

**Interviewee:** Reverend Arnold Townsend

**Interviewers:** Dr. Grace Yoo and Dr. Tiffany Caesar

**Video Recorder:** Yoko Tamada

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**Transcriber:** Charlene Olivar

**Oral History Video:** [YouTube Link](#)

**Bio:** Reverend Arnold Townsend grew up in an all-Black community in Oklahoma and in an integrated neighborhood in Los Angeles. He taught summer school as a part of the Black Student Union in South Park, an all-Black town, after admission into San Francisco State University. He came to San Francisco after the army during 1967. Townsend participated in the San Francisco State Strike of 1968 as a student. Afterwards, he went to theology school and became a pastor. Currently, he lives in the Fillmore District of San Francisco.

**Abstract:** 00:00:00 – 00:05:57 Reverend Arnold Townsend discusses his experience with integration and living in a tight-knit, Black community in Oklahoma. 00:05:47 – 00:08:00 Townsend expands on his childhood experiences prior to urban renewal in Los Angeles. 00:08:00 – 00:11:59 He describes a childhood memory and mentions his family being the one of the first Black families to move into the neighborhood. 00:11:59 – 00:17:00 He further illustrates what growing up in the ‘50’s was like, describes the interconnectedness amongst his neighbors of various ethnicities, and discusses how news of White people moving in segregated the communities. 00:17:00 – 00:22:34 Townsend recounts the first times he was exposed to San Francisco State University. 00:22:34 – 00:26:34 He describes what he witnessed during the Summer of Love in 1967 and tells stories of his parents and how they shaped him. 00:26:34 – 00:41:08 He describes his lifestyle when he was first living in San Francisco to when he moved to Castro Hill, including the nightlife in San Francisco at the time and the presence of Black-owned businesses and churches that supported the strikers. He then shares his experiences and opinions surrounding solidarity and the evolution of progressivism. 00:41:08 – 00:47:49 Further, Townsend tells of how he started going to San Francisco State University and his thoughts surrounding the cost of education. 00:47:49 – 00:54:56 He talks about the strikers, their mission, their sacrifices, and learning to challenge racist curriculum and ideology. 00:54:56 – 01:11:47 Next, he talks about his and others’ involvement in the strike and SF State, along with the principles established with the Department of Ethnic Studies about community involvement. 01:11:47 – He shares how he worked for the BSU. 01:17:18 – 01:22:18 Townsend talks about theology school and his children. 01:22:18 – 01:23:10 He talks about having grandchildren. 01:23:10 Reverend Townsend ends by recounting his experience with court and serving jailtime, and his son’s incarceration experience.

## Transcript

**00:00:00 Townsend:** While I think a study of Africa is absolutely essential to African Americans as a people to get a handle on who we are, I don't think we focus enough on mama and papa. I spent the first ten years of my life living with my grandma, and my granddad, and all my aunts and uncles. And the people in the flour sack dresses and the build overalls brought us a long way. And while much about them has been denigrated, I believe wrongfully so. I started life in an all-Black town in Oklahoma, and the last time I was there was in 2010 because a part of my family that I didn't know very well was having their family reunion. So cousin and I, who's from my branch, we went and we got there. We went to church that Sunday, and when I came out of the pulpit, at the end of service, a lady walked up to me: Mother Neers, ninety-two years old. And she said, 'Son what's your name? I believe I know you.' I said, 'Oh no ma'am, you couldn't know me. I left here at seven years old and that was 2010.' I was sad or whatever I was in 2010, but it had been a long time. She said, 'What's your name?' I said, 'Arnold.' she said, 'No it's not.' Now I know my name, but I'm not going to argue with a ninety-two-year-old woman in her church either. And she said, 'what's your name?' I said 'Arn-', she said, 'no, it's not; your name is Butch.' Now, if you call me Butch, you're either a relative on my maternal side or you're from that town, cause when I got to L.A., I wasn't Butch, you know? And anyway I said, 'I never got to ask my granddad, but why did your dad and my granddad-', she was a friend of my mother's, they grew up together- '-why did those men and women want their own town?' Because up until then, I had always thought those all black towns- because there were twenty-eight in Oklahoma at one time, I had thought they were 'cause white people didn't want them around. I didn't know they were intentional. And the first time I realized that she said- what I consider the most wonderful bit of understatement that I have ever heard- she said 'Well you see, baby, they just believe that they live with the rest of 'em,' meaning white folks. She shook her head and said, 'it just wasn't gon' work out.' And it hasn't for us. They did it. Integration. When it comes to education and economics, integration is the worst thing that ever happened to us. Because I come out of the segregated area. So, for example, I was telling some young people the other day, you've never been on the street like I have, like Central Avenue and Avalon Boulevard in L.A. back in when I was a boy in the '50's. So you never been on a street 'course fifty or sixty black owned businesses. When I was a boy, I loved baseball, when I was growing up. I still have an unnatural relationship with baseball. And when we were on our way to a game, if we were running late, there were two stores where we could buy candy, bubblegum, toys. One was owned by Mr. Morris, who was Jewish man. And another was owned by Mr. Johnson, a Black man. When we was in a hurry, we went to the Jewish man's store. Because if we go to Mr. Johnson's store he gon' want to know what you're taking in school, what your grades was like, how your mama doin,' what's your daddy up to, when the last time he'd been fishing. 'Cause he cared about us. He cared about what happened to us. I tell my son, you tell my son and daughter all the time 'y'all got lucky.' When I was growing up, every adult in my neighborhood was a d\*\*\* snitch. They would tell on you. First of all, they would check you if they saw you doing wrong. By the time you got home, your mama and daddy already knew cause they got on the phone. And sometimes you didn't know they saw you! So you walk in house and think everything is cool. And all hell finna break loose up in there on you. I mean, how glorious. No idea to know that when we left our home and walking down the street, like, especially in the summer- because we didn't have babysitters in those days, after about eight years old, we was on our own- we didn't know that we were being watched everywhere we went. That's the tribalism that was brought from Africa to the South, to L.A., and New York and everywhere until they tore apart

our communities. And this wretched behavior that we have in our communities can be directly tied- let me show you. I grew up on a street like many of us did, but some of y'all that grew up in San Francisco did, but I grew up on the street with single family homes, and there might be forty, fifty homes on the block.

