So I got to hear them and I got to see them, so I was aware of what was really going on in terms of the California Black Panthers.

*(You went through all that and then helped bring in a Black Studies director on campus?)*

That's right. First was the proposal. I spent that summer, September, it was called *To Break the Chains*. And the title doesn't mean the chains here, we were talking about the chain here. And, it was kind of funny because even though he told us to write it, we didn't think he was going to say okay.

*(Dr. Heady?)*

Yes. So, get a group of people and we have a big sign with fists like this with shackles breaking, *To Break the Chains*, and I'm marching with all of these people over there, and we go in and we sit down, and he says, I read it, and we're going to go ahead and approve a program. And we're all sitting there like, okay.

*(You were ready for a fight.)*

And he said, the doors will be open the summer of '70, and we said okay. And that was in September '69. So, in 1970, we didn't have a director, so my brother was going to Albuquerque High, and he said you know, there's a teacher there by the name of Charles McNeil, and he's really into Black History and he's really smart and he really, really, really cares about Black students. So I get in my car and I go over to Albuquerque, and I wait for lunch time, and I go up and I said, "Are you Charles McNeil?" And he goes, "Yes." And I introduce myself and we've just written this proposal that has been accepted and we want you to be our...we want you to...will you consider being our director? And he just flat-out said no. He said, "The student here, I feel the high school students here at Albuquerque High need me more. You guys can kind of fend for yourselves and I'm sure there's some other more qualified people." But I left the proposal. And two days later I got a call. He said, "Let me



come up and talk to the Black students." He came up and talked to us and we talked and he talked to the administration. And then we get a call from the administration. Okay, this is our guy. He's not qualified. He doesn't have a master's degree. We don't care. Let him get it on the job. It's hard to find somebody that we want. So, President Heady said no. And Coleman Travistead who was Vice President of academic affairs said give us three names and we'll choose from those three names. So we go back. We had Charles McNeil, Charles McNeil, Charles McNeil. That was our three names. And so, they went ahead and hired Charles McNeil.

And let me tell you. Charles, he was the right person at the right time. Let me just say that. He hit the ground running. A lot of courses, things got done really quick. Really quick. He was moving the program really fast and quick and we hated to see him leave. But we believed in Dr. Bailey, too, because Dr. Bailey was homegrown. He was a product of Albuquerque from the flat to the sticks, as they call it, from the Kirkland addition to the Northeast Heights, Dr. Bailey knew everybody. So we were confident that he would do a good job also. So, he came on campus in 1971.

*(You were still an undergraduate when Dr. McNeil got the program started. When did you graduate?)*

In '71. I was still an undergraduate when Dr. McNeil came, when Dr. Bailey came. When they had, I was in law school when they started the summer youth program and I'll talk about that. Now the difference in Dr. McNeil and Dr. Bailey. Dr. McNeil was doing a great job in terms of academics and moving the academic program, and Dr. Bailey was very good with the students. They related to him right away, especially the athletes because he had been an athlete. And he was able to talk to and get to a lot of students about staying in school, about studying, the retention rate, he had a real impact on the retention rate of Black students. So, that was a good thing about Dr. Bailey. And then, of course, just before Dr. McNeil left, he brought Stokely Carmichael to campus. And the state legislature threatened to cut the university's budget to one dollar if Stokely came. But he came anyway and we survived the threat from the budget and the Board of Regents. But he came anyway. And like you said, he brought a lot of important people that we were exposed to, like Julian Bun, Merv Dimely out of California that we wouldn't have been exposed to. And so, that was really good.

*(It's hard to imagine that kind of threat from just a person coming. What else was going on in people's minds?)*

The thing that we didn't like was the differential treatment. They allowed Strom Thurmond to come in when he was turning over busses with Black school children, and also expelled two White students who protested his coming. So there was a different standard there. If you can bring in Strom Thurmond, we can bring in Stokely



Carmichael. So that was our principle. But before I get to law school, let me just talk about the real protest about Brigham Young University in 1970.

