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Interviewee: Lee, Robert E III

Interview Date: February 20, 2013

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Houston History

Interviewee: Robert E. Lee III
Interview Date: February 20, 2013
Place: Robert E. Lee's residence, Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Aaron Goffney
Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

Robert E. Lee III begins with *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu and mentions how all major generals have read it. Lee then talks about the Panther Party and his ancestry. He discusses the origin behind his name, and the relation to the Civil War general Robert E. Lee. On the topic of the Black Heritage Gallery, Lee mentions the importance of the black historian. He talks on the Black Panther Party, its history and also the story of his parents. After discussing his mother and father, Lee discusses the black underworld. Citing the term "invisible social construct," Lee tells of the strong black community that was fostered. Lee tells of his schooling experiences, mentioning Southern University and his youthful times with Mickey Leland at Afton Elementary School. He talks about introducing politics to Leland, his brother El Franco Lee, and friend Carl Hampton, and reminisces about their political activism and the coalitions, which were formed including the People's Party II. The interview discusses Carl getting killed by the Houston Police Department. Lee returns to the topics of the Black Panther Party his family. After talking about his siblings, Lee discusses his first job, the experience of his mother firing him, and travelling with his father. Lee talks about starting the Houston Texas Trail Blazers Association and C. F. Smith organizing a Tuskegee training school for black pilots. Lee also mentions Janet Pomeroy and her pioneer work for persons with disabilities who play sports. Lee refers to the Greek warrior Achilles, referencing to it to explain his own birth with an Achilles' mark and what that sign stands for to him as a warrior.

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Robert E. Lee

Interviewed by: Aaron Goffney
Date: February 20, 2013
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Robert E. Lee III's Residence, Houston, Texas

AG: Today is October 14, 2012. My name is Aaron P. Goffney and today I will be interviewing Robert E. Lee, III. We are at his home in 5th Ward.

AG: I heard a lot about that book. A lot of people have read that.

RL: There's no gorilla fight on the planet earth, no general on the planet earth, WestPoint even studies it's in all different languages. No guerilla fighters, last 500 years have not read Sun Tzu.

AG: Wow.

RL: You cannot function as a fighter and not study Sun Tzu. And that's the book there.

AG: The Art of War.

RL: Yeah The Art of War and they said WestPoint, General Robert E. Lee read it, General Grant read it. All your major generals, there is not a general in America that hasn't read Sun Tzu. You can open this up and any page you want, open it up any page. It's just first page and read the... it will be in Chinese on one. Just open it up in the middle just open it up.

AG: Okay.

RL: And read it out loud to me.

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AG: "In the conduct of war the general receives his orders from the ruler. It is then the general's job to marshal the forces available to him. Put them into effective order and build their encampment. Then most difficult of all he commences his maneuvers against the enemy. The inherent difficulties of this lie in the need to turn the devious into the direct and to turn the disadvantage into advantage. For example he may lay a false trail away from his true objective so tempting the enemy off course and thus arrive at his real destination before the enemy even though he sets out after him. This shows mastery of devious."

RL: Sun Tzu... there is no. See there is no see in the Panther Party I was field secretary in the Panther Party. I was a fighting machine an organizing machine. My leader was a guy named Don Cox who just died in France. He was in exile. He was a field marshal. But we were a fighting machine. You know we put the Calvary together to fight. You know and that was the only Calvary that would fight. Other Panthers no. All of them couldn't do that. We understood that. My birth name is Robert E. Lee, Jr. III.

AG: Robert E. Lee, Jr. III.

RL: Everybody call me Bobby Lee.

AG: And you're from?

RL: Texas. Born and raised in Texas.

AG: Born and raised in Texas.

RL: My ancestors were brought to Texas as slaves in Jasper.

AG: Okay.

RL: My great, great grandmother, her name was Palis Adams. She was born a slave in 1832, died in 1932. I pulled this out for you. My grandmother, my mother's mother that's her in the middle she was 3 years old when slavery ended. That lady standing up.

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AG: Three years old when slavery ended?

RL: Right.

AG: When slavery ended as far as the Civil War?

RL: Yeah. After the Civil War she was 3 years old.

AG: Okay.

RL: She was a slave for 3 years.

AG: Okay.

RL: And then later on that photograph was taken in Jasper when she became a teacher. That's my grandmother.

AG: Can I take a picture of this?

RL: Sure.

AG: I'll get it before I leave this is a real nice photo.

RL: Keep it.

AG: Thank you.

RL: So my father's side - slave from the Flannagan Plantation in Henderson, Texas up near Longview.

AG: Longview.

RL: Yeah Longview up the road hence. And of course after slavery my great, great, great grandfather though it was real slick to take the name Robert E. Lee.

AG: Really?

RL: Sure.

AG: Because I was wondering I was like?

RL: Yeah that got me in.

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AG: It was...

RL: That's like... let me first say that's like naming a Jewish kid Adolf Hitler now alright naming a black boy Robert E. Lee. Let's make that real clear. I had a lot of fights about my name.

AG: I can imagine.

RL: A lot of fights!

AG: I can only imagine.

RL: Because you didn't meet anyone in the South, not no nigger (excuse me ladies), not no black man name... you wouldn't meet no black man in the south named Abraham Lincoln.

AG: I want you to be candid so do you want her to go in the living room? She's fine.

RL: Okay.

AG: Yeah you can be candid.

RL: So my name served as an advantage for me as an organizer going in the southern white community. All itself just my name Robert E. Lee, Jr. III okay? But my name is changed. I changed my name well my father asked me to wait until after he is dead.

AG: Out of respect.

RL: When I was in the 4th grade I discovered Robert E. Lee. You know how on your first day in class the teacher said, "Come on in children. And what is your name?" "My name is Suzie Q" "And what is your name?" "My name is Christopher Robins" "And what is your name?" "My name is Eeore." "And what is your name?" "My name is Piglet" "And what is your name little boy?" "My name is Robert E. Lee, Jr. III." Now that teacher (her name was Mrs. Walker). She said, "You stay here til' after school I want to talk to you."

AG: Really that was a white teacher?

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RL: No this is a black teacher. This is when segregation was going on.

AG: Okay, obviously yeah.

RL: No see I have Lee with me right now. And after class was over she pulled an encyclopedia it was obvious that I didn't know the history. My father hadn't told me, you know. Like I said it's like naming the Jewish kid in the Jewish community Adolf Hitler or Göring. And she showed me the history of Lee in the book, read it to me. I was impressed with his horse or Traveller. Traveller took him to war and brought him back. Usually generals get 5 or 6 horses from under.

AG: Just that one horse.

RL: Yeah Traveller was an Appaloosa, beautiful.

AG: Okay.

RL: To this day I like that horse. But what it instilled in me, the point I'm trying to get to, I started reading military history very early.

AG: Okay.

RL: If you want to understand a society. If you want to understand a community organizing, how it is organized, you read about military history. It is all about leadership, how to get men to respond. So very early I started reading southern history. I was in the 4th grade and my first introduction to an encyclopedia which was the equivalent to the internet then when she showed me Lee then I started, my mother bought encyclopedias and from that point I started reading like Grant, Julius Cesar, Hannibal. I was fascinated...

