

3-12-2007

Silvers, Cleo Interview 2

Silvers, Cleo. Interview: Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewee: Cleo Silvers

Interviewer: Mark Naison with LaLite Clarkson

Date: 12 March 2007

Mark Naison (MN): March 12, 2007 and we are doing the second interview with Cleo Silvers for the Bronx African American History Project. The first interview concentrated on her early years in Philadelphia and her first year as a Vista volunteer in the South Bronx. This interview will concentrate on her involvement in the Lincoln Hospital struggles and her eventual involvement with the Black Panther Party and Young Lords. Joining us will be LaLite Clarkson, who will be our lead interview about the Black Panthers and Young Lords. [Crosstalk] Tell us how you came to work at Lincoln Hospital and how- -

Cleo Silvers (CS): Did I tell you the story of the interview, after I left Vista?

MN: Yes

CS: And they interviewed me?

MN: Yes, so take it from there.

CS: So I became a mental health worker two weeks after I became a health worker. They, workers took over the mental health center. Just like that. That was an 1199 chapter. We were known by Bernie Mints, who's a pretty famous guy, in my mind, as a trouble maker chapter. And the reason was because of the workers who run the health center who led the full hospital center, were activist, and who saw themselves as being advocates for their patients. And saw themselves as the very progressive innovators in terms of the delivery of mental health care, to people in need of advice and rights. And they had three demands, of which they had been in the process of negotiating these demands for about a year when I came on.

MN: What year did you come on?

CS: I went on in 1967. Late 1967—December 1967, around January, February was when they took over the mental health center. They have three general demands under which there were specific things that they wanted. The first was an end to the use of psychotropic drugs, because

the impact of psychotropic—the side effects of psychotropic drugs—on the patients. And they were very specific. They had been collaborating with doctors and psychologists and really looking at what was happening to patients.

MN: Were these, was this mostly an out-patient clinic?

CS: This was mostly an out-patient clinic, with a day—they had a day program where patients came in for the day and participated in therapy, like recreational therapy, music therapy, art therapy. It was a great program. And they were trying to expand it and develop it and make it more progressive and make it so that the impact of the program really helped the patients. So that was the first demand. The second demand was training upgrade for the workers. The reason behind that is that the workers actually did more contact with the patients than the doctors and the psychiatrists. And in the process of that, because the concept was teams; they worked in teams as a kind of support system in especially in therapy—therapeutic support—which was a team project which included a social worker, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and a community mental health worker. And for any testing that was done, the same—it was a team project. So, in fact, community mental health workers, through on the job training, which is what it was called at that time, did exactly what the psychologists and the psychiatrists did, except that they didn't have degrees and had no opportunity to go to college and get a degree. Since they were members of the union, they thought that the call for training upgrade for the workers would be one. And also for on the job training for any succeeding community mental health workers. The third demand was, and actually I guess it was a fourth, but that happened later, the third demand was in to the use that therapy that did not include—of talking therapy or any kind of therapy—that did not include a recognition of the economic and social conditions of, in the community. So that's pretty straight forward, and of course these, we, they had been negotiating this way

before even I came. They had an analysis, these were really brilliant quarters. And they were doing the same work that the psychiatrists and psych—and actually they were running the mental health center. They ran the day to day operations; they ran the record keeping; they ran therapy; they really, they were musicians, artists, community people, who, just brilliant. And everybody who they hired, because they themselves actually hired the other community, they were responsible [beeping in background] for hiring the other community mental health workers.

[Beeping in background] This always brilliant- -

[pause in recording]

CS: - -Really were the ones that made the mental health center run, they made it- -

MN: Did a lot of the people working there live in the community?

CS: They all lived in the community. Everybody who was a community mental health worker lived in the community, was from the community.

MN: Did that include Harlem or the, mainly the South Bronx?

CS: Mainly the South Bronx, maybe a couple people came from Harlem, the Upper West Side, but most of the community health workers were either Puerto Rican or African American. All of which either originated either in the South Bronx or Harlem. And of course as they got jobs some of them moved out to the Upper West Side or somewhere in Manhattan, but not very far, or somewhere maybe further up in the Bronx, but not, not very far. So they were functionally the administrators of the program and ran the COO, the CEO. They actually knew what budget was. They administered just about everything and the doctors kind of sat around [laughs] and sat in their offices. But in terms of making things go, they, and we had all kinds of programs—in-patient programming, out-patient programs—I was hired to work in the school project. Now the school project was that in the South Bronx there was children who were in schools had a great

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deal of psychological impact because of the conditions in the family of which they came from.

And of course there was, there was just financial, but there were real psychological problems that children face like—self-esteem issues—and what I found in my work which was very detailed, they assigned me to work with adolescent girls who were victims of incest. And I spent my time as a community mental health worker, besides the work that I was doing organizationally helping to maintain the paper work, as a group therapist working with girls who were the victims of incest. Most of which were Latino, as a matter of fact all of which at that time in my group were Latino. And some of the experiences that I had there I think probably impacted, on me, in that they made me understand why it was so necessary for a community mental health worker had to go to the homes and talk to the parents, and deal with these fathers, to be educated—be highly educated, as highly educated as a psychiatrist or a psychologist—because they didn't go out with us to do field work. They didn't go out with us to, they came into the schools and did group therapy sessions during school hours, but the community mental health workers, I went out and I did- -

MN: You did the home visits in other words?

CS: I did the home visits. I protected the girls sometimes, took them out of the homes and confronted by fathers who were like, “you can't take my kid out of the home.” And it really made me understand why the community mental health workers were making these demands. It gave me a better sense of the economic and social conditions under which people lived.

MN: It's so interesting you're mentioning this because there's, I don't know if you know the book *Random Family*? It's set in a group of young women growing up in the Bronx in the '80s, late '80s, and early '90s, and almost every woman is a victim of sexual abuse. It's like- -

CS: Yes, and that gave me, that informed my support of the work that the other community mental health workers were engaged in, and vice-versa. So I was there, I was training, I was in training. I started doing, going to the schools and taking the girls out of their classrooms and talking to their teachers, talking to school psychologists, talking to the assistant principle, talking to the principles, and at the, and also doing therapy sessions along with, and being trained in psychological tests. So I know how to do a raw shock and MMPI and finger drawing—all the necessary tests. And not only did they teach us how to administer them, they taught us how to interpret them. In order to be able go out and go back and talk to those kids. So it was a very complex job, but at the same time we weren't making like half the salary of the therapists or the psychologists and the psychiatrists—another reason why the demand for training upgrading was such an important demand. So the workers took over and the last demand was for the administrators Harris Peck, and I think his name was Sam Goldman [laughs], and it seemed that, you know my job, I was very young and very energetic, and I could run. And everybody kind of picked up that I could run, so they gave me the job of the communications person.

MN: Literally run?

CS: Yes, literally, yes.

MN: Right.

CS: I was very fast.

MN: [Laughs]

CS: And I was the person that was responsible for sending in the tape, reading and taking communications back and forth between the different departments in the mental health center. Because they were laid out throughout the hospital area. So, if an administrator like Richard Leeks, or Doc would say, “go tell Ruth over in the out-patient department that I said to do this

and that,” or “give this information” or “give everybody a leaflet and tell them they had to come to a meeting tonight,” that was my job. And I really, I loved doing it, because then I knew everything that was going on.