February of 1970, there was demonstration in The Pit, and it was the demonstration halted the game for 45 minutes. What happened that day was the Black Student Union and a lot of other white student groups was going to protest outside of the gym. And two hours before the game, Harold Lavender comes over. He's president of the Student Senate, no, Vice President of Student Affairs. And he comes over and he says that we put an injunction on your protest. Anybody that does anything will be expelled and will go to jail. Well, that just added flame to the, fuel to the fire. Oh, really? Okay. So, then, the real insult was we're in our little haven at the center, discussing what we should do. In walks this white guy. He's somebody from BYU trying to explain to us why we shouldn't get mad because our skin is cursed and why they have to treat us like they do. This revelation. And until they have this other revelation, this is the way they got to have a revelation from God. And Don Walton, bless his heart, one of the BSU coordinators said, "Well, when you talk to your next God, tell him to kiss my Black behind." And the guy turned so red, he walked out the door. He turned so red. So our phone was just ringing off the hook from all the other groups. What are you going to do? What are you going to do? So what we said is, when they start playing the National Anthem, we're going to throw objects on the floor and disrupt the game. And then we're going to raise our fists and walk out. So, that's what we did. We didn't know some people brought kerosene, balloons of kerosene. I was throwing eggs on the floor. And so we did, we had the floor just... and they had to stop the game. And then we all marched out.

Two days later, the police come, the city police come with the campus police to our office and they said, "We're looking for Barbara Brown." Well, I'm sitting there, and I go, "wow." And then, Beau said, "What do you want with her?" And they said, "We have a warrant for her arrest." And so I'm sitting there, and I'm going, I know the campus police know who I am. So, Beau says, "She's not here right now, but we'll help her to come and turn herself in." And they all walk out. And they may have known who I was, too. So I'm about to fall on the floor. And all of the students got together, White and Black, and they getting my bond money together, and I went in and I surrendered, but one of the worst experiences in my life, and that's when I began to give Martin Luther King and all those protestors all the credit, was going to jail.

When they start slamming those... clang. I mean, I was so afraid I could barely breathe. I could breathe. And I kept saying, are they going to beat me? Are they going to kill me? Am I going to get out of here? And they kept me in there for about six hours. And a bunch of Black students and citizens had gathered outside the jail because they knew I was in there, around the sidewalk, and that's why I guess they let me out. They let me out, and on the way out, the cops were just laughing at me because they could see I was visibly shaken. And I got out and I went to trial.



Three of us went to trial. It was Bill Orzen, Allen Cooper, they were presidents of the SDS, Student Democratic Society. They were White guys, and me. And how they got us is they had cameras in the gym on all of the so-called leaders. So they had a camera on me from the time I entered the gym to I set down, and them too. They targeted us three because we were supposed to be the so-called leaders. And so, that's why I was arrested. Went to trial. They got convicted. I got acquitted. And it was based on hair. When I was at the ballgame, my afro was like this. When I went to court, I had no hair. I was bald. I was completely bald, so when they were showing the film to the jury, they would look at me, and they would look at the film. They would look at me, and they keep doing this, and this, and finally, a note came out and said, tell her to put on a wig. And the judge said, "No. I can't make her look like the person in the film. You have to decide." And they came back, acquitted. They couldn't say that was me. Dodged the bullet.

So, anyway, then I get a letter that I might be expelled from school. Because the other two guys were expelled from school. So the Black Student Union, led by Don Walton again, they all go to President Heady's office. Don Walton sits on his desk. Like, the president is here, he sits on his desk and he leans forward and he says, "If you all expel her, we're all going to be expelled, because we're going to tear this place down." And they all got up and walked out. I never got a letter. Okay, people were challenging Heady's decision not to expel me. His rationale was they were, you know how they used to call us in the South, outside agitators, the two White guys. I was fighting for a cause, they were just outside agitators. So, I never got expelled, but I had to pay for that later when I got ready to be admitted to the state bar, I'll tell you about that.

So, that was just a traumatic experience for me. Going to trial and thinking I was going to jail, and going to jail. But it still didn't, I didn't want to do any more protests for a while, but you know.

*(You went through a lot of things that took a lot of courage. Then you went to law school. Did you never think you'd do that?)*

You know what? I was going to be a school teacher. And I was going to school to be a school teacher. Until I got into the department of education, and I was sitting in a class, and this teacher was teaching white kids that you had to use a different lesson plan for Black kids. When I tell people this, they don't believe it. What? Not at UNM. They were teaching these students that you had to use a different lesson plan for Black kids than white kids because we're only going to go so far intellectually.

*(What year was this?)*



I came in 1965 so it must have been 1967. Because I had to go through those prerequisite years and then you go to your major, so it was in '67 or '68 and I was in the College of Education. And then, when I spoke up in the College of Education class, the teacher wanted to get me for disruption of his class because he was teaching about New Mexico and they were talking about Stevenico. And he said, even though Stevenico was of the Negroid race and he was black skinned, he wasn't Black. And so, what I said to him is, I don't care if you come from Mars, if you have black skin then you're Black. And all the students laughed and he complained to the dean and I had to go in. But I had just decided, and my roommate Linda Mitchell Bell, was substitute teaching, and she would come home crying because she said none of the teachers would sit with her in the lounge. If she came in, they all got up and left. And the little, she was in elementary school, kids could call her a nigger and said that the principal said that's just the way they were taught. And I guess they said they didn't want to traumatize the kids or something or punish the kids, so she would come home crying. And I thought to myself, now if that happens to me, I'm going to get in trouble. So I better not even go into student teaching.