AG: By the stories.

RL: With military history as a boy. I was fascinated with history. I'm fascinated with historians, you know because we are a product of our history.

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AG: That's one of my reasons I want to do this interview because I think I am developing that sense of passion myself.

RL: It's very, the black historian... the African Americans...we wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for the oral history of our struggle and then the written history about black man. You know there are books that and literature that were against the law for us to read. The 60s when publishers started unleashing books and literature of black writers it was the 60s you know where the thirst for black history became the strain, extreme and it is still that way today. That's why my love for the black heritage gallery and what Robert E. Lee and Brenda has been doing. People seem to take that for granted.

AG: Right.

RL: Well when you walk in the Black Heritage Gallery man you are surrounded by awesome spiritual historical...

AG: Rich.

RL: ...feelings of black people. People take the Black Heritage Gallery for granted. But once you walk in there it is breathing history. It's visual. So and that's where the Anglo-Saxon or the white supremacists that is, have been very successful in the past is denying us the knowledge of our history. The black historian is crucial to our future.

AG: Right.

RL: Barack Obama the product of black history. El Franco Lee is a product, wouldn't be a Black Panther party... the Black Panther part of society go back hundreds of years man, hundreds of years. It was a warrior society and I think did I send you a piece on that, about the Black Panther history?

AG: No sir.

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RL: Alright well I will give that to you.

AG: You said white supremacists you make the point to distinct the two.

RL: The white supremacists yeah I make the distinction. I've always stated and one I don't look at myself as an ex Panther. There is no way in the world I'm going to consider myself an ex Panther when I have 31 of my friends killed and still have friends in prisons. But the white supremacist he's all... this is a brief definition of the Black Panther Party. It goes back thousands of years.

AG: The Egyptian Black Panthers.

RL: Go back thousands of years. You can read this, this right here there is another one right here. See the Black Panther party is not a phenomenon that just happened in America. This goes back thousands of years the Panther Warrior. It has always been the warrior society. Always has been.

AG: What brought your family to Houston in essentially the 5th Ward area?

RL: Work you know my mother... well let me put it this way. My mother and father are that's a good story. My mother (again) was born in Jasper County.

AG: Right.

RL: And my father Henderson County. [speaking to someone else] Fiza,

Fiza: Yes.

RL: Bring me a photograph of dad, my father and mother. Well here's my mother. So you can visualize. That's right there. I was raised at a place called Lee's Congo Bar and Café. [showing picture] that's Selma Adams Lee.

AG: Was that the restaurant they owned?

RL: I was raised around the black underworld.

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AG: Gotcha.

RL: Very little is mentioned about the black underworld. [speaking to Fiza] Thank you habib.

This is my father 761st and this is where my father fight at Fort Adams 761st tank cadet.

AG: Wow World War II?

RL: World War II he was with General Patton.

AG: That's what we are talking about now? General Patton?

RL: He was with General Patton and...

AG: We can talk about that too. That's a good one.

RL: That's what I'm saying. It's a warrior society you know the 761st is very rarely talked about. My father went there with a man named Mr. Broussard out of Pleasantville.

AG: Okay.

RL: And came he came back together.

AG: That's in the 5th Ward area?

RL: Yeah, Pleasantville is in Precinct One it's about 15 minute drive from here. It's an all black community, all black suburb Pleasantville. But this is my mother she was pregnant with me. Okay, my father when he came back from World War II it had a hell of an effect on him. All I know he never talked about it. But when I would talk with some of his friends they would say one thing, "He killed a lot of Germans."

AG: Really.

RL: That's what the old heads that went with him. But he was influenced, he went to museums, he went to you know he was in North Africa Battle of the Bulge. It was all black tank battalion and it really changed his whole life. My father was a Muslim when he came back. You know my father introduced me to the Koran in 1967.

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AG: Okay and how old were you then?

RL: Shit I will be 70 years old in December 16th.

AG: December 16th okay.

RL: I was 20 something years old.

AG: Okay.

RL: He was not going to let my mother work in no white folk's kitchens

AG: Because that is what they were doing at that time?

RL: Yeah. So with the monies and things that he saved (my father was a hustler man) you know there is no such thing as a "nice club." No one talks about the black underworld and the role it played as played in the little Africans all over America. Did you ever hear about the Godfathers, the Italians?

AG: Yeah.

RL: We talked about we read about the Irish underworld, Jewish underworld Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel, they too great organizers. You wouldn't have Las Vegas if it wasn't for the Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky you know. But no one has ever wrote about the role that the black underworld has played.

AG: I would like to know some stuff.

RL: That's a very key subject matter to study and read. The numbers racket which is called policy. Some black guy there's a book called "Captive City" that talks about one of the...let me put it this way. You heard of the numbers racket right?

AG: Yeah.

RL: Policy... from the 30s and 40s it was called policy up to the 50s.

AG: Okay.

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RL: The wheel of the numbers racket was in my parents club, the wheel okay. The white boy started with the little nigger penny and dime game ~~de~~ you know what I'm saying? Until one of the Jones boys (who was black) got arrested for tax evasion and he talked too much.

AG: They knew it was big money then.

RL: And that's when they realized... in 1958, 1959 they had a big massive police attack on the black community, the 5th Ward, 3rd Ward, 4th Ward... Dallas, Galveston. They were looking for a numbers rackets, gambling and all of that which my father had the lead. See my father died in New York. He was not going to go to prison.

AG: Okay.

RL: And once they shattered the policy the numbers racket, the movie with Fishburn and Cicely Tyson called "Gangster" that's what it is about.

AG: That's what it's about.

RL: It's all between the black gangster, the white gangster who could control the number's racket. But they named the movie wrongly man. They named it "Gangster" you know.

AG: It had nothing to do with being a gangster.

RL: Now in Las Vegas Bugsy Siegel did the first night club in Las Vegas, he was the first organizer you wouldn't have a Las Vegas if it wasn't for the Jewish... Bugsy Siegel was Jewish, great community organizer. Meyer Lansky, Jewish, he could control all the gambling in Cuba before Fidel Castro overthrowing it. Up until January 1, 1960 Meyer Lansky which is a hero of mine...

AG: Right.

RL: I love community organizer. But when it comes to the black underworld we are not talked about. Black underworld along the money teachers didn't have no money. There wasn't

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no banks. The black gangster, so called black gangs, you know. So and they were the one that had justice. When there was a rapist, when the police didn't care about no black man raping somebody it was the justice of the black underworld. Our crime level was very, very low when the black underworld was around. And they were the bankers. They were the ones that had the night clubs (you know). So many of those guys who went to World War II came back very, very, very ready man to confront the injustices in black America. That is what I was trying to lead to. It was the black underworld that funded NAACP, Urban League, a lot of the black movers.

AG: I see.

RL: In the black underworld.

AG: Because you have to wonder where that funding came from.

RL: Huh?

AG: One has to understand where that funding came from.

RL: That funding came from gambling, bootlegging, I won't use the word prostitution, my father had the word "sex merchants" "pleasure entrepreneurs."

AG: Pleasure entrepreneurs... That's a swift way to put it without degrading.