MN: [Laughs]

CS: [Laughs] So I got the opportunity, and I met all the mental health workers.

MN: Right.

CS: And I got a sense of what they were doing. So I had a sense of the whole overall program and how all the pieces came together and what the process was. So when it came time for the administrators to be asked to leave because the workers had made their decision, we had our union meetings, 1199 said “we’re not going to support you, or you better not do this,” and the workers said, “well we’re tired of this shit” and- -

MN: So 1199 did not support this movement.

CS: Absolutely did not support this. And absolutely did not support the take over. So they called us a renegade, we were a renegade chapter. We were the trouble maker chapter. And, of 1199, and we actually went in to the administrators office, and it was my job, after the leadership of the mental health workers sat down at the administrator’s desk, we blocked the doors. We told the rest of the workers that we had taken over the place, we started administering the program. My job was to walk them out to their cars.

MN: The administrators?

CS: Yes [laughs] so now there is a man, there are some people that have talked about, some of the administrators talked about, and they say that they, that I did not hurt them, but that I had an intimidating look and stance that made them understand that they had to get out of the place—I never touched them—and get into their cars and go away. So, [laughs] and I think that’s been

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documented in some of the papers and some of the memoirs etc., etc. about the role that I played in making sure that they left the place. So we took it over, we held it for 30 days. We ran the place and we put into place new policies, new programs, that for, for all intensive purposes, may, stayed at the mental health center as long as Lincoln Hospital had a mental health center, and were interpreted and picked up and are still being used today in most mental health facilities. And that's I think the thing that the workers at Lincoln Hospital should be most proud of, that several of the policies, some of the programs, some of the activities that we implemented are still in active today. [Phone rings in background] This has got to be Leslie. [Phone rings again and CS answers] Good evening.

[Break in recording.]

MN: So, we, you mentioned that 1199 didn't support this struggle. Who did? How did you, which organizations- -

CS: This struggle was supported, tremendously supported by the community; supported by the patients. People in the community, we put out a leaflet explaining what we were doing. And I want to say that's a part of the process all the time, was to inform the community of what we were doing. So the people in the community supported us, and the other very important organization that supported us was the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party supported us and the activists in the Black Panther Party that gave us the greatest support, and that is they gave us financial support, they gave us, they brought us food, they brought us water, and they helped us plan, because this was around the clock operation. We stayed up all day and all night for almost a month with few hours of sleep in between. Plan the development of the new programs, how they would function, they helped us to start have an analysis of what was going on in society and how we fit into overall society in terms of the kinds of changes that were

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necessary. And [laughs] this guy, anyway, they, I mean, I may just tell you who in the Black Panther Party were the most active supporters. Jaroom Muthey Muhhad. Zayd Malik Shakur, and the third guy that hung out with them Rashid, who were health care oriented and who were really oriented toward helping workers' struggles. And that was the whole point of the Black Panther Party coming there was because they thought that that was one of the most important things that was going on in New York City at that time with the struggle with workers. There were student take-overs at the university campuses I think simultaneously the Columbia take-over was taking place, but the, they thought that the most important thing was to be up there with the workers and to help us have an analysis. They brought in doctors, radical doctors that they knew, like Dr. Bill Brunsten, and the other there were some radical doctors that were already on staff, started to collaborate with us. So that this was not just for workers but this was a collaboration with other professionals. We had the support of the psychologists, the nurses, the social workers, and so what happened was that in an attempt to try to divide us, Albert Einstein College of Medicine contacted the social workers and psychologists and threatened their jobs. That they thought that they could divide our struggle and get them to say they would go back. They threatened with their jobs. Now, on all this by the way, is documented in the news papers. I have some, some of the documents I think and I have a couple of leaflets that we put out during a period and a couple of the telegrams that went out to the psychologists, telling them that "if you don't come back to work tomorrow you're going to be fired" and all that stuff. But they stood there, they stood with us. We really were able to develop a unified struggle. Now, it also in terms of just the thinking through what we were doing and planning for the eventuality that we were going to be thrown out of there, because we had no illusions that we were going to take over running this thing forever. And the thing, the thing was that the administration of Albert

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Einstein College of Medicine who had actually designed this program, the administration of Lincoln Hospital, and that consortium, because Albert Einstein College of Medicine was the medical school that, for Lincoln and Jacobi and I think Bronx State as a matter of fact, so all those. And so that consortium, they were trying to figure out how best to get us out of there without coming in a beating us up, essentially that's really what they were trying to do. And I'm sure they had a lot of meetings, as many meetings. We met all day and all night essentially and really kept a good hand on what was going on and a good sense of what was happening all over. And when you're doing something like this and you have the support of the community, community people tell you everything. They were like, "hey, this is what's happening over here, call up Cleo and tell her to tell Block to tell Richard that this is boom boom he better get over here." It was really, communications was really open and very good. And I'm swimming back and forth, that's the other thing. I went up and down and back and forth a great deal. So that was that struggle. We held it for 30 days and then the cops came and we had essentially just walked out and then came back to work the next day. And I don't think anybody really got fired or anything.

MN: How did this experience change you as a person, as a political person, as an organizer?

CS: I can tell you that I think that this experience was one of those experiences that make you who you are. I was very young—I was 19, maybe 20—and I never learned so much about big things like administering a hospital; about doing research and understanding a particular problem in depth; about the importance of organizing and informing people, the importance of communications. And the other thing was the commitment of the workers who actually did this to the patients, and the real love that people developed. That's the other thing, the really important things that the love that people developed for each other in that process. Because

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when you're depending, you know that your life pretty much is depending on that other person to do what you asked them to do, and you don't know whether they're going to come back and have it right or not, that's tremendous. You're got to have real love and real respect. So -

MN: So this was a life changing experience for a lot of people?

CS: Absolutely, absolutely

MN: Now what about political education? Did you begin to read things in this context that you hadn't read before?

CS: Well let me say that immediately, almost immediately within a week after the struggle of the mental health center ended, I was recruited into the Black Panther Party. Now, that's the key, that I was working with members of the Black Panther Party who were, doing all this analysis, and were meeting with the workers, and really were into the details. They were not, these were not maniacs. These were really detailed, smart people who gave the workers a better sense of how to go about doing the work of building and growing this organization, this mental health center—both philosophically and organizationally. And in the same time, they began to offer political education classes to the workers. So they did it at first on sight, while we held the mental health center, and then afterwards when they recruited me it would be done down at the office on 122nd and 7th Avenue.

MN: So their offices were in Harlem?

CS: Yes.

MN: Their main office?

CS: Their main office was in Harlem. They didn't open up an office in the Bronx, the Boston Road office, distribution center, newspaper distribution center didn't open until later.

MN: Right

CS: And, yes- -

MN: Describe your first Panther political education classes.