And so, I decided to do political science, and I'll tell you why. They told me political science would be a prerequisite to law school, that you either do English or political science. And because of all the legislation that was going on in the country, '64, '65, Civil Rights Act, and just all the kinds of decisions that were going on involving Black people, my position was is I always thought it was the classroom where you fight it. And I thought that the best playing field is in the legal profession. And so, that's why I decided to go to law school is because of those experiences. And then when I got in law school, I had some issues that we'll talk about.

I was admitted in 1971. And so, when I got to law school, Dean Hart, no problem. He welcomed me. They had no Black law students. The University of New Mexico was one of the most diverse law schools in the country. They had the American Indian Law Center. They had a lot of Hispanics, and now they had a Black person. So they were one of the most diverse law schools in the country. And we had some pretty famous professors, like Sam Deloria, who was the brother of the guy who wrote *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*; very well-known in the Indian nation. And then we had Cruz Renosco, who was very well-known in the Hispanic community, who, after I moved to California, became a judge on the Supreme Court of California.

*(Professor Jerry Walden, who was a renowned constitutional law professor.)*

Yeah, UNM had some really good law professors, and it was a very good law school. The problems I had was with the teachers. I had one incident with some students in the lounge. They didn't know I was in there and they used the "N" word, and I went around and said, "Do you mind?" And they apologized. But that's when you know you really shouldn't use it because I'm here now. So, anyway.



And then, there were two teachers, one of them was a contracts teacher, and every time he would use an example of somebody dumb, he's say this person got exploited or taken advantage of, it was always this little old Black lady. And so once I raised up my hand and I said, "Do all of your examples of ignorance have to be Black?" And he was shocked. I think I shocked him. Maybe it wasn't intentional. I just asked the question. He went straight to the dean. And the dean said, "Well, you could have asked him after class." But what really made him mad was after that, the women said, "We don't want you asking us if I'm a Ms. or a Mrs. or whatever." He would ask them, they said just call me by my name. So after that, everybody started speaking up. So he was really upset with me. And that was my contracts teacher, his name was Goldberg, he was from New York.

And then I had a problem with Mr. Ted Parnell. He was my international law teacher. We had to do a paper on international law, and I did mine on South Africa. And he wanted to flunk me because he said it was all propaganda. You know what side I took. So the dean said, "You can't flunk her because she did a paper." So that was it. And then, we had an internship class where students went to the prison and we were supposed to do paperwork, like divorce, custody, and stuff, for inmates. And the first time I walked in, Rodriguez looked at me the whole time, he was the warden. He was looking at me. I said, I wonder if there are any Wanted posters of me up here or something, the way he was acting. You could tell he was real concerned that I was there. So he called the dean and told the dean that I couldn't come back. That not to send me back. Don't send that Black woman. Well, I don't know what me called me to Dean Hart. And I asked Dean Hart why, and he said because he said I could hide a gun in my afro. And I said, well, he can search my afro before I go in. But he told him no, I couldn't come. I was a security risk or something like that. So, my position to Dean Hart and the people over the program: if you continue the program with me, you're aiding and abetting racism. And so Dean Hart didn't want the program, but you know who did? The students voted. If she don't go, we don't go. Discontinue the program. And so he discontinued the program.

Another thing about Dean Hart is when I came, they had the Mexican-American law student association, American Indian Association, so the Indians and the Mexicans were trying to decide which group I was going to join, and I said, neither. I am going be the Black American Law Student Association. So they went to Dean Hart and he said, yes, she can be the Black American Law Student Association. So he gave me money to go all over the WAC conference to different meetings. But the real interesting thing is second year, I decided to have a conference here. And when my fellow white law students walked in the building one morning and saw about three hundred Black people in there, they were all like, "What's going on?" We were having our regional meeting at the University of New Mexico. But Dean Hart and the staff, they rolled out the red carpet, and everybody said, man, you got it going on at the University of New Mexico. They were real nice to everybody. And I so I didn't



have any trouble in law school because Dean Hart, a lot of times I didn't even know it. He was coming to my rescue. And not too long ago I saw Dean Hart at one of the Black alumni chapter functions and I told him I will forever be indebted for how you made it so easy for me. He said, well, I had a little help. He said, "Charles McNeil and Chet Roberts was calling me every other week saying, 'How you treating your Black law student over there?'" And I didn't know this until years later, and they said, yeah, we were calling. See, they didn't tell me. But they were looking out for me. I was the first in a long time, and they knew that my success would pave the way for you and Sam and everybody else. And I think since then there's never been a year when there wasn't a Black law student. So that was interesting.