**00:05:47 Dr. Grace Yoo:** And where'd you grow up?

**Townsend:** L.A., South Central. Maybe forty, fifty homes on the block; three, four people in each one. Sometime one person, sometime six or seven but it balanced. Well, you can know that many people and they all know you. So then urban renewal and all this other stuff come and they tear down single family homes and they build a complex with 200 units, one bedroom, two bedrooms, three bedrooms, four bedrooms. So now that complex, that 200 unit building now, is sitting on thirty, forty homes that it took out. Now you got three-hundred people living there, and then they tear down to build one-hundred-fifty units on the other side street. Now you got five-hundred people on your block. You can't possibly know that many people. And people are leery of strangers, no matter what color they are. So what you do is you don't foster community. And so this is what leads to this kind of behavior. When I was a boy in L.A. growing up, we knew the police were dangerous and all that. But y'all know who we were scared of? I was scared of my friends' daddies— the men in our neighborhood. You know, we're standing on the block talkin,' and all of a sudden, it's getting in the evening, It's seven o' clock in the summer, we're out there making noise, and all of a sudden you hear a window go up and a disembodied man's voice says, 'all right, y'all carry that on away from my house now.' 'Yes, sir, Mr. So-and-so.' And you go home and we, you know, we lost community. And so when we build these complexes, we don't build community, which should be just as important as the home we construct, if not more so. 'Cause a community can make a bad house work. Um, better than a good community can make a good house. You can have the greatest house in the world, but if you don't live in a community, you're empty. You're without money. But anyway, y'all need to start, so. Yeah, because as you can see, I can go on.

**00:08:00 Interviewer:** This is great though. And you already answered one of our first questions, 'where did you grow up?'

**Townsend:** Yeah, I grew up in South Central, L.A.. I started in Watts living with my grandparents and then by the time I got to be about roughly ten years old or so, there was a big argument with my grandmother and my mother, because I was my grandmother's favorite. She wanted me to live with her, and my mom wanted me to come live with her. And my mom said, 'but Mama,' because that's what we call our grandmother, Mama. My mom was mom, [and] my grandmother was [mama]. She said, 'But Mama, he's my son. And he never lived with me.' And my grandmother [said], 'Well, you know, baby, I'm kind of old now. And he's a big help to me. I need him to help me around the house.' Yeah, she dropped the whole card on her. But anyway, my mom won. Now I'm going to tell you something that is amazing. And it's why if you have children, talk to 'em. If you ain't got children yet, when you get 'em, talk to 'em. I. My mother died in a car accident at forty-seven. I heard this discussion at home with my grandma and my mom and her on the phone talking, and I'm basically hearing one side of the conversation. Now from the time I was ten or so, when I heard that conversation till I was forty-seven, I thought I heard them arguing because neither one of them wanted me. And my mom was saying 'No, Mama, let him stay with you' and my grandma saying 'No, he need to-'. And I believed that 'cause I'm an only child, see. So I didn't have nobody to bounce that-, and I preached [at] my mother's funeral and we went to the repass at the church and then afterwards, we all went to my

aunt's house, who was only five years old to me- so she and I grew up together very close. We went to her house to play, that sort of thing, that black folk do after funerals. And I'm sitting there telling some of my younger cousins the story of how my mama and grandmother had an argument because neither one of them wanted me and my aunt was walking by and she stops and overhears me and she says, 'Fool, that ain't what happened!' And as soon as she explained it, I remembered it correctly, almost verbatim. But for thirty-seven years I had lived within my mind somehow that neither my grandmother or my mother wanted me. Because we don't talk. That's why sometimes we realize now, even in our church, we're not a church who believes that the Lord will fix it. No, the Lord will send you in directions where you can get it fixed. In other words, if your car breaks down, you can pray all you want. But unless you get your car to mechanic or even the same with us as humans. I'm assistant pastor and my senior pastor tell[s], 'Look, I can help y'all with something because I'm trained for that. Some of y'all need professional help. That's [laughs] beyond my goal.' But it really is. I grew up very strangely being an only child, which I don't recommend anybody ever having just one kid, because when you're an only child, it's not a family to you. It was me against it. Don't do that. But anyway, that's where I grew up. I could say this: growing up in L.A., my family and I, the first house my parents ever bought, we integrated the neighborhood. We moved in, we were the first black family on the block.

**00:11:59 Grace Yoo:** Where was it at?

**Townsend:** Well, South Central, 56th Street between Normandie and Denker. We moved in, and within six months, about three or four more black families moved in. And then our neighborhood, black, white, uh, Lloyd Nakano lived there, he was Asian. Eddie Valencia was down on the next corner, Latino. Johnny Alonzo Filipino next door to me. This neighborhood, stayed together for about six to nine years before anybody moved. And we grew up there, and I thought it was the most won- I still do- it was an absolute wonderful way to grow up. People ask me 'What was it like growing up in L.A. in the 50's?' I say, 'Have you ever watched Leave It to Beaver?' And they said 'You're kidding?' I said 'No, except the biggest difference was most of our parents [and] moms worked. Except there were two or three moms on the block who didn't work. And during the summer they would've blocked miles 'cause like I said, we don't have babysitters, so we just ran the streets. Just wonderful. Just ran the street on our own. But because it was LA, you had to have a bicycle or you get left out. So when your bike broke, you immediately that night it fixed 'cause you know L.A.'s too spread out. The other difference was our gang was integrated, pretty much. But other than that, we did pretty much what they did on Beaver Cleaver, visiting the firehouse and getting to know the guys at the local garage and hanging out, just stuff. Getting our bikes and deciding the night before we're going to pack lunches and ride to the beach fifteen miles, or we're going to ride to Griffith Park. That was the way we grew up, and it was just amazing. I used to say when my daughter was first born- Rachel- she was thirty-eight and unexpectedly passed away in 2018. I used to tell people when she was born that if there was a place I could take her where she could grow up like I did, I would move anywhere in the world to give that to her. Unfortunately, that place does not exist. Because I tell people I grew up, I believe in the 50's and the era when the country almost made it. We almost made it. That neighborhood stayed intact. Black, white, all of us were growing up together. We're growing up together. I mean, we really know each other. Our families know each other. I'll never forget, I was ten years old when we first moved in. My friend Bernie, she's a red-haired Irish girl, freckled. Her family is having a barbecue in the backyard. I'm invited, and I'm walking up, and her dad and her two uncles or his brothers are sitting on a shelf drinking beer.

Big truck-drivin'-lookin' Irish dudes. And the joke was, 'Hey Bernie! Here comes your boyfriend!' And we all stayed there, together. But then real estate blockbusters- and this is where propaganda is so dangerous- because these people had experienced us. People on the block, my dad, mom knew all the people and we all knew each other. And the real estate blockbusters started coming in and telling the white folks 'They're coming'. And they started moving. They're coming! We were already there, and nothing had happened, nothing had changed. But they believed the propaganda. Because you know America's first propaganda was racism. Because what they had to do, not long after Jamestown, was convince everybody, the world, and even themselves, and even some of us that black people were only worthy of being slaves. They had to create that propaganda to make their version of this country work so they wouldn't have to work. Yeah, propaganda is so dangerous. They started telling them that, and then the neighborhood started to change. And then some years later, we needed a bigger house. I don't know why, 'cause the family hadn't grown, but my folks wanted a bigger house. I think what it was, [was that] we had a two-bedroom home and a living room, and when we got to the new house we had a three-bedroom home, so one of the bedrooms became the den.

**00:17:00 Yoo:** Where'd you move to?

**Townsend:** We moved to Leimert Park.

**Yoo:** Oh, Moorpark.

**Townsend:** Which is Leimert Park, which is the Crenshaw area. So it wasn't that far, but it was a little far.

**Yoo:** And so, let's transition. How did you think about San Francisco State? Like, where did that start to enter your life?