RL: That's a nice word but I was reading my Koran every morning and I read the Bible every morning. I was calling my wife here about prostitutes. Did I get it?

AG: No sir.

RL: Here it is right here. Harlots.

AG: Which one?

RL: Harlots. Prostitutes.

AG: Oh.

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RL: It's a nice word for prostitutes. Okay right here.

AG: [read muffled in undertone]

RL: Does that say whordom?

AG: Whordom.

RL: Ho's.

AG: Without saying whore.

RL: Ho... sex merchants... pleasure experts, pleasure entrepreneurs. That's all.

AG: When you...how was it growing up in Phyllis Wheatley during segregation? When you went to Phyllis Wheatley High School?

RL: It probably for me segregation was positive. We were against integration.

AG: Okay.

RL: The black underworld was against integration. I was against it. With the debates, the arguments, most of the upper black middle class were for integration.

AG: Integration

RL: The black underworld was totally against it.

AG: Okay.

RL: You know like my daddy would say grass is grass on either side of the fence. We knew that our economics would be messed with, destroyed which integration did destroy. Because what happened when your black middle class moved out that was the devil for the black community. So we were against that. When you raise a community like ours the crime rate was low. We didn't have burglar bars on churches. All the back doors were open. No crime... the crime rate...

AG: So 5th Ward what is painted now wasn't...

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RL: Oh no 5th Ward was a prosperous neighborhood. Go to your historical things about 5th Ward you had the Club Matinee which is like the Apollo Theater of Miles Avenue. You had 4 theaters, 4 black theaters.

AG: Really?

RL: You had the Lyon's Theater, the Deluxe Theater, The Roxy Theater and the Justin Theater. We had 4 theaters that was packed on Saturdays.

AG: Really?

RL: And then the day time it was for kids.

AG: The nickel?

RL: Yeah every nickel you can get in but the day time the parents who went to shop. So the day time was filled with children, all 4 theaters. We had an economic base because white folks didn't want our money. No segregation, white folks didn't want our money.

AG: So you built a community.

RL: So the money was in the circle. You know you had restaurants, you had cleaners, barbeque joints, you had schools, you had nurse's schools, churches, clothing stores, Caldwell Tailors. Kirby John's father, you know Kirby Johns Caldwell who is a minister now he live-one block from me right behind me. His father had one of the best tailoring shops.

AG: Really?

RL: You had Jeff's you had C.F. - the white folks did not want our businesses. So there were people from Tuskegee or Prairie View or you know Huston Tillotson. Then they open their business in the black community. So you had middle class, upper middle class, middle class then you had middle-middle, then you had working class blue collar, then you had the grey collar

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class and then you had the black underworld which fall under consult invisible social construct.

The black underworld you couldn't see it.

AG: Got it.

RL: It was called the invisible social construct invisible. Couldn't nobody see these guys.

Social, you know men working together for their community. Construct organizations, building, construction. So your night clubs played a very important role, you know. They called gambling, liquor, music. You know a lot of musicians, most of your great musicians started in black clubs.

AG: That's true.

RL: You know so when Count Basie came to Houston or Duke Ellington came to Houston they couldn't live in them white hotels. They lived in black... they lived in 5th Ward, 3rd Ward hotels.

AG: You all had to take care of them.

RL: Yeah but they would play for the white folks...

AG: Ahhh...

RL: But they had to return to the black community to sleep. So they would play... so a musician when they came they would split up. They might come to some play over at the Matinees. Some might come to Lee's Congo Bar and Café. Some might play at The Lahoya. Then you had like the bands, you know like the Jazz Crusaders' are from 5th Ward. Illinois Jacquet is from 5th ward. You know you got some of them brothers, what's the brother's name that went to TSU that played trumpet? Botchell. My... anyway. So segregation...apartheid I like to use that word because similar to what was happening in South Africa, all your great minds were forced together during segregation.

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AG: So there had to be relationships formed with these artists they came in town?

RL: Yeah you see the most respected person at that time wasn't an athlete, it wasn't no football player. Football player, "great" "sure..." basketball players. But it was the artists, the musicians. It was the artists, the poets, writers. See what I'm saying? Those were the catch.

AG: Intellectual thinkers.

RL: Yeah man, jazz musicians.

AG: cerebral

RL: Yeah, poets kind of came, poets developed today after like the 70s and 80s. Because in the 60s the athletes were activists. Muhammad Ali was an activist.

AG: Absolutely.

RL: Abu-Jamal was an activist. Jim Brown who played full back for the Cleveland Browns was an activist.

AG: Speaking of sports and activists you ran track?

RL: Yes.

AG: And you got a scholarship to Southern?

RL: Yeah I went to Southern.

AG: Let's talk about that a little bit how how you...did you run any integrated track meets?

RL: Yes. The first time I would do it I was in high school. I was the only high school athlete that was invited to a college track meet because I was doing in college and it was indoor meet here and it was a segregating. I had to change in the parking lot and with my high school coach. Me and a boy named Darrell Dotson was the only 2 athletes, high schooled athletes, now you know how this pissed them white boys off...

AG: I was going to ask you how did they receive you?

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RL: Oh they made it hard. We were called, “nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger” on the stands.

I’m going to give you some of these. This is the young man that I ran with at the track meet.

We met, he and I Mickey Leland and me with me at Afton Elementary school that’s Darrell Dotson.

AG: Okay so you went to school with him?

RL: That’s me there. Yeah and he and I were the first 2 high school athletes to run in an integrated track meet.

AG: I have that flyer thank you.

RL: No they gave us hell.

AG: I can imagine.

RL: They gave us hell.

AG: What are some of the examples?

RL: They gave us hell. See my sport primarily was high jump. That was my favorite. I was 6’8”, 6’9”, 6’10” you know my role model though was no one in America. My role model was a Russian high jumper named Valeriy Brumel. He was 6 feet tall doing 7 feet and I quietly I kept my hero was a communist for the Marxist.

AG: Wow.

RL: Yeah Valeriy Brumel.

AG: Valeriy Brumel.

RL: Valeriy Brumel. I would never tell no one but he was 6 feet tall doing 6’8, 6’9” that’s what made me so dynamic. I could do 6’8”, 6’9”. When you do 6’9” you do 6’11”. When you do 6’10” you got to do 7’. If you do 7’ you got to do 7’3” but I saw him NCAA TV thing when they brought him over to America and from that moment on (I wouldn’t tell anyone though) but

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my hero as a high jumper was Russian Marxists. Valeriy Brumel he was bad. Him and a guy named John Thomas from Boston University was like... John Thomas was black but I loved Valeriy Brumel of course he was 6 feet tall.

AG: And was it a jump specifically that you just...

RL: It was called a western roll. Now you have the fosbury flop. It was called the western roll. He had the western roll. Most Americans were doing what was called a scissor. The scissor and I'll have, I'll give you some history of my track history.

AG: Now you said you went to elementary with Mickey Leland?

RL: Yeah.

AG: That's interesting.

RL: Mick and I we would meet at Afton Elementary school.

AG: Okay.

RL: And this is how we met. When Mickey was a youngster he almost looked like he was white.

AG: Really?

RL: He had blonde hair. Yeah I imagine a little boy 8, 9 years old with blonde hair.