*(You established the BLSA chapter, and you graduated in '74.)*

Let me tell you about my graduation day. The day of my graduation is all kind of family members everywhere, my class, and when they call my name, one of the greatest honors of all was everyone in my class stood up and gave me a standing ovation. I was so moved by that because I didn't see it coming. And so when they clapped and clapped until I got back to my seat. I really did appreciate that from my fellow law students.

*(They must have appreciated your courage.)*

I guess. I was really surprised, but I appreciated it.

*(Then, the Bar Exam. There was a lot of controversy. How did you fare?)*

Let me just say this: I finally passed. But let me tell you about the bar exam. I was already aware, through the BSLA meetings, that this was a problem all over the country. Minorities and Blacks passing bar exams, it wasn't just New Mexico. And in some states they had even caught instances of cheating. But, I wasn't really concerned because I felt, I went to the same classes, I got the same passing grades, I wasn't at the bottom. I was more near the top than the bottom of the class. And so, when I got my first failure, it was so devastating. And the reason that it was devastating is because you go around telling everybody you took the Bar Exam. So everybody's going to ask you, how did it come out? So I said, you know what, if I'd only kept my mouth shut. So it was embarrassing, but it was hurtful, too. And you just go to school all this time and now you're not going to realize your dream. But thank God you can take it again. So I didn't pass until the third time. But when I got that letter, "We are happy to inform," I'm so happy. Two days later, I got another letter saying the ethics, before you are sworn in, the state bar ethics committee have some questions. And I go, "Oh. My. God. The protest. The arrest."

And this was something. There were three of them in there. I went in with Bob Jones who was the only Black attorney in the state at that time. He had come in from



Denver. So I get a Black, and I go in, and they ask me these questions like how do you feel when you hear the National Anthem? And would you disrespect the flag? And do you believe in the Constitution? And I told my mom, I did the step-n-fetch-and-shuffle. Yessir, Boss. I was there with the yes sir boss attitude. I wasn't very respectful. But see, all three had to vote for me not to be admitted. And it was one guy the whole time he never asked me a question; he just kept winking his eye at me like...

*(Don't worry.)*

Yeah. Don't worry. And so, we went and we sat on this bench and then they called us back in. But the real grateful thing once again: I looked outside, I had law professors and classmates. I had one of the Indian chiefs. All standing out there in front of that supreme court in support of me. So I walked out of that room, and I walked into the courtroom, the supreme court courtroom, and I raised my hand, I was sworn in. I could see me mother sitting over here crying and my sisters all crying sitting in the courtroom. And then I came out and I gave the victory sign and they all clapped. So, what you do follows you. They said you have to display some commitment to the Constitution. It's required to be a lawyer. And I don't know. I knew some guys that I know probably wouldn't have answered the way that I did that I went to law school with, but they were lawyers.

*(They must have had the footage.)*

Plus I had an arrest record. They held me over for trial. They felt they had enough, and one of the things one of them said is an acquittal doesn't mean you weren't guilty. It just means they couldn't convince the jury. So you're not completely not responsible for your actions. But I think they were more concerned with my attitude toward law, the Constitution, the flag, and all that.

*(The country.)*

Yeah, the country. So I was admitted. Then I hung my shingle. I'll let you ask.

*(You go right ahead.)*

Okay, what I did, I went to Legal Aid. I got a fellowship. It was called a Reginald Heber Smith Fellowship. And they placed law students with legal aids all across the country. So I was working for the Legal Aid in the South Broadway community center which in my neighborhood. So I was able to help a lot of Black people in the South Broadway area who had problems. And a lot of them at first was reluctant. Are you going to tell somebody about this? I'm sworn. I cannot. It's confidential. Because I knew them and I knew people. They were just concerned that I was not going to hold to my oath of confidentiality. But I did. And sometimes my sister would want to beat



me up. "I want to know what he said." Can't do that. So that was my only problem. And then, when I left Legal Aid, I was there one year, I opened my own practice.