**Townsend:** Well, it hadn't been in my life at all. I'm gonna be real honest in this interview; I hope y'all have the good sense to edit it. I just want to be honest, because it's truly a funny story, but people may not understand. So I left L.A. to go to junior college, just outside L.A., thirty, forty miles Mount SAC (San Antonio College). I went there because it was a baseball school. And college only meant baseball to me, because that's what I wanted to do, that's what I thought I would do. So I went there. And the reason I went there is 'cause they were a like a foreign team for USC because my ambition was to go there for a year or two and then transfer to USC and then sign a pro contract. Well, I got out there to Mount SAC. I had some issues with the coach, primarily sat around and I was a pitcher. And then anyway, I dropped out after a couple of years at Mt. SAC, and I was talking with the White Sox and the Phillies. But Vietnam has just had just jumped, the jump jumping off 1965, so I got drafted in the army. So I get to Fort Carson, Colorado and I meet a guy, Roger Cameron, who's another striker who I'm looking for. Anyway, Roger and I became friends. When we were in the army, one of the things we talked about was we had a real thirst for literature. Real literature. We could buy them books where everybody kill each other in the PX. But real literature was hard to come by in the army. My mother would send me books and stuff, and she would send me Peanuts comics books because I identified with Charlie Brown. And anyway, um, Roger got out of the army early. We were able to get him out after only about eight or nine months. And when I met him, he was a grad student at State, he was from Richmond, moved to San Francisco to attend State College. Then he went to Cal, graduated Cal, then became a grad student in anthropology. And because he remembered the

dearth of literature, he would send me stuff to read. Well at the time, San Francisco State had a literary magazine called Open Process, and he would send me copies of Open Process. Now you guys are kind of young, so it might be difficult for you to put this in context, but this is 1966. Larry Flynt, Hugh Hefner and them people are going in and out of jail for what they're publishing. So he sends me a copy of an Open Process. One of the copies he sends me- 'cause I'm already thinking about where I want to go to school when I get out of the army, where I want to finish school, and maybe even give baseball one more job. I'm getting kind of old now, 23. And so he sends one copy of Open Process had a full frontal nude of a woman, and I decided right then, this is probably where I want to go to school. This looks like the kind of place that I would like. So that's how I got introduced to San Francisco State, believe it or not; and nothing to do with ethnic studies- because you got to remember Black BSU wasn't even a thing that I knew about in '66. I knew about Black, I knew about the struggle and what we were going through, but this stuff was just crystallizing. So when I got out of the Army, I came home in '67 and I got released in Fort Lewis, Washington. I get on a plane, I get in town. The next day I'm a free man. I fly to San Francisco, I let Roger know I'm coming, we're going to spend a few hours, and then I'm gonna head on home to see my folks. Now you got to remember this is September 2nd, 1967. Ya'll remember what 1967 was? No, you don't 'cause you're too young. That was the Summer of Love, (pause) And I hit town. I ain't going to tell you much more because most of it I can't (laugh). But I hit town, I go to Roger's house. Well, that two hours turned into thirty days. I was here thirty days before my folks knew I was back in the country. What was going on in San Francisco in '67 was like nothing I had ever seen. No one had.

**00:22:34 Yoo:** Can you describe what that was like? What was going on?

**Townsend:** Well, only a little bit of it. Can I describe for what I consider will be a family friendly document where I can tell you about that? It was really open and free. You could walk down the street and get in conversations. And the people were having [conversations] about not only where the country was headed, but how people ought to live their lives. We were talking about stuff that we saw and I still think was really important. People were challenging racism and racist concepts that were considered normal, the norm of how we should live. People were challenging that. They were even challenging, uh, family structure. And societal structure. Things that resonated with me- I remember when I was out here at State College and I bought a book of women's poetry. I only remember one poem that was in the book, but it just resonated with me so much because my daddy was different. And the one poem I remember from the book was, 'When he got sick, I took care of him. When I got sick, he got sick too.' That— it may not sound like much, but that was like revolutionary with me, because one spoke to the kind of man I didn't want to be, and it wasn't the kind of man my daddy was, I guess. I appreciate him and my mom's relationship so much. And I thought my mom was what y'all would call a career woman before the term was ever popular. I remember walking home one day, and in the driveway, there's a brand new 1955 Ford in 1955, and that was the hottest car out there. We got us a new car and I said, 'Oh we got a new car!' My daddy says 'Yeah, me and your mom.' In other words, you ain't put no money in this car. You can't claim 'our.' And so we ate dinner that night, and me and my dad are sitting at the table talking. Mom gets up from the table, she go in the bedroom, she come back, she got a coat on, and she takes the car keys and throws them in front of my dad and say, 'Here,' and throw them on the table. He said, 'Where are we going?' She said, 'You're gon' teach me how to drive.' And he said, 'You gon' learn how to drive? She said, 'You don't think I'm gonna pay for a car that I can't drive? My name on them papers too.' Those are the people who raised me. So if I'm a little strange. I'll just tell you something else about my

dad. My mom's gone now, and I go to Vancouver, Washington to visit at the beginning of I guess what was the first one? Was that Desert Storm? With Bush senior, Saddam Hussein. And I asked my dad, I said 'Dad. What do you think about Saddam Hussein?' He said, 'Well, I don't know much about the fella, but I figure anybody got that many white people mad can't be all bad.' And so, if you think I'm a little strange, those are the people that raised me, so blame them.

**00:26:34 Yoo:** So you're here for thirty days of summer love here in San Francisco. What happens next?

**Townsend:** So I'm here thirty days. So finally I go home. Okay? And, uh, I go home and I'm in L.A., and I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do, but I'm really already thinking that I want to go to school at State. And after spending those thirty days and meeting people from State College and met some black folk who going to State College, you know, I'm pretty much sold. But I'm still, you know, L.A. is home. And I'm hanging out with my folks who I've been away from, 'cause during those two years, I only came home one weekend in those whole two years. I didn't get to leave before I went to Korea, none of that. But I was just glad I wasn't going to Vietnam. And so, that's why I'm kind of commuting. I sign up for unemployment, I get my check every Thursday. What I do is I get my check on Thursday, and I party all weekend. And on Sunday night, I would take the hippie special back to- see, a flight at that time, a flight to L.A. was 12 hours. But if you took the hippie special, which was like round midnight on, uh- because that was where they used fly every hour on the hour to L.A.- well, if you took the hippie special, uh, at midnight, you was only \$10, and they'd be smoking weed on the plane. 'Cause you could smoke on the plane, yeah and playing guitars. So I would take that back to San Francisco. And I'd be in San Francisco from Monday to Thursday, and then on Thursday I would fly down and go straight to the employment office and get my check, because that's when you pick up your check, at the employment office. And then L.A. was a good party town. So I'd give it all my friends I grew up with, and we'd party every weekend, and then I'd come back. And so that was that was it for about six months. And at the end of six months, I had met a young lady here and we kind of hit it off. And I just came up and moved here to San Francisco. Then we got a bigger apartment up on the top of Castro Hill, and it was my existence. And so I got a job working graveyard at the post office. This leads to State College. That job was a graveyard at post office, at the air mail facility. So my ride- I lived on top of Castro, but I wouldn't let them pick me up at home- I would catch the bus down to Divisadero and Oak. The gas station, the Shell station used to be there. And on the other side of the street where there's a paint store, next to the paint store, there's a place there. I think it may be a pet shop or something, but anyway, it was the that was the Both/And Jazz Club. Which was a nationally known jazz club and all- I'm talking 'bout Train, Lee Morgan- everybody played there- Miles- when they came to town. That's where they played at the Both/And. Delano Dean, and Lenny- can't remember Lenny's last name right now, but they owned it. And so I would stand in front of the Both/And and smoke a joint and listen to jazz. And I'd get there about 45 minutes before my ride would get there. So I get to hear some music. Sometimes I go inside. When I'm standing out smoking a joint one night, and these two dudes walk up. Two brothers walk up. One of them I had seen before, we playing basketball in the Panhandle, and he had on army fatigues. But because I just got out Army, I could tell they were the real thing. They weren't something you bought a Banana Republic. And so we started talking. So they saw me and they asked me if I had another joint, and I gave them both a joint, because I was selling weed too, and I'm trying to make customers. So that became kind of like a little ritual. They'd walk up and I'd stand there, we'd smoke a joint together before they go in and before I go to work. And one night they told me, 'now look, man-' I was off on Saturdays and