CS: Well before I describe that, let me just tell you, that it was Zayd and Labumba and Rasheed that told me, “we want to recruit you, do you want to be a Panther?” And Bill Bronston, the radical doctor was there, and he had a *Red Book* in his pocket. He whips out his *Red Book* he says, “yeah, you are really revolutionary. You’re fast, you run, you’re smart. Here’s your *Red Book*.” And I was like, “okay, cool! Give me the *Red Book*,” and I start reading my *Red Book*. And they said, “go down and register as a Panther. Go down to the office.” Well of course you know I ran down! [Laughter] I ran everywhere, I ran back and forth over the bridge over the Willis Avenue bridge.

MN: You literally ran?

LaLite Clarkson (LC): You ran from Lincoln Hospital to 122nd and 7th?

CS: Of course, I’ve always ran! [Crosstalk] And I was fast! I was running past the- -

LC: So you ran all 15 minutes?

CS: Yes. If they wanted to get information from the hospital to the office, I was the person to get. “Get Cleo she runs.” And I ran, I’m serious, that’s, I hoisted.

MN: [Laughs]

CS: [Laughs] I was the runner. So, and I actually was better than some of the guys and I was not less well endowed than I am now [laughs] but I just like, ran.

MN: Now had you been exposed to at all to Marxism- -

CS: Never

MN: - -when you were growing up?

CS: Never

MN: Or to Socialism?

CS: Although I was never exposed to it, but I did know, I did tell my teacher, my 5th grade teacher, that I was a communist. Because he put on the board the definition of communism and the definition of capitalism, and I said well I thought capitalism was not fair because it's, to each courts its needs and from each courts was building, and to me that was more fair than the dog eat dog lessaiz-fair kind of thing.

MN: Right

CS: [Crosstalk] If I always, encounter with the whole concept, until I started taking up the political education classes down at the Panther office. So, this is very important, you've got to hear this, I run down to the Panther office, I run up to the office, Malcolm X is blaring, he's got the record blaring all over the neighborhood, "the ballot and the bullet," and these two sisters, dressed in African garb, and one of them was Afeni Shakur and the other was Gloria Jean, the famous sister. So I run up, "hi sister, how you doing? My name is Cleo, Zayd and them told me to come up here and register and get to become a Panther. I want to be a Panther; I think I have a hot chance." [laughter] And they was like, "you?" and they looked me up and down [laughs], "how you going to be a Panther, you not no Panther." I said, "yeah, I want to be a Panther, they sent me here to be a Panther!" They said, "well, you can't be a Panther because you don't even know how to rap a gaylay." I said well, I had my head down, "I don't know if I can rap a gaylay." And so they, Afeni told Gloria Jean to go in to see Janet Cyro, another one of my very best friends, and send out a rag to wrap around my head. So, Janet sent Gloria Jean with the rag and they wrapped my gayley, it was an African, a piece of African fabric, which they wrapped around my head, and then they took it off of my head, and said, "now you do it yourself." And I did it, but I wrapped a beautiful gaylay, they said, "wow, you're a Panther now!" [laughs] I was

not a Panther until I was invited to fill out an application for, that was my initiation. And whenever Afeni and I see each other we always cry because that was a really beautiful way to become a member of the Black Panther Party. And a very beautiful sister, who would, and I want to say about that is that the women, more than the men in the Black Panther Party, were always very accepting of me. And that I never had ever a cross word between myself and another woman in the Panther Party. And I always say that there are people in the Black Panther Party, other members, treated me with great respect and dignity. I never would have a sexual encounter with any of the brothers; I never was sexually abused or even hit on because they respected my work. Because I came there as a worker, I came there as a Marxist, I came there as a, somebody who was wanting to study and work, as a person interested in changing the community. I didn't come there as somebody who- -

MN: Who were the intellectual leaders of the chapter, the people- -

CS: The New York 21. That's why they busted them. And they really were, they had read Vinnone, they were reading Tommy and Crun and they had the *Black Book*, they had read all three of Vinnone's books, not just the one. And they had read the *Red Book* but had then gone on to read on contradictions by now, had gone on to read some Lenin, and had gone on to read some Marx, the Rue de Muhhad, brilliant, Sundi a la Comb, brilliant. As a matter of fact, all of them, all of that crew, that 13, because you know that some of them were police officers that got arrested doing that. But that crew of 13 actual Panthers, were very, very smart group of people who had already done the reading and who actually led, and led the political education classes, like I remember de Ruber led most of the ones that I attended. Ali de Hassan, he did some leading of the political education classes. But they also decided what programs or activities would be done by the Party in New York City. So, I mean, they're like, we're like a central

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committee. So they sat down and they would say, “ok, well this is going on. We’re going to go over here and we’ll put this many people to work over in this area.” And so people were over at Columbia, some people were on City College campus organizing, some people were selling newspapers down on 42nd street, some people were in the Village, some people were in the Bronx doing the Lincoln Hospital thing. They had organizations spread all throughout the city. And then there was the person that ran the office and had a crew, and the newspaper distribution was very clear, there was people that did the financial thing. It was highly organized, this was not playing around. We were highly organized and very thoughtful in everything that was done, very well organized. We had forms, we had papers, we had books. Person came in talking about they want to fight the police, we’d give a book. “Read this, you can’t fight nothing you don’t know about, if you don’t know about it you don’t have an analysis. You can’t fight. Read the books, then sit down and determine if you really want to fight this struggle.”

LC: So when you joined the party program that they all were, some of the stuff they were doing at the time when you joined. I mean you mentioned- -

CS: We had people were dropping off truckloads of shoes to the party office. We had distribution of shoe distribution. We had clothing distribution. People had cleaners in Harlem, would bring cleaners—clothes from the cleaners—and give them to us and we would distribute them to the community. We always had a person, whether it was Malcolm X or Marcus Garvey or some other person, we always had a, a record, a recording of political ideas every day, at least in the summer time and in the fall. Every day we would be, that would be blasting outside of our door. And of course we had the free breakfast program. Now the free breakfast program was a very, very highly organized operation. We had a group of people that went out to different stores and collect donations. We had people who were organized to get up at four or five o’clock in the

morning to start the cleaning and cooking. We had another crew go and pick up the children.

We had another crew that would come in and do the homework. And another crew that came to do, to take the kids to school and then in the process we would all go and sell our newspapers during that period. So after you get finished cooking then you go sell your newspapers or you would take care of the children. Because remember we had lives. We didn't just do this. We also had lives and homes. We had a Panther Pads, where you had child care. Somebody would cook, somebody would clean, somebody would, and all this was organized through the office. So the officer, the officer of the day—which was usually Janet—got a call saying, “they didn't clean up the Panther Pad on 100th. Nobody cleaned up.” They're like, “who's responsible? Your name is on the list today and you didn't clean up. You didn't wash the dishes. You didn't take the trash out.” Everything was organized. So it was a marvelous experiment in how people work together and how to organize and how to really be in an organization.

LC: I got a second question, and this is more so looking out organization, in terms of accountability because, I mean the Panther Party was, like you said, you all had lives and it was some what of a volunteer organization- -

CS: Was a completely volunteer organization. Totally volunteer.