AG: Right.

RL: He had light, light skin. He had the greyish eyes and his mother was a teacher and his grandmother was a teacher. Me and a boy named Lateral Alton were crossing guards every morning. But every morning some nigger's called the Broussard they looked like little pigmy's. They would chase Mickey. Mickey wouldn't fight. He would not fight until the day he died he wouldn't fight.

AG: Really?

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RL: So every boy he'd be running and they'd be behind. You know he'd run and every time he run they would be waiting on him. So one day I figure I'd stop that shit. Because I loved fighting.

AG: Right!

RL: We were raised around night clubs. That's what made me so good. I loved it. I loved fighting. When you fight somebody who loves fighting you're in trouble. I loved it, I just loved it man you know. So I put my pole, well my crossing guard Mickey would be running. He lived behind the ... I decided to stop it man. So I snatched one of the Broussard's and it didn't take much to whip his ass. And I walked Mickey home and met his mother who was a beautiful woman. I thought my mother was the prettiest woman in the world until I saw Mickey's momma and we stayed friends until the day he died. We developed from Afton Elementary School together. He and I and Darrell Dotson...

AG: Okay.

RL... went on to Eagle Smith together, went to Wheatley together. Very clear that Mickey had a leadership very early, very early. He never smoked, he never drank. He was raised to be a very mannered you know where I was raised around night clubs I could speak all the languages, "slick" "kept money in my pocket" you know, when I was only 8, 9 years old people were telling folk, "keep your daughter away from him" because I was raised around the female sex merchants and the male sex merchants. I was raised around all of that. Mickey had a quality very early, some like Franco because I shielded Franco from all of that. President of Student Council at Wheatley Mickey was pole-vaulter, played football went both ways.

AG: Defense and offense?

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RL: Defense and offense man. You know wonderful human being. I was always...and to see when I brought Franco and Mickey into politics it was May 1970. Me, Mickey, Franco and Carl Hampton with me.

AG: Carl Hampton?

RL: Yeah Carl when to Wheatley. Carl was from Pleasantville and we always meet that night, all night I would show them how to organize Rainbow coalitions you know because back during the 60s it was very easy, it is very easy to organize around racism. It's very easy to organize...

AG: With the energy and attitudes.

RL: Yeah it's very easy to organize around hate. You know because everybody has an oppressor and it's very easy to generalize about another race being your oppressor. Racism is a satanic politic because we are not born to hate. We are not born a racist, you know, we're are born in an act of love.

AG: That is the liberalism aspect of things. We're not born evil.

RL: Yeah we're not born evil. We're not born to hate no one. God didn't send us here to do that. That's why I don't believe no racists there is no "who's who" in Heaven for a racist. God didn't send them here with that. Now I believe that.

AG: Yeah I do too.

RL: Okay so with Carl and Franco and them and that's how we were raised. Too during segregation you show me a black man (or a woman) that their parents sit them down to hate another human being. Show me. Introduce me to him. He's lying. The black family, the black family (especially the black mother) we're a product of being taught love. See what I'm saying?

We are taught that man as a people. Even during slavery we were taught that you know. So that

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was the thing I would emphasize in all my organizing til' today. Mickey had that quality. Frank had that quality. Carl had that quality. And when we split up that morning me, Franco and Mickey would go to Austin to organize. I would emphasize with Carl because I was field secretary for the Black Panther Party then.

AG: Okay this is your return.

RL: May 1970. My mother used to tell me over and over (my dad would too). "I don't care what you are doing in Chicago. It ain't nothing until you come home."

AG: It ain't nothing until you come home.

RL: My daddy used to tell me. And my mother would say. "Until you go to Jasper..." That rung with me. You know it's real easy to sit up in Chicago and talk about "off the pig." That's easy to do it at Berkley Cal or Colonial University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Chicago campus. That's another thing you come to Houston.

AG: And this was before Fred Hampton's murder?

RL: Yeah Fred had been killed. Fred Hampton of Chicago leadership was killed December 4, 1969 at 1:00 him and Mark Clark.

AG: So with that interference.

RL: That's documented in the murder of Fred Hampton. Now I came home in May 1970 Carl Hampton.

AG: Right Carl Hampton.

RL: From 5th Ward.

AG: From 5th ward Black Panther.

RL: Right. And I emphasized to Carl **1**. Don't name in the Black Panther Party. So he named

it People's Party II. He opened it on Dowling block from Saint John's church across the church
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from Emancipation Park. When Carl opened his office June 1970, July he was killed by the Houston Police Department sniped from top of Saint John's Baptist Church.

AG: Can I read something to you real quick? It's in regards to Carl Hampton. This is a magazine, the Houston History Magazine in my class that were actually taken. They are actually taken in reference to this article. I saw this even before I started doing my research on you and learned about Carl Hampton and it's a young lady (well she's older now but she wrote story about her experience at what is now Emancipation Park and going there as a kid you know when she was a kid at 8 years old and the biggest thing she can remember is eating cotton candy and just having a great time with her family. And she said that, "And then there was a day in 1970 when I forced my father as he drove down Dowling Street to turn his head and actually see riffles sternly and proudly hailed by the Black Panthers in front of their offices located at the corner from the park. At home he insisted that there were no guns. "Those boys were bluffing," he told me. I dared him to drive back to see for himself. He did, taking me with him. As he drove near to the sight I regretted my dare when I saw my father's hands trembling on the steering wheel. My father was born in 1899. As I watched the fear grow in my father's old eyes I saw him turn and look straight and look in the fearless eyes of those armed young men. Shortly after that day July 26, 1970 the Houston Police gunned him down." And that would be...

RL: I was 7th in police brutality in the murder of black people. That was a major emphasis that black people wanted was to stop the oppression of white police. For a second, have you researched, there are hundreds and hundreds of unsolved murders of black people, black men and rapes of black women by policeman. You know, Selma, Alabama the march on Selma was my mother by the name of Selma. That will show you Bill Conner was no phenomenon there was no murders in the south but again I will say man there are hundreds and hundreds of unsolved

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murders and rapes of black women by policeman. It would stagger you man. So that was the emphasis that the black community wanted us to do.

AG: So the story of Carl Hampton that was really close to you?

RL: Yeah very Carl first was a friend. Carl wasn't no stranger.

AG: Right absolutely.

RL: Secondly I sat with him all night he and I and Mickey and Franco strategizing about organizing. My emphasis was to "Don't wolf the police car. Stay away from them. Don't wolf them." You know but he got pulled into that rhetoric and he was dead in July. Franco could have been there because at that time we were organizing and laying the ground work for a free health clinic. My thing was first you organize programs to educate the people, breakfast programs, free health clinics. You know libraries, recreational social programs for seniors and things like that. May, June, July Carl didn't get a chance. He was killed, sniped, killed from on top of Saint John's Baptist Church. He attacked the police. He confronted them and this is a southern city. This wasn't Chicago...

AG: Wasn't Chicago.

RL: ...or Berkley or Oakland.

AG: Down south.

RL: We don't know today who that police sniper was. I've been trying for over 40 years.