And I never will forget, when I was at Legal Aid, I was doing a lot of small claims kinds of stuff. And the first time I went to superior court, I walked in, and I used to remember this judge's name, I can't remember, he looked at me and he looked at his clerk and he says, "I didn't know we had a Black attorney in the state." And he told her to go look it up. And she went and looked it up and she came back and said, "Yeah, she was admitted to the bar."

*(Here in New Mexico?)*

Yes. Yes. Yes. He didn't know. And he was just that kind of judge. He was very blunt. I used to know his name. I can't remember it now. But anyway. She checked it out, and so one of my first, how I decided to do criminal law is they had a Black guy who was a rape defendant, he had raped a lot of white ladies. And nobody wanted to take the case. So they actually called me. The bar called me and said, "We will pay you. Will you take the case?"

*(Because everybody's entitled to have a fair defense representative.)*

And in the courtroom was friend Daria and my sister and after the first day, they said, "Why are you representing him? He's guilty. He may get out and rape us." But the issue was, to me, and I took my oath as a criminal defense attorney serious, you have to represent everybody and whatever your beliefs are, your feelings, you have to give them a good defense. I knew they had him factually, but he was a little disturbed and I thought they should sentence him to a state hospital. And I didn't even think he was competent to stand trial. I wanted them to send him directly. But once they found him guilty, the judge ordered him to a mental facility. So, but that was my first case. When I got a check for almost five thousand dollars, I said, this is the field I'm going to work in. Back then, that was so much money. I was celebrating. And it was my experience after that, I don't care how poor the family is, criminals always have money. They can always come up with money. And they come up front with money. And that's how I got involved in criminal law. I would like to say it's because of the fact that there's a double standard with Black clients and white clients, which there is, but I really initially got in it because it was lucrative.

*(Are you saying you made a life decision based on that one case?)*

That first one. Because I had my shingle out here on Fourth Street, and I had divorce cases and I got a few other criminal cases, but what I noticed is that family law people always seem to be broke. PI you had to get your money way down the line and you had to take money out of your pocket sometimes. So it was good money. Quick, good money in criminal defense. And I did feel that I could go in and



change somewhat the system which was not happening, not with the criminal defense system in this country.

So then, I decided to move to California in 1977, after I graduated. And when I was first there, I worked for a law firm, and it was an agency too, for the developmentally disabled people. So what I did is I got handicapped people mainstreamed into the school system, social security benefits, stuff like that. It was all administrative law. And I was there for ten years, from 1977 to 1987.

*(Why did you choose to go to California?)*

I thought New Mexico was boring. And I went out, and remember those trips when I was in school doing the proposal? And when I was going to look at the schools and I would go to visit my sister? At that time, California was the Black Mecca. Black people owned businesses, everybody was calling each other sister and brother. There was all this Black love, there was all this Black culture. I used to come back from California wearing dashikis and beads and all kinds of stuff. And I just thought it was a Black Mecca. And so I decided to go. And sometimes I wonder if I made the right choice because while I was here, I was living in the South Broadway area, I was approached about running for Congress. And I might have been able to win. I'm not sure. But I just didn't want to stay here, so I left and I moved to California.

*(Your background might have lead you to some different kinds of clients. Can you share some of the highlights of that criminal practice career?)*

Let me just say, I did everything from jaywalking to murder one. Capital punishment. And I said I did one capital punishment and I would never do it again. The stakes are so high. The system becomes vicious. The policemen become vicious. The D.A. becomes vicious. The judges become vicious against defense attorneys. They want that guy fried. And so, let me just say that the problem that I had with practicing law in California, and I guess it's that way everywhere, if you want a study in racism, I call the criminal justice system Racism 101. Just study the criminal justice system. It doesn't matter how many Black attorneys, how many Black judges, how many Black DAs, the system is skewed and, I think, will always be skewed toward Black defendant. And I'll tell you why...

*(Against Black defendants?)*

Against Black defendants. They're going to be arrested more often. They're going to be held over for trial more often. They're going to be convicted more often, and they're going to be given a higher sentence than people who commit the same crime. And I always say, that's because everybody turns against a criminal. Your own community, they don't care whether you're being discriminated against or not. You're a criminal and they don't want anything to do with it, so you're out there. And



the second thing, and I tell Black people all the time, stop throwing away your jury letters that come and request you to be on juries. Most jurors are white, and they come in with their pre-conceived biases. I don't care how they say they're going to be fair. They come in with their preconceived biases. And it tells. They'd have these preconceived biases that are locked in. So, and I tell all of my clients, it's not innocent until proven guilty, it's guilty until proven innocent. And that's how you have to look at it. So most of the times, even if Blacks come in to the jury panel, they always come in and say, "I hate police." Dismissed. Don't say things like that. Just to be dismissed. You always have very few Blacks on the jury panel. And that's one of the major reasons, I think, we are lining the prisons.