LC: - -Just in terms of like accountability, because a lot of organizations trying to go through that now in terms of numbers dwindling, numbers falling off, what did you kind of see as- -

CS: Well see, part of the problem, things you have to understand is that you put all this in the context of the '60s and what young people were doing in the '60s. We was dropping out or we were either, and certain young people were doing nothing or getting high, and party and listen to music all day and all night and would go out and walk the streets. There were some young people who decided to totally commit their lives to waging the struggle to change the society.

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That means absolutely. That means that you make a 24 hour day contribution to changing the society, which includes physical. We had, you had to go to Karate class. I was a green belt. I'm bad. I'm not bad I'm talk [laughter]. But Dr. Walter Bo, was our sensei. And Doc, Aubrey Dawlkins, was our sensei, and they taught us how to kill with our hands. So you, we had the physical development, you had your mental development, you had your day to day life, you had a contribution to your collective, and you had your contribution, your work that you did, your political work. My political work included organizing at Lincoln Hospital, because we haven't talked about how right after that, we started the Think Lincoln committee, which was a political organization that was an outgrowth of the struggle with Lincoln Hospital's mental health workers. So Think Lincoln committee's, we'll talk about that soon. So you had all of that, you had your, all that was directly connected. You were directly, I mean, somebody called you and said, "I want you to do this," or one leader, some leader in the party said "you've got to do this," you just went and did it. There was no question in my mind. We were a paramilitary organization and I suppose that some of the people, some of the young people who didn't have as much discipline as I did needed to be disciplined in another kind of way. But I don't think there was ever a time when I, and I was married woman by the way, was not totally committed and either made a contribution to the development of work of the party or had members of the party just staying at my house. I mean it was just always- -

MN: Now were you aware that you were under surveillance when you were in the party?

CS: So naïve, so absolutely naïve. I was totally unaware until the arrest of the New York 21. That's when I figured it out. Absolutely no clue. Because of my upbringing and the education that I had received was that when we were doing everything within the law, and everything to which we had a right to engage, and I always say to young people, that's the one, one of the

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major mistakes that we made was that—our naiveté. We absolutely did not know how much of a threat we posed to the government and to the powers that be. And the fact that they, that J. Edgar Hoover named us the most serious threat to the continuing the organization of the United States government, that we were a serious domestic threat to the government. I had no clue. And I think that the other mistake that we made was that we didn't really listen to the older people. They was trying to tell us, "hey you all better watch out." We was like, "you all are too slow, we too busy, we don't have time for that bullshit. Ok slow down, no, we don't have no time to slow down, we don't have time to be talking. We all want to talk, go sit over here and toy with this." We were busy. We had health care to change. We had to change the face of equality of health care. We had the welfare department to deal with that was disrespecting the people in the community. We had to bring Latinos and African Americans together in unity. We had to sell our newspapers. We had to run our free breakfast program. We had to educate ourselves and have our, plus we had to have time to party. Let's sell our newspaper, get the information out and help educate the masses, and then we had to have some time to party. So in all of that we didn't have no time to be talking to no old people talking to us about slow down. [Laughs] So that's really, but at, with that was a big mistake on our part of the cause, some of these people were progressive and had things to say and had an understanding and an analysis of what the government could and would do to you, which we would have been much more, I think it would have taken more to destroy our organization if we were that aware.

MN: Did the people in your Panther chapters spend any time at the liberation book store?

CS: [laughs] We spent all the time- -

MN: That was my favorite place, at 131st and Lenox.

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CS: Absolutely! Liberation Book Store was the Mecca, and I have a feeling we actually might have had a chapter in there, that just hung around in the Liberation Book store and had discussions. Because there was a discussion group going on there all the time, and I think we made many a week. We made a lot of purchases at Mr. Musho's Bookstore, but we made many many of our book purchases at the Liberation Book store and the rest we got from China Books. Downtown on 23rd street. So, and that's where we got our *Red Books* to sell.

MN: Right, now when the Panther 21 arrests took place, were you still a member of the party?

CS: Yes.

MN: And how did it, what was that experience like?

CS: Oh my God, you know, I can tell you that for some reason I felt very removed from that. The fact is that I was starting to build this Think Lincoln committee and begin to do this real focus health care stuff. And the complaint table that the Think Lincoln committee set up was like a full time job. We set up a complaint table at 10 o'clock in the morning, then of course the guards, the administration of the hospital would put us out, then we'd have to get ourselves back in, then we get put out again. And then we would go through this all day long, taking complaints and acting as advocates inside the emergency room, because remember the emergency room wait for a person who got ill or who was injured in the South Bronx was 36 hours. 36-72 hours to be seen.

MN: To be seen?!

CS: To be seen in the emergency room at Lincoln Hospital. And their triage was for shit. They didn't have a triage plan. So that whole thing was like a whole full time thing. And it was not only the taking of complaints now, also in that process we were, we had designed the forms and had people sign the forms giving us their complaints. And by the time we took these complaints

to the administration of the hospital we had 4,000 complaints, stacked up like this. But that was my idea and I was kind of, with all the other mental health workers, we did this thing and it was like on the weekends, it was just 24 hours a day. It was at the same time as the New York 21 was arrested. And, I mean, I didn't really get it. There was something about that whole thing that I just, that I didn't, I knew there were some cops involved, I knew that there was some corruption involved. And I also had been aware that there had been some people going around after us to different stores, telling, saying that we were a, what do you call it when you make demands on somebody?

MN: Extortionists?

CS: Extorting, yes. They said that- -

MN: Or protection racket.

CS: They said that we were extorting these stores and that we were threatening the people to give us the churches. And people were coming to us and saying "these are my churches." They were, we were not extorting. People wanted to make contributions to the churches program. So that's that story. So I didn't know that and I heard, I would hear all these other accounts of things going on, but I didn't get it, I didn't really get it. Didn't get it until I really, until I got into the morgue and started to see how all the police function internally in the organization.

Although I had heard, and although I was active in support, you know we would go to the courthouse and all that for the New York 21, and by the way what that did is diverted our attention from all the other work we were doing. And our money. And our resources of all kinds. And our fundraising, because we had 13 people in there who are like a million dollars each on bail.

MN: Jesus, I still remember the march from Central Park to Queens.

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CS: It was tremendous. So that stopped us from doing all of our other community work, but we maintained our office.

MN: Couldn't always put away the- -

CS: But that's when you could hear the stories of Panther's telling the stories about the surveillance. That you could pick up the phone in the Panther office [laughs] and be right at the house- -

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

CS: So, South Bronx, 163rd and Boston Rd. was the Panther newspaper distribution office. And it was also an office where journalism took place. So people who were writers and people who were interested in taking care of the newspaper and who were not necessarily doing other community work with the exception of selling newspapers, everybody had to serve, sell certain newspapers. So this one evening we were kind of hanging out having dinners Zayd, for myself because this is before they arrested the New York 21 I believe. And we were just kind of hanging out at the house and they brought in this little guy, this dude, and his name was Little Wes. So Little Wes and we was all was hanging out and we were talking and he was so funny. He could imitate Bobby Seal.