Red Malone left the sniper on top of Saint John Baptist Church. Yep. A Houston Police sniper was allowed to go on the top of a church man! And wait for Carl Hampton and a man named Bartee Haile, Carl had organized a Rainbow Coalition. It was People's Party II. M.A.Y.O (which is Mexican American Youth Organization) and the John Brown Party, Bartee Haile.

Bartee was shot. Don't nobody talk about Bartee. Bartee was wounded you know. But the

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emphasis in the black community is always been is the abuse of policeman's and the black community. When Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney these three civil rights people the policeman was involved in that. No policeman to this day has been sentenced for killing a black person to this day!

AG: To this day. It goes back further.

RL: It goes back to the 19th century.

AG: The Houston Memorial and El Campo.

RL: Yeah thrown in the river with handcuffs on. So that was a major issue with us in the Panther Party that's what the people was asking us. You know we knew that in order to stop the oppression of the black people in the 60s because the whole 60s was a civil war. That was a revolution in the 60s. You know Barack Obama is profiting by that revolution.

AG: Exactly.

RL: You know we the Black Panthers, America created us. But we wasn't the first forces to confront violence with violence. No one talks about Robert Williams. See the first organization to arm themselves against white oppression is this man right here. Robert Williams.

AG: Self Defense, Self Respect, Self Determination.

RL: And there's a book that he wrote called, "Negros with Guns."

AG: Mable Williams the singer or is this?

RL: No that's his wife. Alright but there's a book he wrote called, "Negros with Guns." His organization was called The Deacons. They had the first violent confrontation with the Klan. Okay but no one talks about him. No one talks about Robert Williams.

AG: Robert Williams.

RL: Get the book "Negros with Guns."

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AG: "Negros with Guns."

RL: That is his book. By Robert Williams, "Negros with Guns." He was later, he confronted white power structure. His organization was called The Deacons. That was, in the 20th Century that was the first black organization to organize themselves with weapons to defend themselves against white supremacist attacks which was lynching's, bombings, church bombings. So it was this guy. But that's the point I'm saying. The black... we don't have...that's black history. But a lot of folks never hear of Robert Williams. And he went into exile. Many of them... and it was male and females who had armed themselves in The Deacons. They weren't all men. His wife was with him and these guys were Christians. All of them were ex war vets. World War II war vets and they confronted the Klan with guns. They defended the black community with guns. That state indicted him and the country that gave him political asylum. First he went to Cuba...

AG: Okay.

RL: No, no, no... I'm sorry he went to North Korea, then he went to China, Mao Zedong. And he was a ward of the state Mao Zedong took care of him. Then he came back to America where he died when he came back like in the late 70s or 80s but this was in the 50s. Then your second armed group to defend themselves against white violence was the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party was founded in Lyles County, Alabama not Oakland.

AG: Not Oakland.

RL: Stokely Carmichael organized the Black Panther Party. That's a fact man.

AG: Stokely Carmichael I don't remember. I've got something on him on audio.

RL: Stokely Carmichael is the founder and is organized around defending the black community with arms, also a third political party. Franco is living that out. Mickey Leland is

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living that out. You know voter registration and all that. That started in the 60s. You know if Carl Hampton had kept People's Party II and would have lived he might would be mayor of Houston right now.

AG: I see. Because when you were transferred to San Francisco with the Recreations Leader for the Handicapped you moved to Chicago?

RL: Yeah well what happened like I said my strength is Recreation for the Handicapped, wheelchair basketball, all the things now you see now I've been trained in that. Archery for the blind. I can coach baseball for the blind I know how to do that.

AG: Wow!

RL: Swimming, track and field but a partner of mine was recruiting for Vista and he had applications and everything and I just filled it out you know to help him out. I'm quite sold on the job already. I got accepted and I thought about it. With Chicago would giving me a new experience and I went out there.

AG: Bobby Seale.

RL: Bobby Seale is my cousin. Bobby is from Jasper.

AG: Okay.

RL: That's how I got into the Panther Party. See when I went to Chicago as a Vista volunteer which is a domestic peace corps, I lived and worked in what is called Eisen YMCA near north side and this is where all them powerful gangs were.

AG: Young Lords?

RL: Young Lords, Cabrini Green that you see on television, you know, I lived 4 blocks from that constant activity up there. So I lived in the Y and worked in the Y so all the gang leaders and gang members came to the Y so they got to know me, you know. And also what the gang leaders

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would do. Let's say you had a motel with 20 rooms and they wanted to control your place.

Every time you got a vacancy they rent a room. Every time you got a vacancy they rent a room.

Every time you had a vacancy they rent a room. Pretty soon they have all 20.

AG: They take over.

RL: Every month they just pay you their rent. So that's how they did the Y. They lived all over the Y you know and they knew what I was doing and it didn't me... I wasn't scared of them. I came from a background too.

AG: Right, right 5th Ward.

RL: You know and so they gave me carte blanche everyone knew not to mess with Bob Lee. So I lived and worked there and I was with them. I went to courts with them, went to their funerals, went to their homes, whenever gang fights were fixing to break out a lot of time I would go and stop them. You know so very early I had established a relationship with the white gangs, the Puerto Rican gangs. All the white hustlers because usually guys who were released from prisons and juvenile homes they would go to the YMCA and get a room. And they knew they could depend and I lived there with them. In the mornings I'd got up and open up the gym and swimming pool because a lot of them had courts to go to. I would show up in the court rooms.

AG: Subconsciously you keeping them somewhat out of trouble at the same time.

RL: Sure, sure, sure I was keeping them out of trouble.

AG: You was keeping them out of trouble.

RL: Some of them.

AG: Some of them.

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RL: Cha Cha Jimenez of the Young Lords he was leader of 1500 kid boys. Cha Cha's coming in on October 29th. He's flying in from Puerto Rico to visit with me you know this month.

AG: Is he?

RL: But I had an instinct because I was raised in an underworld. I was raised around Lee's Congo Bar and Café. I was raised on the waterfront with 2nd Ward you know.

AG: Would that be the Houston Ship Channel area?

RL: Yeah around the ship channel. Yeah we had 2 clubs.

AG: I was raised like I said you romanticize the God father the Italians. The only difference between the Godfather they were Italians but they had the black attack I was raised around that. Like I would tell Franco my father, my brother, my kid brother people think Franco is my older brother. Franco... I have an older brother named Jesse Lee who died in prison. I have an older sister named Dolly who died because hospital in Jasper was segregated and my parents tried their best to get her to Galveston and she died. Then there's me. My brother Thurman who lives next door, then I have a sister named Audrey who recently died of Leukemia, then I have a brother named El Franco Lee, then I have a baby brother named Billy Lee. Billy teaches school. He was nose guard for Oklahoma.

AG: Oh right OSU or Oklahoma University?

RL: Oklahoma State.

AG: Oh Oklahoma State okay.

RL: And so what I'm saying we were all... I was the one by being old I really was... I started working I didn't play marbles when I was a kid. I wanted to work in the club. I started to work in the club when I was 9 years old on Friday and Saturday nights. My mother would I begged.

Because there you've got music, you got hamburgers, you got barbecue, you got dancing you got

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everything you want to drink is in there you know and I knew marbles wasn't nothing. I wanted to get in that club. So I started working in the kitchen. My mother fired me when I was 18.