But let me say this: I just didn't do criminal defense law. I also worked with the United Negro College Fund of Southern California. And I worked every year with Lou Rawls on the telethon. And during the year, I worked with Magic Johnson. He set up a celebrity basketball game, and we used to rake in millions of dollars. And then after that, when the Los Angeles Raiders came to town, I was a Raider fan, used to travel with the team. I went to every game they played, I was such a fan. But I got the Raiders team to come in to Compton. You've heard of Compton? Into the Compton School District and go to schools and talk to Black kids, Marcus Allen, he was co-chair with me, Willy Brown, who's one of the old Hall of Famers. And they would go into the Compton School District. And then I got Al Davis to agree to bring kids from Compton from the classroom up to the Raiders' camp and they would have lunch with the Raiders and the Raiders would talk to them. And the kids would really look forward to that. There was sometimes a lack of self-esteem in those classrooms, especially when you look at the conditions, and they would have old books, and so just something to be positive about and help them stay in school. Maybe if Marcus Allen sit down and talk to them it would mean something.

*(Old school books?)*

Let me tell you something about Compton. In the high school, the sewage was backed up for about six months. They had sewage backed up in the bathrooms. The conditions were horrible. That's just the way it was in California. And so, after I closed my criminal practice, and I did it to help veterans. When I started, when I used to come out of the courthouse, I used to see homeless people. And my cousins in Atlanta, they talked to them. I met a lot of them and a lot of them were veterans. And it's only because nobody was advocating to get them into the systems to get food, clothing, shelter, medical, health. And so I started working with veterans on my own. I was bringing them into my office but I wasn't charging. I was doing a lot of I guess you call *pro bono* work. But then, I came back for my 35-year law school reunion.

And Dr. Bailey called me and said, you know, they're having a 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for Black Studies. So, I go over to Black Studies, and I'm sitting outside



of Alfred Matheson's office, he was the director at the time, and I heard him tell the person, tell her I'm not here. And I heard somebody say, she's already outside. And so he come out and he bring me in and so we started talking. And he said, who did you say you are? And I said, I'm Barbara Brown Simmons. Wrote the proposal "To Break the Chains." And he said, "To Break the Chains? What is that? I've never heard of that." And he said, "If it existed, I think I would know about it." So then I thought he was calling me a liar. But I said, one of your staff people here, ask Charles McNeil, Jr., about it when I leave. And so I guess he did. And I so I called Dr. Bailey, and I said, they don't want us to be a part of the celebration because they don't even know who we are. I don't know who they're going to give the credit to. So, Dr. Bailey said, "Let's all get together. Let's have our own celebration, and do a movie through the state." So, lo and behold, we look up, at one of our meetings, in walks Dr. Matheson. And he said, you know what, we want to merge these celebrations. We want to be a part of this, and we're going to allow you to hang a plaque in the office so in the future everyone will know about how Black Studies was founded. And that's how we got the plaque. And we merged, and we did the forty-year celebration.

But while I was researching for the film, I was reading these books and I was reading one and it said at the protest in 1970, the Black Student Union stood on the sidelines while the white students protested. And he was the chairperson of the Board of Regents then, I can't figure his name right now. And I thought, this is Black history. This is lies here. How can they say that? I went to jail. And so I started talking to Nancy Brown Martinez and we started looking up stuff. And the only part of this university that preserved our history, was *The Lobo*. *The Lobo* articles we had, and that's how I came in contact with a photographer by the name of Tony Lawdebrow. Because every *Lobo* article it would say, photo by Tony Lawdebrow. And so, it disturbed me. I went back home and I told my husband, I said, "We did all of that protesting, we making a lot of people rich up there, we got all these professors making all this money and we got all these programs going on, and nobody even cares or knows about the sacrifices of the Black students." Not Barbara Brown Simmons, but the sacrifices of the Black students who put their scholarships on the line. Who could have gone to jail like I did at those protests. And so, it didn't sit well.