MN: [laughs]

CS: And he had us falling out on the floor imitating Bobby Seal giving the 10 point platform and program. I thought he was the cutest thing he was wonderful, Little Wes. Well, and, then we, later on he went out and sold newspapers with me in front of Lincoln Hospital. In front of the mental health center, which of course, we got, we used to sell, we'd sell-out over there because we were loved so much, the Black Panther newspaper was loved so much. He went out with me a couple of times and we sold newspapers in front of Lincoln Hospital. Well, come to

find out that Little Wes was from Philadelphia, which I don't even think I knew at that time

where he was from, and is in fact Mumia Abu-Jamal.

MN: That's crazy.

CS: So that, we knew each other, we worked together, he's been to my house, he had dinner there. We were, well of course, any Panther could come from anywhere to New York or to the world. I could go to any other place and you were just like immediately you were family.

MN: That was what the movement was like. I never paid for a hotel between 1967 and '73.

Anywhere I could go in the country I could get put, you could get put up by people.

CS: Yes.

MN: Sleep on the floor, sleep on the couch.

CS: Sleep somebody's pad.

MN: Yes, exactly, it was- -

CS: Sometimes it was real nice. [laughs] There were some nice places.

LC: So you stayed in the Bronx office strictly sort of functioning as a newspaper distributor?

CS: Newspaper distribution office. It was not really a Panther organizational kind of office, or, but don't let me lie because I don't know, I've only was up there two or three times. I was functioning out of the Harlem office and doing whatever hospital—Lincoln Hospital—work and selling my newspapers. Really, essentially around the hospital—around Lincoln Hospital. So I don't really know what all was going on in other places. Except I knew that some of the sisters was going Downtown to 42nd Street and down to the Village and they would come back with they stories. [laughs] About what was happening down there- -

MN: Now when did you become aware that there were divisions within the Panther Party, ideological, and ideological struggles that were pretty serious?

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CS: I'll tell you exactly when. Right when, I don't know when it was, it was right around the time of the arrests of the New York 21, and Edith came down from Oakland, because we had read so long. Well, I read it right away. And I told one of the sisters I don't like that shit.

MN: [laughs]

CS: I don't like it. But you can't say that. You couldn't just go into the meeting and say, "I think Eldridge is," although I mean, you probably could because it was that kind of democracy, where you could say what you thought, but they would probably kick you out and tell you to shut the fuck up. Listen, I don't really put what she was going to say but I didn't do that. I told a couple of sisters that I don't really like that shit. And a couple of sisters said to me "you didn't read the part about the rape shit. You didn't get to that yet," because I was like, "because you going to be even more upset when you get to that." And then it was like, then there was the New York 21, and the New York 21 appealed to Oakland for help. And if you remember, there was a refusal of assistance from Oakland to help the New York 21. So now, it's obvious that there's a split going on. For that while that, I think this is going to be end of my discussion, but I got some more time. But while this was going on, the New York 21 were in court and they were litigating their case and you had to read about the litigation of the New York 21 case and the fact that they were eventually all acquitted of all charges, because it was all a bullshit set up to mess with our organization. But Zayd, and who was not a member of the New York 21, Mumba was, his brother was, had told me, "we would like for you to continue to do the work up there at the hospital. The work around health care is very important." Curtis Powell was concerned about the Sickle Cell Anemia work, which I was also helping him with. He was one of the New York 21. So, Zayd said, "and I'll tell you what, there's getting ready to be some shit. I see that the shit is getting worse, it's getting shady here." He took me over to the Young Lords office. Now,

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I only met the Young Lords maybe once or twice, and we had, we started, they had started to support the Lincoln Hospital table, complaint table a couple of times since they were Young Lords also working on the table. They said, “ok, you all take her, because she can’t, she’s got a lot of work to do, she’s a good worker organizer. She’s going to work better with you all with that shit that’s going on in our own office.” That’s how I came to work with the Young Lords. Zayd Shakur and Rasheed actually personally took me to the Young Lords office and handed me over to them as a health care organizer. And they did it because, I believe that they wanted to protect me from all the other bullshit that was going on in the Panthers. And I’m forever grateful to them and I really am. I think they respected me and they liked the work that I was doing, saw me as an asset to the struggle and actually personally took me out of the Black Panthers in ’72 and took me to the Young Lords so [inaudible].

LC: Now was the Young Lords office also in Harlem?

CS: It was 111th Street and Madison Avenue in East Harlem.

LC: Right near Marquette there.

CS: By Marquette there, so, that’s an amazing story isn’t it, this amazing cause? It also set the tone for a stronger relationship between the African American community and the Latino community and the Puerto Rican community. Because whatever it had been, and it had been strong because there were a lot of Puerto Ricans who were members of the Black Panthers, and when I became a Young Lord and more and more African Americans became Young Lords, and we lived together in collectives that were Young Lord and Black Panther collectives—equal collectives. And we worked mutually on a lot of different issues in the city. We learned a lot about each other’s culture, so that was a really important thing. And it came from, it was initiated out of love, just the same way that Fred Hampton met Cha Cha Jimenez in Chicago and

helped him to see the errors of his ways that they gangs was, helped him to politicize the Young Lords organization again in Chicago as a result of the work of the Black Panthers. And same up here.

MN: It sounds like the Panthers in '67, '68 had these amazing leaders in some, in a number of cities who, and certainly in Chicago, New York, and- -

CS: And in St. Louis, down in New Orleans, they were just all over. Baltimore, Eddie Conway, brilliant, brilliant leader.

MN: There LA also.

CS: Yes, Los Angeles, Geronimo. There were some great great people, who were really—thank you very much Mark for saying that—who really were committed to seeing new and better things happen for our community. Who really cared about the people. Maybe out of their own experience, many of them, most of them out of their own experience. Some from the experience that they had in the, in SNCC and in the Civil Rights Movement, and some who were involved just because they wanted to see better things happen. We all kind of had that mutual commitment to that change and were willing to give our lives. Let me just say that one of the things that everybody should know is that none of us saw ourselves growing old.

MN: Yes, no, that I think that's such an important thing. I never thought I'd see them 30 years old.

CS: No, because- -

MN: You lived everyday as if it were your last.

CS: If you're a revolutionary you knew that they was going to come and get you. They were either going to come and get you and incarcerate you or they were going to kill you. But we were so committed to making changes, and we believed we could do it. That's the other thing

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that I think is so amazing is that we had this belief in ourselves that we could, as a matter of fact, this is kind of a joke. We tell this, some of us get together now and talk about this, how dumb could you be to think that you could woop this mother fucker's ass? [laughter]

MN: I know I know!

CS: We thought we could woop his ass! We did! We believed it, we was bad, we was bad. I mean we were physically in shape. We were mentally a thousand miles ahead. He would be over here but that, we didn't know that he was inside of our organization. But he would be here, and we would be like over there or somewhere intellectually, and culturally, and just everything. We smoked weed and make your mind explode and some shit. I'm serious [laughs] we -

MN: But you know the other thing, you're saying, is that the young people in the street look up to you.

CS: That's true.