Sunday- 'Now look man, we're going to pick you up tomorrow, and we gon' go up on Fillmore Street and hit some of the clubs,' but they picked me up and took me up on Fillmore Street. And I thought I had doggoned to hell. It was Cadillacs double parked up and down the street, people walking in and out of the various clubs. It's my seventh or eighth club where it hangs, 500 was on the corner eight. And then there's the Booker T, which had a hotel which had a club inside of there. They had live music. I'm trying to remember all- the Birdcage, Minnie's Can-Do Club the university hide-away, which was a jazz club right, connected to a Japanese restaurant. You could go from one to the other. The scene was the northernmost club on Fillmore, it was on Clay, and that was Fillmore. I know it's Lower Pacific Heights now, but that was the Fillmore back then. And then Nate Thurmond had his restaurant. The beginning was on Pine and Fillmore. Oh, the Texas Playhouse. The Flamingo Room. Jackson Center, and some more. And then you had Jack's and Sutter and some more. Then you had after Howard's, Jimbo's Bop City. The Fillmore was live. And then you go on Divisadero Street and you have the Sportsmen, the Playpen, the Half Note. Oh, The Morocco. Fillmore was just something to behold. They called it the Harlem of the West, and it really was. And you've gotta understand something, though. They were clubs, but as a companion to them, there were also other companion businesses that were Black-owned. Beauty salons, barber shops, shoeshine parlors, restaurants. All this was black-owned. Cleaners. Where you get your clothes cleaned. And what you've got to remember is that these places represented wealth. We had fun in them, and all; they represented wealth, they represented jobs. All of these places hired people, all these Black entrepreneurs, hired people to work in these places. And so what happened is through urban renewal and redlining and all that stuff, they took our wealth and gave us money for it. And you also got to understand that these were the people who kept the strike going. They not only came out and walked the picket line. Community icons, people like Mary Helen Rogers. They walked the picket line, they also fed us. I mean in their homes, they fed us, they took care of us, they protected us. When the strike was over, I don't know about anybody else, but the Black kids out here, we couldn't get jobs. We were pariahs, if we were not for Black businesses and Black organizations. The people like Dr. Carlton Goodman that took care of us. The Black churches that supported us and took care of 'em, put a little money in our pocket so we could eat and survive. I don't know. None of my friends that I can remember, after the fact, had a job working for white people and white organizations. No, we couldn't get no change. On the late Terry Collins did his, Freedom of Information Act, it wasn't till then that- well, we knew the FBI and all them people was around- but we found out we were surveilled by the intelligence divisions of all the armed forces in the army. And we were kids, and in a way, knew we weren't ready necessarily yet for armed overthrow. Although that was something we dreamed about, fantasized about, of change, [in] the direction of the country. But I think what we didn't understand that JFK, Hoover and others understood was Arab Spring. That sometimes dissonance can become so great that it will require a change in government. I remember being at a demonstration that the Third World Liberation Front supported, along with the Panthers and every other radical organization, a Free Huey demonstration at the Federal Building to where the people at one point joined hands. And the Federal Building of Golden Gate is a whole block. And we joined hands and surrounded that block two or three rows deep. You know many people it takes to do that? That it was so strong. A protest was so strong that it was growing and we were seriously talking about a general strike in this country. And one of the things that I would say if I was going to say that I found lacking in today's movement of younger people is education. Political education of people in the community who may not even be on your side now. Because I watched truckers and Teamsters who came out and attacked the first antiwar demonstrators. I watched them go from attacking demonstrators to marching in the demonstration by the time the Vietnam War ended. That was because of political education that



we took on and because that's what we were doing. When the general press reported on what we were doing. They had to report on what we were talking about. You see? And so, I find that lacking today. Instead of doing like the Republicans do and choosing sides, get busy and educate the people who should be your natural ally. And that ain't happening now. That ain't happening now. We've got to go back to some things, use things that worked. And so anyway, I was a baseball player, and I was a pitcher; and if I was pitching against somebody who couldn't hit a curveball, I wasn't going to throw no fastball the next time. So if you see things that have worked, use 'em! And again, and again, and again. And that's something that y'all called the progressive movement has really got to start getting busy with. Start talking to people who don't look like progressives. 'Cause y'all got it in your mind what a progressive looks like. I'm amazed when people tell me nowadays that I'm not progressive. 'I remember when you used to be progressive,' I said, 'no we used to be progressive.' I was young then. Now I'm old progressive. If I try as an old progressive to do what young progressives did I would look like a fool. I have to provide something else now. Cause when I was in the Army and they were teaching military tactics, when they talk about 'you gon' charge the enemy,' they never said, 'well, when we get ready to charge, the first thing we're going to do is we're going to put all the old men up front.' That ain't gon' work (chuckles). It ain't gon' be pretty. We move too slow, we gon' get everybody killed. But there is a place; but we live in the western world. And western thought says that when the new comes, the old is thrown away. The eastern world, when you get to Asia and Africa and all those places, they said 'no.' When the new come, they join hands and move forward together stronger. Moses would have never gotten to the promised land without Joshua's strength. Joshua was in charge. But Joshua, with his strength, would have never gotten there without Moses' wisdom. So that's why it takes all of us. And if we don't adopt some of those things and learn from our brothers and sisters of eastern thought, we gon' always be stuck.

**00:41:08 Interviewer:** So Reverend Townsend, thank you. This is all so amazing. can you tell us when you made contact at San Francisco State with the strike and the Black Student Union? Like the who are the first folks you met, you know?