Yeah she fired me. First job I was hired first job I was fired from. My mother fired me... my mother fired me man! I had a fight with a customer.

AG: Was it justifiable?

RL: I was feeling... well I'm 18 now.

AG: Right.

RL: And a guy I felt was cursing too loud around my mother I grabbed that nigger and beat his ass. Drug him out to the parking lot because I was much bigger then. I haven't been like this. I'm thinking my mother is going, "My hero" and kiss me. So when I drug him out in the parking lot people pull us off. I grabbed that man and beat that nigger and drug him out and threw that nigger out like they do in the cowboy movies and his name was... I had to apologize to him later. I'm not proud of that either to this day.

AG: Right.

RL: But my mother took me to the back room where the numbers, the policy was all counted. We had a room that's about this size and the door is a little hole a peep hole where you slide it up and that's where people hand the numbers in.

AG: Okay.

RL: The round table like this that's why I'm partial to it with counting numbers and the money. She sat me down. I'm named after my father she said, "Junior everything we have our home our food our clothes our cars everything we have comes from the customer." She said, "Junior now you fired because it ain't going to sound right if Selma Lee and Bobby Lee's son is

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jumping on the customers.” I could never go in my mother’s fried cook club, not on Lyles Avenue again.

AG: Wow.

RL: Not the front door.

AG: Because that was the bread and butter.

RL: Yeah she said, “Everything we have comes from the customer.” She said, “That same person that curses loud.”

AG: That’s the part of that community that you were talking about that funded yourselves because you couldn’t get work from other places. So you had to do things yourself. You was pretty much part of the entrepreneur family.

RL: We was a powerful family. We was a powerful family. We had 5 or 6 people working for us. You had the chef. You had at least 3 people in the kitchen. Then you had waitresses. You had to have some bad waitresses to attract men.

AG: There you go.

RL: You know my father knew to let my mother run the club. Because like he was saying, “Man them niggers ain’t going to come here and see me. They are going to come to see her. And they are going to come and see her.” This was a card my mother had that my dad had passed out. And my mother never smoked or drank and my mother died of lung cancer.

AG: Second hand smoke.

RL: Second hand smoke, lung cancer man at the age of 57.

AG: Wow from being in the club.

RL: Yeah lung cancer. And my father who died two years later because when my mother died I knew my daddy would die. So my dad cocained himself to death. Cognac himself

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because that was his heart. When black men and women marry then it was serious. It was serious.

AG: Regardless of what history tells us.

RL: Yeah it was serious.

AG: Deep down in here it was.

RL: My father and mother eloped. See my mother came from a farming, a ranching background and my father came from a teacher's background. You know like this is my great grandfather on my father's side. That's my great grandfather Hook McElroy ranch. Look at that nigger how he dressed. That's my great grandmother and my great grandfather.

AG: He was sharp.

RL: Yeah. His name was Hook McElroy. You know cattleman. I got a blanket when you go out of this room look on that couch. You will see an Indian blanket. That was Hook's blanket. Named Hook McElroy, look how they dressed man!

AG: I'm waiting on my slow camera sorry. Here we go. They sharp!

RL: Yeah. It is obvious this wasn't the type of man you messed with that.

AG: You can tell.

RL: That was the man that white men knew not to mess. That was a black man that white men knew not to mess with.

AG: Not to mess with.

RL: Yeah.

AG: So with you being well rounded in the underground market I mean underground world in Houston was that your incubator to get with the gangs and starting...

RL: Yeah I already had the background. I knew about dealing dope man.

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AG: Right.

RL: Hey man when I was 12 years old.

AG: Right.

RL: I went to New York with my dad. We were sitting on 100 pounds of weed.

AG: Wow!

RL: We traveled at night then at the day time we'd find places to sleep in the car. So I stayed 3 months in Chicago with my dad, in New York with my dad just he and I. He had an apartment on 112th/145th Street.

AG: Wow.

RL: 145th.

AG: Oh 145th okay.

RL: No 148th Street between Saint Nick and Amsterdam we had a dummy pay at the safe house where the nigger would sit at the table and roll the joints but I sit on 100 pounds of weed man when I was 12. I went back at the age of 15 sitting on 100 pounds of weed with my dad for 3 months.

AG: 3 months...

RL: My dad would hang a key around my neck. My dad real early taught me, started me out the way I did my boys. You treat a person early like a man and he'll act like a man. So that's what my father did.

AG: No passes.

RL: I was working at a night club at 9, 10, 11, 12 years old man until I was 18 when my mama fired me. Now think about that man. When other niggers were playing watching Mickey

Mouse and all of that I was listening to jazz man listening to niggers talking. I was serving

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people food. I'm cleaning toilets. You know I have pints, half pints when liquor stores close at 10:00 I was delivering pints of whiskey bootlegging. I was the last person in the world they thought would have a bag of a dozen bottles of Canadian Club. I knew how to gamble man. You know look at this room. Look at what you are surrounded by. Look at what you are surrounded by.

AG: Yeah.

RL: I'm married to an Arab man. I ain't no ordinary nigger.

AG: Right.

RL: So America ought to be thankful that I didn't go to the underworld. There's a lot of Panthers fathered be here. They had a lot of Panthers from Chicago because I'm here. You know that's what I'm saying the black underworld are about organizing. The foundation of the black community was rooted on what is called the ill of the legit that serve the legit. The legit couldn't go to no banks and borrow no money. You know that's why I'm saying no one has researched the organizers in the black underworld. But I've seen it. I live it. You know it's just like I'll show you something. I want you to read this son.

AG: Okay.

RL: I want you to start. Now this is World War II my father is Sandy Booker, big loan shark he just died recently at 86 years old, World War II. This man writes for the Chronicle. I showed him this. I took him into this. This is just now I want you to read from here to here.

AG: Okay.

RL: And look at that man's face. Read it out loud.

AG: "Now days his Arab comes from a middle aged friend who operates a loosely organized neighborhood medicinal cannabis service. The supplier says he has for years provided marijuana

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to ailing elderly people and to younger folks suffering from AIDS and other maladies. He knows there are laws against what he is doing but said he believes prohibition to marijuana for medicinal use is unjust. He said the laws protect the profits of companies that manufacture name brand pharmaceuticals rather than accommodate citizens who seek benefits from an herb that can be grown most anywhere. The supplier of medicinal cannabis grew up in historical black neighborhood of 5th Ward. He went to schools daring to spend some time away doing the troubled 60s learning about social activism and neighborhood organizing. Rather than follow a law that forbids medicinal cannabis he said he follows the traditions that established it as a useful herb that can bring relief to suffering that can help them make the most of their day and maybe tomorrow.”

RL: I was able to take what is ill legit and just function it now. I won't take a penny from them. I've been able to take your neighborhood dope dealers who do cannabis and organize and organization that has served people with illnesses. That's functioning now man.

AG: That's functioning now?

RL: Right now. Hey man this is from The Houston Chronicle.

AG: Home remedy options.