MN: They, and it was a whole different thing, it was just a -

CS: We influenced the rest of society. Everybody dressed like us. And why? Because we had the courage to stand up to the Man, which everybody was scared of. You get 150 people in the city walking around in leather coats and storm boots, [laughs] and berets talking shit, and talking about "come over here, you better be ready to deal," and the other people were like, "oh, I'm going to be with them." [laughs]

MN: I still remember a demonstration in New Haven, the free the Panthers day, where we had 5,000 people marching arms linked through the streets, and we had that whole city scared shitless. I remember the chant, "Fuck Harvard, Fuck Yale, get the Panthers out of jail!"

CS: I love it! I love it!

MN: And you know, it just it was that sense of just power and yet you also knew they were coming after you.

CS: Be not afraid. That we were not afraid. And that's a shame to say, and that's part of our naivety I think as a young person, when you don't think you can get hit by a car, until you get 20 or something. It's kind of like, and that's where we were coming from, like you don't, we didn't think we could get hit by a car. And we thought that we didn't have any sense of fear. That it was necessary to be afraid, because either they was going to kill us or we was going to win. And I say well we going to win [laughs], which I loved. I loved that idea. And it disappoints me in some ways that our youth today don't have the, and I don't know if you call it the bottle, or sense of their own selves and their own strength and ability to change society. You can change society. You can make things happen.

MN: But you know what, some of this goes back to the way you were brought up in Philadelphia and the way so many of the people were brought up with the families and the sense of history. And that once they unleashed you, you had that strong upbringing that our young people don't have today. I mean, that strong family background, when push came to shove, it gave you a sense of your own power. You had roots, I mean you know- -

CS: And values.

MN: And values.

CS: And what I mean by that is that there never was a time when I was reeking to think that I had to have sex with somebody that I didn't want to or to believe that this was about relationship—personal relationships—because I was raised to be a quality individual so that I never had that problem. That wasn't part of my problem. Whether or not to get married at the

time—sleep with somebody is another issue [laughs]—but to be, and the idea was to be

principled. And that came from the family background that you had.

MN: And you also had discipline brought up, being brought up.

CS: Very much.

MN: Which, and I mean it just, that's a whole long subject.

CS: Let me tell you, you're absolutely right.

MN: So, what about the music of the time and what, how did that shape and help you?

CS: This is such an important question, thank you so much for asking that question. We had a, there was background music for everything. There was a soundtrack, and everyday, it was young peoples' music. It was "I'm black and I'm proud," at that time. It was Marvin Gaye, "what's going on?" It was Peaches and Herb, Curtis Mayfield, it was all of them, the great music. It was anti-war songs. Falicia what's her name, the girl that sang the anti-war song. You remember Mark.

MN: Joan Baez

CS: Joan Baez, it was the Beatles, it was all of that.

MN: Yes, yes, they were all, right.

CS: And it was Bob Dylan, it was Richie Havens, it was all of this great fabulous music that was going on, and it was jazz. Because if you were hip, if you were a Panther, and you were intelligent and you read books you also listened to John Coltrane, and, or Annette Coleman, you know what I'm saying [laughs].

MN: Do you remember Les McCann and Eddie Harris "compared to what?"

CS: "Compared to what," yes, absolutely. It was all these- -

MN: Miles Davis' "bitches brew."

CS: “Bitches brew,” we was arguing, everybody was arguing whether “bitches brew” was a sellout from Bebop. I mean that was successful.

MN: Really? Ok.

CS: Yes. Did he sell out? He had white boys on the gig. So that was a discussion, a big discussion. [Laughs] And the music kept us going.

MN: What about the Latin music of that period?

CS: Unbelievable. Eddie Palmieri, Tito Puerte. I used to go dancing. I doubt that you know that I’m really a good salsa dancer, for an African American or black girl I could dance like a Latina.

MN: Well a lot of people from the South Bronx, I mean- -

LC: It’s a South Bronx thing.

CS: [Laughs]

MN: It’s a South Bronx thing. [crosstalk] Everybody, I’m sure [laughter] you can’t, I mean that- -

LC: If you black and you from the South Bronx you can dance.

MN: No, no, because I put on a salsa CD and I have a couple of black students from the South Bronx who say, “I know all this. I go to the corner bodega, this is” - -

LC: And that’s all they play.

MN: I’m, and these kids from the suburbs they’re like, “what the hell?”

CS: Yes, you got to be, and they, you go out, I’ve had danced with Tito Puente personally myself. Get down off the bandstand and you know you be staring right there like you could sleep. [laughter] I’m like, “Oh! Did you see that?!” Well, and I’ll tell you one more sexy story.

And that is that I met one of my best friends, the co-chair of HRUM, the health revolutionary

union movement which of course we should talk about, and we used to go to Orchard Beach on the weekends. Sell newspapers, to be Young Lords, to relax. And she said to me, “you know, the last time I saw you in a real funny situation we were all at Orchard Beach and we all in the water when your bikini tops fell down.” And I gasped. I was like, “Me?! This can not be true!” But those are the kinds of things; I mean we were hanging out [laughs]. But this is the South Bronx. That’s what we were doing, we were out, you know you was riots down on Orchard Beach all the time, just to fight the police, out there just for the hell of it. People would go out, “well what’s it going to be this weekend? Is it going to be a fight?” And people would plan to beat up again and people would take their bottles and shit and throw it at police.

LC: Orchard Beach.

MN: Very powerful.

CS: “Glass me, I’m glass somebody else.” Ask some other people, they’ll tell you. I’m not bullshitting you. Other people will tell you we used to go and fight the police. Because we felt like it. It wasn’t, but we didn’t lead that, I want you to know!

MN: [laughs]

CS: I want you to know that. The Young Lords and the Black Panthers did not lead that. It was the people on the street that like to fight the police at Orchard Beach. It was like a thing. So -

LC: And you all would go - -

CS: And we would go and help [laughs]. We was just going to help to make sure nobody got hurt too bad.

LC: That’s wild.

CS: It was wild. [Crosstalk]

MN: It was a crazy time.

CS: We were tough. What can I tell you we were tough guys.

MN: Now when did, were the last poets part of the circle that you were in?

CS: Abbie O'Doune, I actually know, and he was, you see the last poets were like the Richie Havens, and they were doing their music thing and doing their art thing and they would come in to do fundraisers for us. Or they would hang out at nighttime. They were not doing work.

MN: Right

CS: Going to the free breakfast program in the mornings, they were not doing that. But they did make a contribution and they, they were part of the culture of the time. Jose Faluisiano would used to sit out on the steps and with his guitar- -

MN: People don't know he's from the South Bronx. Where is- -

CS: East Harlem. I- -

MN: You saw him in East Harlem?

CS: Yes, in Harlem right in front of the Lords' office on Madison Avenue. I used to tease him about being blind. [laughter] It's true, I'm telling you the truth, oh man.

MN: So you got any more questions LaLite.

LC: I do.

CS: Go ahead, and I tell you- -

LC: Alright now I, I'll do also I guess sort of, like we was saying going into the Black Panther Party and about initially how that experience was, I was wondering if you could talk about initially your experience with the Young Lords.