**Townsend:** I started it, but I didn't finish it- so these guys, that would come and get a joint from me every night in front of Both/And were students at San Francisco State. That's what I meant to say. They were students. George Kolbert and Wade 'Speedy' Woods, both members of the Central Committee. And George was so important because he was in charge of the Bail Fund. He raised and handled the money for the Bail Fund. See one of the things [is], you didn't worry about going to jail, because you knew the brothers and sisters was coming to get you out. They're not going to bail you out when you walked out; somebody's going to be there to give you a ride home. So, uh, we became friends, they took me up on Fillmore Street that night, and I told them I wanted to go to State. So I came out, and right around that time, the strike jumped off. And I was working nights at the post office, was out spending my day, even before I was a student, on the picket line. And I got home one day, I just got off work, getting ready to go take a nap. You know, 'cause I got to sleep in the daytime because I'm working graveyard shift. Cherry Collins, Clarence Thomas, Buzz Thomas, Don Smothers who now lives in- they're all members of the Central Committee- who now lives out in Philadelphia. I hung out with him last time I was in Philly. They came and knocked on my door and said, 'Get dressed,' man. We taking you out to State College [where] you enroll in. So they bring me out to State College, we get out here, and I'm getting ready to go, I see the people lined up to sign up for school. I go to get in line. [They say,] 'Where are you goin'? I [say] 'Ain't that the line?' [They say] 'Well come on, man.' So they take me to the administration building, they take me into a door that I know I ain't got no

business going in. You know how you on campus, you all see them doors, you never see anybody go in and out of those doors, and if it if they are, they ain't nobody you know? So they took me to one of them doors, we went through some back hallways, I come in, I go in to see Reggie Major or to Upward Bound project or whatever it was called. No it wasn't called that, it was called EOP, something like that. Yeah. So he's over that program, they give me some paper to fill out outside, they take me to Ron Major, uh, Ron Brown, who is over the money. He can get you your money. And so I go see him, I fill out some more forms, I go somewhere, I get the forms signed, dated, stamped. Next thing I know, I'm in school. In one day, I am in school. I got some checks for several grand: you know, my student loan grants and all that stuff. I'm in good shape. We go to the bank. When I was out here and they signed me up for all of that, it cost me— and this is really as important as anything I'm going to tell you— cost me seventy-eight dollars, [pause] to sign up for my first year at San Francisco State. You know why? You know why is cost me seventy-eight dollars? Because the Constitution promised me a free education. And six, and eight, and fifteen-thousand dollars is not a free education. When I went to junior college, it cost me eight dollars. Now it would've cost me thirty-two, and I could have got tickets to all the sporting events, but since I was in the athletic department playing ball, now those were free. So it cost me eight dollars. That's where the education should be, 'cause were promised a free education. So, in fact, the next year, they raise to eighty-seven dollars and we raise hell. 'Cause they went up nine dollars or whatever. Y'all think we made out of money or something? That is as important as anything that we're going to discuss, that you could go. And I'll tell you another thing, I'm going to say this because I might forget later. Coming out of strike we end up now with ethnic studies. So, I don't know what they're called now, LGBTQ Studies, Women's Studies— all that is important. Well, you know what's equally important that we don't talk about? For a couple of years after the strike, we had open admissions. It didn't matter where you went to school, what your grades was, and none of that. You wanted to go to school, you had a right to go because you paid for it. One of the black students that got into school on open admissions ended up graduating and getting his master's and he's retired now— but they still called him out of retirement because he so needed— he became one of the baddest child psychologists in San Francisco. Black, and had lived a life, and had been in the life— what people working for, females, if y'all know what I mean, gave that up because he got into black politics, then went to school, became a child psychologist and saved the lives of so many children in San Francisco. You couldn't number them on your hands, fingers, and toes, [out] all the people in your family who['d] never would have had the opportunity, would not for the strike and open admissions.

**00:47:49 Yoo:** What's his name?

**Townsend:** Gene Mabry. Called him Brother Mabry, from Bayview Hunters Point. Brilliant man, and I count him as a dear friend. But these are the kinds of things. It wasn't for just some intellectual pursuits that we wanted this college open, it was to save people's lives. It was so we could pour into people's everyday lives. One of the things that didn't happen that should have happened and still should happen: we had it set up that nobody could get a degree in Black studies, unless you had put in a certain amount of hours working in the community. For Black organizations, Black churches. I think that still ought to be a part of the criteria. I think it was a mistake to dismiss it. But when the BSU folk was no longer, you know, they felt us being a of this school for being a part of ethnic studies for many years, and then that was kind of dropped. 'Cause, see, what we were thinking, that we could get talented folk who were going to end up in great places as kind of employees for these Black non-profit organizations, for our Black

churches. We could get that talent for a few years, at least, until they got out of school and started commanding a salary that we couldn't pay them. And we figured that Asian studies and LASO Studies and all that would follow suit and do the same thing. And we would be pouring these cadre, this battalion, these legions of brains into our communities. Pouring into our children, and our seniors, and our single mothers that we would have this talent. The one thing we didn't want to happen is for ethnic studies to become part of the ivory tower experience. Because were it not for those people that we wanted to help, it wouldn't be no Ethnic Studies. It was folk who went to jail out here that never walked on a college campus a day in their life. Eloise Westbrook, Bertha Comb, Mary Helen Rogers, Cleo Rogers. Then others, Charles Turner, Dr. Carlton Goodman, they came out here [intelligible]. They came out here and got arrested. Put a hold on their lives, for y'all! You get what I'm saying? Cecil William, Jan Mirikitani, his wife. They went to jail! And I went to jail three times. I never went to jail 'til I got to college. Long as I was on the street, I was pretty good and avoided jail. But out here I got lazy. This is what Ethnic Studies was created for— not just so you could get some books, get some good grades. That absolutely nothing to do with what we were doing. What we were doing was to improve, build up, rescue, and save our communities, and this institution was going to do it. And then our dream [was] that every institution around would follow, which they did. But what? No Black Studies and Ethnic Studies 'till we got it out here. But because we didn't keep the community-based component with it, because, see, the ivory tower experience didn't see value in our communities. And I think sometimes we got a little too focused on trying to prove our academic worthiness to White people, who told Black students after they promised an Ethnic Stu- Black Studies Department- told them later, when they came back to school after the summer that there really was nothing academically worthy about the Black experience so we ain't gonna do it. So why we try to prove our academic worthiness to them? D\*\*\* academic worthiness. If the community could see your worthiness, that's what we should have been concerned about, that the people in Fillmore, in Mission, Ingleside, that even the people in the Sunset and Richmond, if they could see our academic worthiness, the hell with what the ivory tower intelligency of thought. We were never out to impress them. All they knew was we were the ones who disrupted their classes. My first year out of high school, I went to L.A. City College. I took only one course of philosophy courses. That was kind of guy I was, I was always into that kind of thinking. And there was a young lady in this class- maybe a year or two older than me- Japanese, from UCLA. She took that class. And she stood up one day after we'd been in class about three, four weeks. And she tore the textbook, that the instructor had given us, apart. And for me it was an epiphany! I was eighteen and didn't know you could argue with a book. I thought if it was in a book somewhere, it had to be so. And she tore the racism- one of the authors was Alfred North Whitehead, and I can't remember who the others were, but- my whole world changed. I mean, I started reading differently from that day forward, just out of high school. This, is what we were trying to do.