RL: Now if I was a white man... if I was a white man doing that he would be writing a book on me. But I'm showing it to you I'm a nigger. If Franco was a white man, Main Street would be El Lee Street. Franco is named after a Cuban cigar. The Cuban seaman that would come into our night club the night Franco was born. My dad was high and the Cubans gave him a bunch of cigars and my mama said, "Bubba what are we going to name him?" "Shoot let's name him El Franco." So what I'm saying is my culture comes from the black underworld not the church.

You know in the black community...

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AG: It's amazing.

RL: Yeah keep that, that's me. That's 5th Ward. That man, I took that man and showed it to him, introduced him. He traveled me a whole day.

AG: So this is one of your purposes when you came back to Houston regenerating 5th Ward this is one of those things.

RL: I have always been around cannabis since I was 12 years old I went to New York with 100 pounds...

AG: Right.

RL: That means I'm sniffing it too with my dad smoking.

AG: Yeah.

RL: Okay? You know I smoke it now for my cannabis I have some of the best. I'm part of an organization that proposition in California that legalized it. I was part of the proposition in Oregon to legalize it. I was a part of the proposition in Alaska to legalize it. But I have a massive underworld distribution cannabis. That man seen it he met the people. And I have the doctors that supports it so and I tell people cannabis smoke Cannabis the book I gave you that's the book I give doctors, lawyers and all of them. And God created cannabis like I said in the beginning man and woman came last.

AG: Right.

RL: God laid everything out. Cannabis you cannot destroy cannabis man God make it. But what I'm saying when people call ill legit. I have formed the "so called" cannabis what they call...well you got "pot salesman" "weed" see I don't deal with those niggers. I deal with cats who sell cannabis. I make a distinction. I give them and people pay them. You know. Thomas

Street the doctor's tell me and I tell all the AIDS patients don't take all that medication just keep

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smoking that dope man and so there is that. That's hundreds of thousands of dollars being made in this community. And these guys the guys that are selling it they are paying their rent. They are part of the political movement to legalize it. That's what I have now if I told you that verbally you wouldn't have believed. You wouldn't believe that if I told you that. That's me!

AG: It's right there.

RL: Pull up give it back.

AG: Okay.

RL: Alright here is Mr. Booker World War II Sandy Booker. That's his cane that he left me when he died. This is his ring. When he died his wife gave me. That's an honor. Now here he is right here read right here.

AG: You want me to stop right here?

RL: Just right here just the top paragraph.

AG: Okay.

RL: That's Sandy Booker.

AG: "At 85 years old and in failing health he takes one at a time."

RL: And then go down around in here somewhere.

AG: Okay. "Then he opens the front door to the 5th Ward home where he and his wife of 60 years old have lived together for a long and happy time. He sits on his front porch and visits with any neighbors who care to chat, soak up some sun, watches the birds, squirrels, cats and dogs."

RL: Okay now right here. Right there, now this is one of the Chronicle's best writers. He retired now. He lives in Kansas.

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AG: "It is the same plant his ancestors and people all over the world found helpful and great many ways for many centuries. Its seeds were valued as food as fibers in the stocks were made into sturdy cloth and strong ropes. Its stems and leaves could be turned into medicine."

RL: So when you organize what you do let me just put it this way. I have never ever I've always said that I don't get down on a brother because he selected to sell cannabis to survive. I do get down on someone who sells crack cocaine. The organizations and which is again that falls under the invisible social construct. I'm invisible. If you saw me yesterday, never met me you wouldn't know that I'm Bobby Lee.

AG: That's true.

RL: And it's rare that I let people of strangers in my home. You here because of Joshua. Because I figure whoever Joshua called friend, he my friend.

AG: I appreciate that.

RL: I've known Josh since he was 4, 5 years old. That's the importance of your role as a new generation historian. I'm going to die. But I do want to acknowledge the role that history has played to make me. I'm a part of that history, of reading, studying. I happen to meet some very gallant young men 31 of them. You heard all their names. You know Fred Hampton wasn't the only Panther that got killed.

AG: Right.

RL: 31. 31 man... 31 men and 1 woman named Cindy Smallwood. You know. We killed 17 policemen. And I'm not proud of that...thou shall not kill there's not a day passed that I don't think about these boys. I was field secretary. I take that personally and there's not a day passed that I don't think about the policemen that we killed. There were 16 white boys, policemen and 1 black policeman collectively. We killed 2 in Chicago. Gilhooly and Rappaport.

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November 19, 1969. Jake Winters shout and waited for the others when they killed them the next day Martin December 4th policeman came shot Fred Hampton and Mark Claw. Here is the Panthers that were killed.

AG: I have that.

RL: That's all of them.

AG: Yeah.

RL: That's a lot of human beings man.

AG: It is. It is.

RL: That's a lot of human beings. We wouldn't getting paid every two weeks. We weren't getting no checks. Youngest Panther 14. He's here with me now. Poison he was 14 years old now he has his Ph.D. I brought Poison home in '69. He was a gang leader in Chicago and I knew someone was going to kill him. So I called my mother. I talked with his mother but she... his mother on the South side was happy to see him in the Panther Party as opposed to being a gang member in the South side. He was the youngest guy in my ... I called him Poison because he knew so much about drugs. He was smart. And I met him he was 14 when I met him in '68. He was 15, 16 years old when I brought him home. Mickey was a recruiter for TSU School of Pharmacy and Mickey got him into the school of Pharmacy.

AG: Really?

RL: I always called him Poison. He lives in Houston but he's a strong Hugo Chavez supporter. He's been in Venezuela well organizing a campaign for Hugo Chavez.

AG: Okay.

RL: So you ought to talk with him.

AG: Okay.

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RL: But if you, when you go into a community and I'll close on this man. You want to identify the informal community the underworld community, the hustlers. That's the fighters.

AG: The warriors.

RL: That's the fighters. But that's the world I come from. I've always believed that. Malcolm X that kind of guy.

AG: How did you go about did you start the Houston Texas Trail Blazers Association?

RL: Yeah.

AG: You and Jennifer...

RL: Pat Pray.

AG: Patricia. You have a piece in the Kitty Kong library. Hiram Walker?

RL: Hiram Wilson I'm sorry.

AG: And how did that make you feel being part of the Museum for Fine Arts?

RL: I'm starred. I'm absolutely stunned.

AG: That's... I go to that museum all the time.

RL: I'm absolutely stunned. Pat and I went to high school together. Her father C. F. Smith this is her father. Her father F. Smith organized a Tuskegee training school for the black pilots.

A lot of people don't know Pat's daddy. And Pat and I (again that's Pat's daddy) Tuskegee.

AG: Oh okay Tuskegee.

RL: That's Pat's father and that's the role, that's what I'm saying. Pat and I recognize, we've been knowing each other since we were 8, 9 years old. That's her son right there me hugging him. That's Robert Pray and he works with Franco now. He's a pilot. Yeah Rob and all of them come up together. We were talking about history (Pat and I) and we knew we were quite aware

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that the whites... because you remember the white supremacists don't want you to know your history.

AG: Right.

RL: Okay and Pat and I started talking about black people in the state of Texas that were just people weren't acknowledging like her father. That's ... Smith man. So we decided just to research people here in Texas and Pat gave it the name Texas Trail Blazers. Every weekend we was on the highway going to graveyards, churches visiting people, was developing to that. And Pat, we still have people we haven't seen. We never dreamed that it would end up in all your major libraries and all of that. We met relatives, descendants of General Sam Houston.