CS: Yes. We should say that there is always, there has always been, a bit of a cultural strain that exists between African Americans and Puerto Ricans. And then later on as the Latino community developed and grew, between African Americans and the Latino community in

general. Part of Latino culture is marry up. Don't marry nobody darker than you, marry somebody lighter than you. Which is all about doing better for yourselves being not, less black. So that's a part of the underlying core of culture of the Latino community. So, as an African American coming into a setting where everyone spoke Spanish, essentially, almost everyone, there were some people who were Puerto Rican who did not speak Spanish. But who learned how to speak Spanish and had been accustomed to hearing Spanish because it was in their backgrounds. My Spanish is still not good at all, while I do understand some. But at the same time, if you remember I did my first organizing in the Puerto Rican community and developed a sense of how to interact and how to relate to the Puerto Rican community in their hoping and all of that. So it wasn't such a hard thing. It wasn't as hard as somebody who came from hard core African American nationalistic background. I had already developed a love for Puerto Rican culture.

MN: And also Puerto Rican culture is so African. Even if the people don't look African, I mean here, the stories here, people moving from the South into like the Patterson Houses and these light skin Puerto Rican men playing drums as the most incredible thing. They never heard drums like that and- -

CS: Down in the South they had hard drums.

MN: Because their drums were taken away, but, and you also had Santeria. And you had that African religion which, African religious practices as central to the culture. You had drumming and Polly rhythms and African religion and- -

CS: And mast and all this, it's amazing how- -

MN: It's a contradictory experience, you could say Puerto Ricans are the most African white people in the world.

CS: [Laughs] And many of them- -

MN: And many of them are African too, but they're, there's like there's more European in Puerto Ricans than Cubans.

CS: Well I might differ with you on that. What I learned in the Young Lords is that the Puerto Rican is a mixture of three things—Ieno Indian, African—who dropped off on the island—and conquistadors. And that that is the basis for the mixture, and why they come out looking like that and why their families can range from way darker than me or way to looking like you.

MN: Go to a Puerto Rican wedding. [Crosstalk] No it's true, we could be a Puerto Rican band.

CS: Exactly.

[Crosstalk]

MN: I know. My man Orlando Plaza, who owns Camalada's in East Harlem, he's like me except two inches bigger and two inches wider. Scary guy. No it's an amazing culture and musically I just, I think there's no music like Afro-Cuban music.

CS: Well, there's no music like Afro-Cuban music and there's no music like Puerto Rican music. I have to tell you, I'm totally in love with both those genres and I, almost as much as I love African American jazz, and that takes a lot. [laughter] But no, I totally, it was in that sense, but in the other sense, in terms of going into the Young Lords, remember I knew all these people. We had all worked together. We had all built the Think Lincoln committee together and collaborated intellectually and organizationally and developed an organization. We were in organization together. And immediately after I became a Young Lord, then we started a HRUM, which was an outgrowth of the work of the Think Lincoln committee, because there were workers down in Gouverneur Hospital who had a struggles going on there. There were workers at Metropolitan Hospital that- -

MN: What does HRUM stand for?

CS: Health Revolutionary Union.

MN: Wow

CS: And which I was the co-chair and Gloria Gonzalez who was married to Juan Gonzalez was a co-chair. She was the leader of the struggle with the hospital workers at Gouverneur. We built a health care worker, independent health care worker's organization with a newspaper called *For the People's Health*, which with a program of preventative health care. We went to different communities and knocked on doors and did health care testing for better health care testing, every weekend. We had study group every Friday night, and I could tell you some other stories about things that we did, like [laughs]- -

MN: This was the early '70s?

CS: Yes, yes, and HRUM was an amazing organization. We used to go to 1199 meetings where everyone member of 1199, and just take over the mic, and start demanding that they, 1199, take a stand on an end to the war with Vietnam. Or take a stand on a health care issue. And we would just go and bogart because we had the Panthers and we had the Lords backing our side [laughter].

LC: So the HRUM at that time, also in the Harlem, I guess some of the nature health closers?

CS: Mental health care, the issue of forced sterilization in the African American and Latino community.

LC: Could you speak on that just a little bit more.

CS: That they were, they had a program in Harlem and in the South Bronx and in Brooklyn where there were people of African decent—both Latino and African American—where they were forcing the women to have their tubes tied, in order to stop us from reproducing at the rate

that they thought was too high. So that's what was going on. So that was a big fight. And of course the death of women who were receiving saline injection abortions, which was the basis for the second take over of Lincoln Hospital, the death of Carmen Rodriguez, who was a woman who died from a saline abortion that was administered by Dr. Einhorn who was the head of the OBG obstetric GYN department of Lincoln Hospital. And along with the 4,000 complaints that we had developed, that we had gotten over the Think Lincoln committee's table and the death of Carmen Rodriguez, and our demand that the administration be changed at Lincoln Hospital, that sets the onset of the take-over of the fuller hospital, and of course our further organizing of the doctors and building of the doctors collective. That was our job, and what, we did that. And we organized and doctors collective of radical young OBGYN- -

MN: Now was that the committee of interns and residents come out of that?

CS: That was kind of a collaboration but that was an independent- -

MN: An independent organization, right.

CS: We stopped the selective market, when hospital doctors collected, and I was responsible for their communicable education classes.

LC: To sort of go into it now, so with the second take-over, what was sort of the onset that had a case for that?

CS: The onset was the death of Carmen Rodriguez. A woman went into the hospital, now before we talk about this, Lincoln Hospital was so bad that it was know as the "Butcher Shop." People would go in and have a problem with their left leg and end up with their right leg cut off, in the operating room. Many times you would go into, because they weren't paying attention. They didn't care about these people. People would come out of the operating room with instruments still inside of them. You see what I'm saying here? You go in and you got a

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gangrene on your right or left finger, and you end up with your whole left, right hand cut off. All those kinds of unbelievable things would happen to people. Children were dying because there were problems, and of course there was the lead poisoning issue, which was a very serious issue. There was all these things that Lincoln- -25% of the people living in the South Bronx at that time were addicted to heroine. So there were a lot, there were high levels of infant mortality. Infant mortality rates were unbelievable. So there was all these issues and there was one hospital in all the South Bronx that could take care of patients. There was no medical service. So of course it was going to be horrible. Plus the actual building had been a, it was condemned! The actual Lincoln Hospital which they tore down, which there are pictures of by the way—and you'd see Carol Armstrong to get those, some of those pictures—had been a nursing home for retired slaves. So there was plenty, there wasn't just one issue, there was plenty of built up anger over a horrible conditions of health care delivery in the South Bronx. And it wasn't getting any better and it didn't seem that the people who were running that institution gave a shit one way or the other. That's the point—they didn't care that the, so what if these people are sick? So what if there's high level of drug addiction? So what if we were screwing up every once in a while? They had an excuse for everything, they didn't care, because these people aren't worth caring about. So it was a question of dignity and the dignity of the community to demand their rights for decent health care. So that's what the issues were. It really wasn't just one issue. It wasn't just one thing that sparked this off of. A set of conditions, political conditions, social conditions, nobody wasn't doing anything about it, except us. Nobody was exposing these things and demanding that they get better. We were like, we were like a Canary in the cold. We're like, “hey, we don't like this shit, somebody's got to say something.” And you know what else, in a way the community seemed like they were a little scared, or a little, just, not pathetic,- -

LC: Apathetic.