**00:54:56 Yoo:** Reverend Townsend, can you talk about the role, what roles you played during the strike or what were you doing? What was your what do you feel like you-

**Townsend:** I would say that if you talk to my friends like- but not Springer, and the late George Colbert, and the late Speedy Woods, I think they would tell you I was a soldier. I wasn't a leader. I wasn't a member of the Central Committee. I was just out here every day. I wasn't an idiot, so I used my brain to do what we- but I think what happened is because of my active activeness, I've never called myself an activist. I think things like activist, revolutionary, and I think those are the things that other people call you. And it's an honor and a compliment. But I don't call myself

that, That's a little presumptive for me. But yeah, my role was I was here every day during the strike fighting the police, sometimes physically. The incidents that I could tell you but I won't, even though the statute of limitations have passed, I just hope that, you know, I have great kids who like to think of Papa a certain way, but yeah, I was involved in that part of it. Like I said, I went to jail three times and once was during the mass arrest. And that's only because then there was only a mass threat, because the people- and we should have known better- that we should have put our people at the back of the march. Because the people who are at the back are the ones who don't want to be in the middle, which mean they ain't the ones who want to fight. And because they wouldn't fight and bust through the police line as they started to try to encircle, they were able to do it. Because if certain people hadn't been at the back- let me tell you. When they had the mass arrests, when they cleared all file, when they got all the strikers on the buses on their way to jail, they found knives, and guns, and pool balls. Really creative. I used to come to strike every day with a pocketful of- my army field jacket- I would come with a pocketful of marbles. 'Cause when they would chase us on horseback, the horses couldn't run on the marbles (chuckle). So you threw marbles behind you, and they couldn't catch you. Oh, these people at the strike were bringing the- oh, they found knitting needles with no yarn. They found scissors and no paper. Everyday, we came out to protest. And we were we believed in fighting back. We were not passive and passivist. I used to say 'y'all pacifist and non-violent folk need to stay away before you get somebody hurt.' Cause, I'm not against you, but this is not the time for that. This is not what we're doing. We love Doctor King; that ain't what we're doing here. Because we thought it was important that there be some physical resistance to oppression, because that's what we were fighting. And the oppression that we were fighting wasn't the police. The police were the defenders of the oppressor. The oppression was what they were spewing out in class everyday, trying to get you to believe the bull- I would have said this differently before I was repping towns- but trying to get you to believe the bull that they was feeding these kids in class every day about this system, which most of you all are way too wise to buy now, but the only reason you are too wise to buy it is cause folks sacrificed out here, so some alternatives could be taught to you. There are alternatives that you were taught that I wasn't taught. So the first trouble I got here, I was in high school. D'Arcy High in Los Angeles, California. And I asked my instructor in a class in U.S. history 'If John Brown was insane because he wanted to use violence to free the slaves, why wasn't George Washington insane for using violence in the Revolutionary War?' Now my teacher said, 'Arnold, you're such a jerk.' And she sent me to the principal's office for that question. Now, my teacher was right. I was a jerk. I was always cutting up in class, but I wasn't a jerk right then. I thought the teacher had an answer of what the difference was, I really did. I wasn't being a smart aleck. If I asked you that now, I'd be smarter. I didn't know she didn't have an answer, sent me to the principal's office. Now my parents were old school; the teacher was always right. So I took a note home that they gave me, sealed, so I didn't read it, and I gave it to my mom and daddy at the dinner table. She read it, passed it to him, he read it, and I didn't get in trouble. So now I'm really scared cause they're really goin', this is really serious now. I'm really in trouble. They might make me move. And nothing was said! Wasn't discussed! I get up the next morning- when I got up, my parents were always already gone. I would hear them getting ready. They left while it was still dark. My mom was still home. And I get ready, I get dressed, I get ready to leave to catch the bus. She said, 'No, no. I'm taking you.' I figured [if] she['s] going to drop me off, maybe she got doctor's appointment. We get to school, we still haven't discussed this note. I'm so confused. I'm getting ready to get out, like they've dropped me off before. And [mom goes] 'No, no, no, no. I'm going with you.' We walk in the principal's office, we sit down, and my mom goes off 'cause my question wasn't answered. She and the boys' vice principal, they get into it. Next thing I know, here comes the principal. This thing is

really serious, that my question was not answered to her satisfaction on why was this man insane for one violent history but they weren't? And so when they get through with all that right in front of me, I'm feeling pretty cool by now. So finally, me and my mom get up to leave, and we're walking out the door and my mom stops, turns around, points to a boys' vice principal and says, 'Mr. Miller, my son is still waiting for an answer.' So now I'm ready to go to class, right? Mom said, 'No, come on, you're hanging out with me.' I didn't go to school that day. Me and my mom hung out all day. We went downtown L.A., did a little shopping, we ate at The Original Pantry, one of my favorite places. It's a steak and shop house that you got to stand in line to get in, and you might see anybody in that line in them days. From Marlon Brando, to Elgin Baylor, a world champion. It didn't matter who you were, you stood in line and you ate steaks and chops, and we ate ice cream. I spent the rest of my high school career trying to think of questions that could get me another day to hang out with my mom all day long. That was the only time I ever got to do that in my life. That was the kind of questions that you weren't allowed to ask. And you guys, you young people, ask them all the time because of San Francisco State. Because the people that I met on those picket lines, they were students here. And I could name them from Roger Alvarado to Jerry Bernardo to Bernard Springer to Sharon Truscott, Carlotta Simon, I can name them. Well, the sort of most brilliant people I have ever known in my entire life. I believe that when people of a certain kind of intelligence find themselves in the same place together at the same time, major things happen. San Francisco State Strike, yes. But all of the real progressive activity of San Francisco, which is only a shadow of its former self when it comes to real progressive, is living on past glory; but the real progressivism that happened in this city grew out of this strike. The KPOO radio, one the most important uh, institutions have in the city, came out of San Francisco State- the people that created it. The Arts Center on Mission: out of San Francisco State Strike. African American Agriculture Company- Wei Peck- which sought the Redevelopment Agency tooth and nail. You want to find out more about it? I'll send it to you. Uh, *Redevelopment, A Marxist Analysis* which was made by people in San Francisco Newsreel. The Fillmore, the Mission, south of Market talked about urban renewal; and Fillmore and South Market talking about when they were trying to go and try to bring Bart into the mission, which would have done the same thing, and it would have moved people out of Mission like they'd been moved out now. That would have happened forty years ago if they hadn't resisted. All that grew out of the Strike at San Francisco State. Harvey Milk wouldn't have been elected had it not been for State College. Who, by the way, you know, a lot of people talk about Harvey Milk. We're actually friends, I'll tell you Harvey Milk's story. I'm doing something one day, my phone ring. He said, 'It's Harvey.' 'Yeah, man. What's happening?' He said, 'So look, I need talk to you.' Gordon's office, I said 'What's up man?' [He said] 'So look, Arnold, I want to pass an initiative. I want to introduce legislation for San Francisco to divest itself of any business with companies that doing business in South Africa. 'What are you asking me for? That's a no brainer.' 'Well, you know, would it be Kennedy endorsed words on the board? They really should be. I mean, I'm a gay white barber in San Francisco.' Now, y'all excuse the preacher's language, but I'm quoting myself now. 'Harvey, did you think of this initiative?' I just get a little emotional remembering. [I say,] 'So you think if this initiative saved one baby's life in South Africa, that the people in South Africa give a f\*\*\* whether you're gay white boy in San Francisco? Introduce this s\*\*\* man. Ask will it be, and endorse the co-sponsor, but don't you take your name off of it. That wouldn't have happened without State College! I don't know. There's Harvey. Well, if he even had the boldness to run, and he had the nerve to run but to believe he would get support without State College. Because everybody did State. We didn't make no difference, whether you was a woman- women fought for their position. They jacked us up in class when we came up with some misogynist bulls\*\*\*, you know. But it was accepted.