So I called my friend Sam Johnson, and I said, you know, we got to get back into that university system. We got to change this. And so I said, you know the law school has a strong alumni, and they have a lot of authority and power and stuff over at the law school. So we decided to do an alumni association. We sat down with Karen Abrams who was the director and Charlene who was the assistant. And they helped us to put together our bylaws. And we went them on to be approved or disapproved. And then they said but it's one person, you got to find a faculty person, or an administrator to work with on this campus, and they sent us to Scott Caruthers. And from that day to this one, he has always been right here on this side. If I'm on this side, he's on this side. He's been to every meeting. He has supported every



program. He's even funded projects for us. And he's just been unbelievable. And that's Scott Caruthers of the African-American Student Services program. So a lot of doors don't get open if you're not hand-in-hand with the staff or faculty person. A lot of people won't talk to you, so Scott gave legitimacy to our organization, and so that's when I started talking to the dean of students. I mean, the dean of the library at the time, his name was Mike Kelly. And he started telling me about all the forms of history. When he said online, I said, okay, that's where I want to be, because I remember digging in to all those boxes, looking for information. So, I said, no, we want to be online. So it's been a three-year struggle getting to where we are now.

*(Talk about making the decision to refocus from your practice to community service.)*

Let me tell you, it wasn't hard. The older you get, the more you dislike seeing the real, real bad side of life. The taking of human life. The lack of consciousness of people. Being involved, the criminals that I were involved with as a representative, these were bad people. These were mean people. And even the good people, like a man that killed his wife over car keys. These are bad people. So I think as you get older, you want a break. And I just think, as I got old, I did it for 25 years. I wanted a break. I wanted to do something else. I didn't think getting criminals off was as meaningful as doing something else that was more positive. And I realized you can't change the criminal justice system. That discrimination is so embedded I don't think it will ever not be there.

But also, I wanted to get back into doing things that was beautiful to Black people as a whole. And I'll tell you why.

*(brief interruption by crew)*

Well you know, as I got older, I had more of a desire to go back to doing things where I could make positive changes in society and in my local community. Not just for Black people, but for a lot of people. Because a lot of people are hurting now. And I'd like to say that the Black alumni chapter is just not me and Sam Johnson. We have a board, Helen Hamilton, who's taught at the school of nursing. Doris Willard who was a counselor at the school of business administration for years. Rene Madson, who was a track star here and was in human resources. Stanly Mosely who worked for AT&T and now the corrections system. And Scott Carruthers, and Dr. Jefferson are *ex officio* members. And I hope I didn't leave anybody out.

*(Greg Round)*

Greg Round, Jr., who was on the basketball team. So we have a board and we work together as a team. And we've done good things like the oral history film, but we also established a Joe Long scholarship fund. We're trying to set up an endowment



to finance Black students to go to college. Right now, we're looking at about fifteen thousand dollars that we've collected.

*(And you still need to raise money.)*

And we still need to raise money. It's ongoing. We still need to raise money. And also, we established a fellowship in the name of Charles P. Roberts. And what that fellowship, it's a \$15,000 allotment given by the Center for Regional Studies. And what that student does is research for all of these projects. We have tons of research. We intend to do probably thirty to forty of these films before it's over. And even then, we hope it's ongoing so we need somebody to do the leg work for that research who's going to be able to do it on a day-to-day basis. And as I said, we selected Dean Roberts because of his involvement with all of us who were his students, individually and collectively.

And going back to wanting to make a change, in 2004, when Barack Obama first became President, I traveled to the first inauguration. And what was so amazing was we had to ride the train from Maryland into D.C. is fifty percent of the people were from other countries. We would talk to people, oh, I'm from Ireland, I'm from Switzerland, and would go, yeah, we came just for this moment. So this was a really historic moment, not only for the United States, but for people around the world. And I remember it being below zero out there. It was really cold that day. But we had people with oxygen tanks. Hooked up to oxygen. People being rolled in on beds who were very, very, very handicapped, but had to be there for that moment. And then I look now, and I see the treatment of the President of United States. And even though I didn't like Richard Nixon, I didn't like George Bush, I would never disrespect the office of the President. And the last straw for me was how when they were talking about how much his wife and children spent on a vacation. So, this told me we still got a real problem in this country. And it's surfacing. The election of this Black President, a lot of these attitudes have surfaced. And when people say, I'm surprised about Trump, I'm not. Because those attitudes are still there, just they're surfacing. So, I'm saying I need to get back out there and start doing something positive for the community. And I guess the real thing was the killing of Trayvon Martin. And I guess that was a reality check for me. That you can walk up on a young Black guy and kill him and say it was because you were afraid when you initiated the contact. And people support you, defend you, and I kept saying, you need to get back out. You've become comfortable. You've retired, you can, you don't have to work anymore. You need to get back out there in the arena and start doing something.