CS: - -Apathetic. They were apathetic in that, "oh, we can't fight this alone"- -

MN: It's also life was such a daily struggle for people, just such a daily struggle.

CS: Absolutely you're right.

MN: Especially that time where jobs are starting to disappear, people coming back from Vietnam addicted, post-traumatic stress, I mean it just. Have you seen the movie *Dead Presidents?* That just captures what was going on. The early '70s was a rough time.

CS: It was horrible.

MN: The buildings are burning, the landlords are bailing out. They're closing fire houses and police stations while neighborhoods are burning. It's- -

CS: It's horrible.

MN: It was a tough time. Those years were tough, and the hopes of the '60s are starting. So many people are dead, in jail, so- -

CS: The music wasn't so happy anymore.

MN: "Papa was a rolling stone," and you know the song "run, Charlie run."

CS: Exactly

MN: "All directions", 1972.

CS: Yes, you got it.

MN: Yes, it's tough stuff. But- -

CS: The fact was, the bottom line, so that I want to answer your question as thoroughly as I can that it wasn't just one spark, but a whole build up of a whole lot of things. And at the core of it, as far as my perspective, was the dignity of people of color. And their demand for decent health care.

LC: One of the other questions I wanted to ask you is, I guess this is sort of a long range kind of question, but in terms of all of your sort of different organizing experiences, what do you think has been some of the long term successes of your organizing over your career span.

CS: Well, [laughs]- -

LC: I mean collectively.

CS: Yes, well I'd, let me say this, that I feel very proud that there is a bridge among the elders, that is a relationship between African Americans and Latinos in the South Bronx and in Harlem and the New York City area. That would not have happened, I think—this is my own perspective—were it not for the fact that we fought and struggled for the community in the '60s and early '70s. That the activists, the Panthers that they “don't really give a fuck,” to get back up. And to show the things that we had in common, the commonality between us. So I feel that that's, I feel very proud of that. The fact that the federal government recognized that in order for children to learn it was necessary for them to have a nutritionally sound breakfast, which of course is no longer nutritionally sound, [laughter] but the idea. Because that's what the struggle is now, to get nutrition, nutritionally sound food back into the schools.

LC: But in the time you were organizing there wasn't even- -

CS: There was nothing.

LC: There was nothing non-nutritional for kids to eat.

CS: Exactly they had- -

MN: So it was like the government took over what the Panthers started.

CS: And diminished its quality. [laughs]

MN: But that's an important thing that nobody, I think it's a very important thing to point out.

That those school nutrition programs are a direct outgrowth of those free breakfast programs that

the Panthers and the Young Lords created. And I think that that's an important thing to emphasize, absolutely.

CS: That lead, lead-based paint is against the law, was as a result of the fight that we had to get lead out of the paint and to get lead paint out of the apartments in order to get lead—the heavy metals—out of contact with human beings. That they, we fought in city council to get a law so that now anybody that comes into contact with lead-based paint can go and sue the landlord, sue the person responsible. You have to be proud that you had an impact on health care, because the impact of what lead poisoning does is children with brain damage. And we did that after research and really being quiet about it. For that, preventative health care issues like tuberculosis, the development of the Lincoln Hospital detoxification program. And there was not any detoxification programs, besides methadone, of drug program in the South Bronx. Now there's one of the most world renowned progressive, innovative programs recognized all over the world for all the progressive methodologies in drug rehabilitation. We did that when we took over a third time, and demanded drugs, a drug rehabilitation program. And that was with the Jewish corps. I actually hired to be the director—Pam and I hired him—to be the director of the drug rehabilitation program, on the recommendation of the Panther corps. But we, we are a program still. But anyway, so drug rehabilitation program, lots of the methods are now used world-wide, which we decided. We came up with the idea of use of acupuncture and rolfing and all these ideas. We used to use our art. We started learning art, acupuncture, and our using ourselves and based on our reading of the unity and struggle with contraction in the *Red Book*, which is how we came up with the idea to use acupuncture. That's philosophically where it came from then of course we learned acupuncture we taught each other acupuncture. And of course between acupuncturists and many Walter Boske. He was also one of our staff people. So that, what are other things that

we, accomplishments that we made? We made accomplishments in education, and at the time Assata Shakur was an activist—right after I left New York City and moved out—at the, black history, black studies program and opening roads in City College, and black history programs starting to proliferate all over the country as a result of the work that we did. When you start to talk about what impact that we really had, we had a hell of an impact on society. We weren't playing. And it's, until you see all that we were able to accomplish, until you really kind of lay it out in bullets, "we did this, we did that, we did that, we did that," and now you are benefiting, you are beneficiaries. You couldn't, and I tell this to young people all the time, you couldn't just walk in a restaurant anywhere, you couldn't just walk onto a campus and get into school and get a college education, there was no such thing. People's asses would be sitting outside reading a book somewhere but you aren't getting into these colleges. And when you, if you did get in, which very few did, you weren't going to be able to study your own history.

MN: When I was at Columbia there were six black students. One was Kenneth Clark's son, the other was the president's son, son of the president of Prairie View A&M, the other was the son of the head of the republican party in Brooklyn, the other one went to Phillip's Exoder, and there was one normal kid from Bronx Science. It was like, and there was not one, I did not only did I not have a black professor; I never read a book by a black author in all four years at Columbia.

Welcome to the college.

CS: And that's real. That's what, none of that existed. The guy, you guys feel so comfortable that you all could just like chill, but none of this didn't exist until we fought for it and made it happen. And many people gave their lives, that's the other thing, that this didn't happen and the fact that I'm a survivor means that I was very lucky, because you have people like Sundi a la Colie who's been in prison for absolutely doing nothing but 33 years, going on 34. Eddie

Interviewee: Cleo Silvers

Interviewer: Mark Naison with LaLite Clarkson

Date: 12 March 2007

Conway, 34 years, he didn't kill anybody ok? Hermit Bell, 33 years. Chip Fitzgerald, 35 years.

You know there are people, and then there's Fred Hampton, and there's- -

MN: Geronimo and - -

CS: Geronimo did 27 years, Jeruba did 21 years. John Huggins is dead. Bunjo Prin is, Carter, is dead. All these people dead because they were fighting for, and we knew that we were fighting for the generation that was coming behind us. There was no question that we were fighting for the little kids that was coming in back with us, who might eat that paint. Or might need to have a decent education, because we knew what a decent education was not. So that's why we were able to develop these programs of what it could be, what it should be, because we knew what it wasn't. We experienced what it wasn't. So anyway, that's the deal. There's more, I left New York and went to Detroit because HRUM voted me to be the one to become an industrial proletarian and go to Detroit and work in an auto plant. That's right, they voted and I went [laughs].

MN: Bunch of people did that?

CS: And I went and worked in Dodge truck on the back of the line for 5 years, from 1970- -

MN: Did you work at Dodge main?

CS: No.

[END OF TAPE]