‘Cause we couldn't have did it without him. And don't let anybody- I know, men, we get the attention and all that s\*\*\*- but don't you let nobody tell you that the strike would've went anywhere with not only the support of the women, without the mental processes. ‘Cause they were in it one-hundred-percent all the way. None of that would have happened without the support of everyone. And I'm going to tell you: if you don't do nothing else, why are you out here? You fight to make that community connection that you've got to have a certain amount of hours working in the community to get a degree in Ethnic Studies. If we are not different than the other departments, then what is our value? Why did all them people fight? Go to jail? Die? Do time? See, this department was created like no other department on campus, so why shouldn't it be different? And why shouldn't it require difference? How are you going to just fall in step with the rest of these so-and-so's on campus? How are ya'll going to fall in step with them and don't ask no more of your students than they do? That's not how you came into existence. It took more. It took difference to creation. Now, ya'll want to just go along and roll with them. I'm sorry. I don't mean no harm, and I love everybody, but I just can't accept it. I can't accept it, y'all going along with everybody else. I can't accept it.

**01:11:47 Caesar:** Can you talk a little bit about your experience with the BSU? And the role BSU played in the strike? You kind of been talking about it. I just wanted to know if you talk a little more about it.

**Townsend:** Yeah. Can I tell you that the BSU was a strike? ‘Cause now the BSU ain't no strike. If not for the BSU, ain't no Third World Liberation Front. Ain't no Ethnic Studies. Ain't no La Raza Studies. Ain't no Womens Studies. Ain't no Asian Studies, none of that. Ain't none of that without the BSU. With not only the BSU, but with the courage. I just get on campus and I'm in the BSU office with some ugly little bungalow we should've preserved for historical reference, right outside the cafeteria. And I go in there and one day there's Charles Gary sitting at a desk. Charles Gary with the Panther Lawyer. I've seen him on the television. I go in there and one day Bobby Seale is on the phone, in the BSU. And Bobby Seale is talking to a couple of guys. They didn't come here and they even got a case. Bobby Seale says, ‘Well, yeah, I got a lawyer for you.’ And I get his number. Now he's a white boy. If you're too Black for that, f\*\*\*, yeah I can't help you. You know, and this is this activity. So, I come in there and I'm working with the BSU, I join the BSU, and summer is coming and one of the brothers in the BSU tells me ‘What you doing this summer, you got a job?’ I said ‘No.’ He said ‘Look, okay, I got a summer job for you. You're going to teach summer school. You're going to teach Black History at the Community Center at South Park.’ You didn't know South Park was a black community, did you? Southpark. I knew people down there. I taught summer school there. I got to know everybody in South Park. And I'll never forget we were down there one night and late Joe Rudolph, who was a striker and became the general manager of KPOO. He'll say, ‘Ya'll know something fellas? These white fold gonna come down here to South Park, and they're gonna put in quaint little restaurants, and this little circle area, they're going to make it a national park, might even get some gaslights at the entrance, and all these black folks is gone. You can't find nobody black down there now. So I taught South Park and I taught summer school in Fillmore, and I ain't been able to get out of Fillmore ever since (chuckles). Fifty-something years ago, I taught a summer school class in the Fillmore, and I've been stuck in there ever since. I had been accepted to Santa Clara Law School, and they became the, uh, director of Wei Pak and I never got back to them. I got accepted, I was on strike, I was on trial, and I defended myself, judged at Akin's Court, and I was defending myself and my prosecutor, John Dwyer, who became a friend. He was so impressed with the way I defended myself, he wrote me a recommendation to this big wheel in Santa Clara, alumni at

Santa Clara Law School, who then recommended me. And I got a letter of acceptance. Now, when White folk tell you about what they can and can't do, I got a letter of acceptance before I ever filled out an application to (laughs) Santa Clara Law School. But I never got there cause of the BSU. So I ended up in Fillmore and getting a job. Well, I needed a job 'cause I'm coming out of strike and nobody else going to hire us and I'm still in Philly. I'm still working there. We started a nonprofit housing development corporation because there were no really there are no Black-led ones in the city. And so, without Walls Community Development Corporation, which without Walls is the name of our church, our ministry, because we've always felt that people put up too many walls when they ought to be building more bridges between each other. We got too many walls between two walls of gender, color, ethnicity, whatever. We can always find a reason.

**01:17:18 Yoo:** So Reverend Townsend did you go to theology school after San Francisco State?

**Townsend:** I haven't finished theology school, but I did go after San Francisco State.

**Yoo:** Ah, okay. Were you able to finish San Francisco State?

**Townsend:** I didn't graduate, I just left. I don't know. I left high school, I haven't graduated.

**Yoo:** Was it after the strike that you left?

**Townsend:** Yeah. I stayed here about another year after the strike. And then I came back and worked in a black program that was on campus with Doctor Wayne Nobles and a couple of other people. But then I left that. I was doing some community work for them, but then I left them. I was a decent scholar, a poor academic. I have had trouble with authority figures all my life and even after I became one, I still have trouble.