And so I started coming back here to meet with the Black students. It was said this morning that Black students are apathetic or whatever, but actually, the Black Student Union here at the University of New Mexico has reactivated the movement. They have concerns here at the University of New Mexico, and as I said in a



meeting that they had with a lot of the administrators from the University of New Mexico, one of the incidents was about a teacher saying to a white student, "I only thought niggers wore afros" and the university tried to defend it as academic freedom. And that was the wake-up call for a lot of these students on campus. And when they say students don't care, not true.

Let me just say this, I got a flyer from one of them the other day, and it says, "Black Lives Matter." And you know, we were saying Black lives matter when they killed Emmett Till. We were saying Black lives matter when they bombed the church. We were saying Black lives matter when they killed Martin Luther King, and I don't know when we're going to have to stop saying Black lives matter. But these students, they do care. Right now, they're involved with meetings with the president, and if you go to their meetings, this is what you see: Black lives matter. So I hope one day, we don't have to say Black lives matter. I hope all lives matter. But I think there is a reversal of a lot of things that we have accomplished, and I do think we're back on the firing lines, you know. And I do think that people that have all this education that we don't have to worry about jobs not being taken, I do think it's our obligation to go back out. Get involved with the youth, not as leaders but as supporters. That's what I want to do. But anything I can do to push this message that Black lives matter because our youth are in trouble in this country today, and I want to get involved.

So, I'll get off my soapbox. But I come back to the University of New Mexico because I love the University of New Mexico. I tell everybody establishing that program, being a part of the law school, when I say I'm a UNM alum, I'm not ashamed of that. I'm proud of it. And I promote, with all its faults, the University of New Mexico whenever I can. Even to my grandchildren who say, I don't want to New Mexico. So, I hope that anybody listens to this interview just understanding that we all have an obligation. We all should be committed. Black, white, green, because if you could stop hatred here, you could stop hatred here. And like right now, the hatred against Muslims, there's hatred against all kinds of groups. We just need to stop hate. And Black people, we've always thought we were, I guess, got the brunt of, the worst of everything. And I was talking to some Black students at a Black Student Union meeting, and one of the things they said was, why are we talking about the same things in 2016 that you were talking about in 1968 and '69? This doesn't make sense. And this is what these students are thinking right now, here on campus.

*(Can you leave last words a charge for people who come behind us?)*

I think Dr. McNeil said it so eloquently when he talked about the man who faced a sheriff and he fell down and he didn't get back up and swing, and how much he appreciated him. And one of the reasons I think that these oral history DVDs are so important, I think when I was coming up, the story of Harriet Tubman, the story of Martin Luther King and what was happening, not only made me appreciate who I



was and my history and my struggle, it made me feel a responsibility. A lifelong responsibility. And I think that's what we have to make sure that our young people, our old people, continue to know our history so that they will feel this connection and this obligation. Because when there's a disconnect, there's no responsibility. They feel that they have our connection. So when we were telling them about our struggles, they were amazed. And they were amazed that it was coming back. So we said, through the generations, we've got to unite. We've got to help each other. But most of all, I believe that this is a good country. I don't want to go anywhere else. I believe that there are a lot of good people, Black, White, and green, but I think Black people have got to realize that we still have a struggle. And people who have the intellect and the resources, we've got to come back out. The fight's not over yet.

I did a soapbox.

*(Your principal said you were overly-aggressive, or something like that?)*

I was in high school.

*(It seems like that's been your approach to everything. Always a new chapter. When will you ever want to stop?)*

When there's nothing to overcome. When there's no issues to deal with. Let me just say this. I never saw myself as aggressive. I always say, "passionate." Aggressive sounds like grrrr. Passionate is *(pats chest)*. I always think that I'm maybe sometimes overly passionate, but I don't think, as long as there is a need and I can walk, I'm not crippled and I'm not handicapped, I just feel that I need to be involved. I need to be involved. And right now especially with young people. I think we have to be involved with young people. And you know, for some reason or another, when I sit down and talk to young people, we connect. I went to Charles McNeil, Jr.'s class and he called me, they want you back, they want you back. I was amazed because I was talking about racism, hard racism, and we're talking about a majority white class, and same with the Black students, we want you back, we want you back, we want to talk to you. And they involve me in their meetings now. We want you to be involved in our meetings and we're going to send you minutes of our meetings, you know. For your intellect. For your suggestions. For your recommendations. Because I say, I'm not going to lead, but I'm sure going to support you in any way you want me to. I just feel an obligation. I guess my answer is that, I'm sorry. I think that my answer is I just feel an obligation. Why I feel an obligation, I don't know. But I do feel a responsibility and an obligation. And until I can no longer move, I don't think that'll ever go away. I hope not.

**Interview ends**