**Yoo:** And then you became a minister.

**Townsend:** Then I went into the ministry. And it had been coming all my life, but I had been trying to avoid it. My grandmother told me when I was eight years old I was going to be a preacher. And I was raised by my stepdad, who's a wonderful man and a great dad, and he adopted me, and he's Townsend. I had met my biological dad once when I was five, and then when I was sixteen, he visited me at my high school because he was in L.A., and I got to know him when I was fifty-six, and he was a retired Baptist pastor. And interestingly enough, my daughter Rachel, who in 2018 passed away January 5th unexpectedly, like a vein burst in her neck like an aneurysm. The next day I was going to meet with some people who wanted to name a building- they had a senior building they rehabbed in Fillmore. They wanted to name it after my recently deceased daughter. Because she used to do the Juneteenth parade and a lot of other things in San Francisco. I opened it and it was a young lady introducing herself to me that, uh, she had been born in Los Angeles in January of '62. I got out of high school in June of '61. And long story short, it turned out, uh, my high school girlfriend when we graduated was pregnant and had a baby, and I never knew she had a baby, and put the baby up for adoption at one month old, and she was adopted by an older couple, didn't know she was adopted, uh- a well-to-do couple- in fact, her godfather was the late Tom Bradley, former mayor of L.A.. And she found out she was adopted after her parents died. And she started looking for her biological family, and she went on Ancestry, and I had done that years prior to learn my African roots, and long story

short, it turned out that she's my daughter. So after my daughter passed, I ended up with a daughter I knew nothing about. If you Google me, The Chronicle did a two-page Sunday spread on me and my two daughters. And she is an accomplished jazz singer, lives in New York, the resident vocalist at Birdland, the oldest jazz club in the country, and just got back from England, by the way, Sunday before Monday before last Monday from doing a gig in London. And she'll be singing at my 80th birthday party, which I'm now planning. We're going to do a big thing, and we're having a ball getting to know each other. Name is Natalie Douglas. And she's married, no children. But I have a son who I adopted, Corey, who is 35, and he has two daughters. I have *dos nietas*. 'Cause my two daughters are salvadoreñas. Yes, their mother is Salvadoran, and they're eight and four, and I'm having a ball.

**01:22:18 Yoo:** Wow, Reverend Townsend, what a lifestyle (laughs).

**Townsend:** Let me tell you something: the greatest thing in the world is your grandkids. 'Cause you can be as irresponsible- my son, he says, he says 'But Pop, why you buying them so much s\*\*\*, man?' I say, 'Son, I ain't gonna never tell them no.' 'What do you mean?' I say, 'I'm not raising them, you are! You tell them no. [Yoo laughing in the background.] 'You know, they've been with me all day, they got a big bag of candy. You know they don't need too much candy. You're a good dad; you take the candy. Now they hate you and love me, that's how it goes, man!' That ain't fair, grandparents don't play fair, we plan to win, man. (laughter in room). They hate you and love me. That's how I go mad. Well, that ain't fair. Grandparents don't play fair. And so, he's a great guy.

**Yoo:** Reverend Townsend, just a couple of questions and I'm just gonna wrap up-

**Townsend:** Please, ask anything you want, 'cause y'all know, I can go on. So you gotta interrupt.

**01:23:10 Yoo:** Yeah, yeah, that's awesome. How many days did you spend in jail total during the strike?

**Townsend:** Well, I didn't spend very long. I'll tell you why. Well, because the strikers would get you out. One time I spent about three or four days, but here's the deal: when I went on trial for the mass arrests- Oh, I got a great story for you before I tell you about the mass arrests. I was arrested once because a cop that had arrested me the first time, I forget what it was even for, we were doing something. He sees me come out of this building. Right after I come out of the building, some cherry bombs or something blows up a toilet. Well he saw me in the building, and he just assumed that I did it. So they arrested me and charged me with setting off explosives. So I go to court one day, and my judge is Judge Harry Low, Chinese judge. So they call my name, I stand up, I walk up. He says, 'Now what did you do?' And he looks. 'Explosives. What are you doing in Municipal Court? Why isn't he in Superior Court?' 'Well, Your Honor. Uh, it was fireworks.' He said, 'Are the arresting officers in court?' He said. 'Yeah. Come up here.' Judge Harry Lowe said, 'Fireworks? Do you realize that this is a court of law? We got serious matters we're pursuing? And you got somebody in my courtroom for fireworks. If you ever bring anything like this again, I'm gonna put you in jail for contempt of court. Case dismissed. Get out of here.' So years later, I'm working on as a consultant on something with a lawyer friend of mine, and he's a land use attorney and we're working on a project. So he gets some tape, brings me to lunch. He says, 'I want you to meet this judge. Good performance, retired judge, who's



gonna help us on that.' So I go, and it's Harry Lowe. So I said, 'I actually had met you before. I was before you.' He said 'For what?' So I told him what happened. He said, can you imagine they bring a case of setting off fireworks before a Chinese judge? Can you be more stupid than that?' He said, 'Fireworks are like a religion in our community. I have never been so pissed off in my life.' (laughs) And so we had a great laugh about that, Harry Lowe and I together. Oh, great. I was convicted of one charge, and acquitted of two others. But the one I was convicted on, I was supposed to go do six months. Well, some of the people who were on trial with me, they went and did their time. You know, 'I aint you. You Black, you ain't doing time till the last minute when there's no other option.' Our case was overturned, so I never had to go to jail. And the people who did time basically did it for nothing. Because they did about four, four and a half months, when you get time out for good behavior. My son was arrested; he gets a scholarship to play football at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. There's an old song they sing about the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe. That's the Atchison. (exhale) Kansas ain't like other places. And I told him before he left, 'Son, Kansas ain't like California. Weed is drugs. If you get caught, you ain't going to get a ticket. They're going to put your ass in jail.' He gets called about two-and-a-half ounces. My son ended up getting a year in prison now for two and a half ou- you ever heard of Leavenworth? Yeah, Fort Leavenworth prison. Well, what people don't understand is there's a federal prison on one side of the street but there's a state level [intelligible] on the other side. He goes Leavenworth about ninety days, then he goes to a camp. He calls me and says, 'I'm not getting out early.' Because I told him, you'll end up doing about nine months 'cause you'll get credit for good behavior and for working. He says, 'I'm not working.' I say, 'What you mean, man? You don't wanna get them White people next time-' He said, 'Townsend.' That's what his Mama called me, that's what he call me, or Pops. He said, 'Thirty cents an hour?' That's about what they pay you for.' I say, 'I know, son, but you know, you don't want to be there.' No. He said, 'All I know, somebody told me once: 'Don't never work a job for less than an honest day's wage.' Because if you take less than an honest day's wage, you're a slave, and boy don't you never be a slave to nobody.' You know who taught him that, right? So he throws it back in my face. I turned from fear to being proud, that you're willing to do time for your conviction, I'm with your doing. I got you, I got your back. And so he got out, and he's doing great now. He's a great guy, as you can see, full of integrity. He's adopted. His dad was never in his life. And I'll never forget, his oldest girl is eight, that when she was born, we were at the house one night, and they were passing the baby around, everybody was looking, and he and I was sitting there looking, smoking cigars, probably. And I overheard him mumbled to himself, 'She will never have to wonder where I am.' He and the mama aren't together no more, but he sees his girls everyday. And only time they don't see him is when they go to El Salvador with their other grandparents, with the abuelos. But other than that, he is with them every day. And I overheard this once: they were at a party that his godparents threw- so most of the people there were older people, few people his age- but they all been knowing him all his life- and his mother overheard them telling him what a great young father he is. And he said, 'Everything I know about being a father I learned from Robert Townsend.' Said, 'Okay. Don't tell me nothing else 'cause you gon' make me cry.' I get emotional very easily, but that's who he is now.

**Yoo:** That's great. Thank you, Reverend Townsend. Uh, Professor- thank you. Because you had so much to say, but we want to give you-