AG: Descendants Sam Houston?

RL: Yeah descendants. Same way with me I met with the Adams family that used to own my family.

AG: Okay.

RL: You know so when we discovered Hiram Wilson the pottery's now thousands of dollars but when he was doing it of course slave masters had certain slaves that did things. You know like that pottery right there. That's the kind of stuff Hiram Wilson would do.

AG: Okay.

RL: [to his wife] We're getting ready to go baby.

RL: So we got that notice man I was moved like I told Pat it's not just Hiram Wilson that's going to be installed in that place. You and I have been. We have been there.

AG: Absolutely.

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RL: So I was very impressed with that and moved with that man. But my secret and I tell Franco a lot. You know Franco saying... put it this way my brother there's not a day that passes that my brother and I don't talk.

AG: You got him involved in politics.

RL: Yeah. He's my baby brother. I told you May 1970 Franco must have been 18 years old. I'm the oldest. I'll be 70 years old December 16th man 70!

AG: That's blessed.

RL: Frank was the baby brother and all of the sudden because he's a powerful politician people have a tendency to think he is my oldest brother. I won't say anything. But I've always taught Franco I would take Franco on dates when I was in high school man. I was the only nigger go on a date I've got my 8, 9 year old brother with me. Why I'm going to buy a chick, hamburger and not buy my little brother one.

AG: That's real.

RL: Where in the world did my little brother can't go with me? Where? If Franco can't go can't nobody go. Wherever I went in America man when I was working at the Recreation Center for the Handicapped in San Francisco I sent for Franco. If he wanted to go to work with me as a little boy and volunteered. When I was in Philadelphia I sent for Franco. I saved my money I sent for him in the summer time. When I was in Newark, New Jersey working at the Occupational Summer my strength is working with handicapped people that's my strength. I'm talking about teaching that's my strength. I knew how to teach archery to the blind man.

AG: That's amazing.

RL: Just get the target, put the sound on it. Let them be about a yard from it where you and I when we pull the bow we point it but the blind person can see it...

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AG: With his ear.

RL: You pull it you get them real close to it and then you turn them loose. They give a sound and you keep pulling them back. You make the bow stronger and you hear that sound and you get 10 yards, 20 yards. That's my strength.

AG: You listening.

RL: Yeah see that's what we did. Baseball, home base, first base, second base, third base it's a path, gravel. He followed with his feet to the base. You got a person with a voice calling it. He's got a bat that's kind of large. You want him to hit the ball. So whose throwing the ball you want him to hit it and his feel was sound. Bell so the feelers are blind. They are running to that sound. It's the funnest thing in the world everybody bumping into each other. He's running down that path as a gravel lane and he gets to that base and he turns and his feet takes him to the 2nd base and 3rd base and bring him home. Wheelchair basketball which seems so easy today. Those wheelchairs sitting there now that didn't exist then. I was fortunate enough to be working with a woman named Janet Pomeroy (P-O-M-E-R-O-Y) she wrote a book called, "Recreation for the handicapped" she is the pioneer of what the sports is today for handicapped people.

AG: Janet Pomeroy?

RL: Janet Pomeroy. Recreation center for the disabled they use it today. It's in San Francisco now. She wrote a book called, "Recreation For the Handicapped." It is the bible and I happen to, she happened to be my boss. When I went to San Francisco I didn't want to work.

AG: Right.

RL: I was doing good man! I went to visit my relatives and there in Oakland, I was looking over San Francisco they had some partners over there. They let me borrow a Cadillac I drove over there and I told them, we'll close on this one. I will give you some of my advice. Here's

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some money to buy some wine. Here's some money to buy some cheese and crackers, here's some money to buy some whiskey. Here's some money to buy some weed, buy some broads over here.

AG: Street merchant.

RL: I needed somebody to work. I looking for one woman. I knew how to do that. So when everybody was coming I said real quietly I didn't want any high yellow broad. I didn't want no broad living with their mama and daddy I was looking for a broad that worked and usually the one that worked was sitting at the corner where everybody passed over her. And I went slid up beside her, talked to her. She owned a beauty parlor but she wasn't attractive by their standards.

AG: By their standards.

RL: I learned real early you fall in love with a woman's brain. And you want a woman to fall in love with your brain. So we hit it off well because we talked on the brain.

AG: Was this the mother of your first child?

RL: Hu?

AG: Was this the mother of your first child?

RL: No, no, no.

AG: Okay.

RL: The mother of my first child was in the Panther Party.

AG: Okay.

RL: The tall boy I just showed you.

AG: Because I read the piece "Going back to my past."

RL: Yeah.

AG: That changed my mind. The piece "Going back to my past" that you wrote.

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RL: Yeah, yeah.

AG: I read that. I thought that was real.

RL: Yeah. So she and I got along real well. Man on weekends I spent weekends with her.

We'd go see Jazz, we'd go to the library, talk books, poetry, black history and all that. She wasn't attractive to other people's standards. She had a beautician parlor, she had business she did people's hair but she wasn't attractive by other people's standards man but she was beautiful to me.

AG: Beautiful to me.

RL: Smart man, smart man. So one Saturday morning I'm lying up in bed them niggers they all in one house 90 of them. I've got my little pad on the weekends. I spent the weekend with her. I hadn't planned to stay there that long. But I knew where ever I went if I wanted to have fun I wanted to find a woman. See I would wait for the woman that everybody would run over. Because a lot of the cats back then were run for the body of a human being in lieu of respect because see the most powerful person on the planet earth is a woman. God works his miracles through women, though woman. Women womb and then man. Do you understand what I'm telling you son?

AG: Yes sir.

RL: God works all miracles through woman. I've never seen a fortunate man that brutalized a woman. Something bad happened to them later. You can go to Psalms 22:9-10 it talks about relationships between God and women. So everything we know man comes from women. Our mothers! If I were to have it was a force between my father and my mother. My father was pulling me to the ill legit world.

AG: Okay.

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RL: And my mother was pulling me to the social services where I am now. My father was a bad nigger. I'm sure my father may have killed men and never got caught for it. I've killed men leaving the Panther Party. When people stole money from us. We couldn't put... we were a multimillion dollar organization. Nigger stole money from us man. I had to hunt him down and my name is Robert E. Lee Jr. III. Robert E. Lee was a warrior. Whether you agreed with him or not.

AG: Right. It's been a much a pleasure. Beyond a pleasure.

RL: I'm going to show you something before we go. [to woman: Get ready Fiza] Do you need to use this?

AG: Well I wouldn't mind reading it.

RL: Take it.

AG: If you don't mind I'll give it back to Josh.

RL: It's okay you are with Joshua.

AG: I appreciate it.

RL: I'm going to show you something. You ever heard of Achilles?

AG: Achilles?

RL: Achilles the folks story. What do you know about it?

AG: Well no I haven't heard about it.

Man: You talking about the Greek?

RL: He was a Greek he was a warrior that all you had the only place you could kill him...

Man: Was his Achilles.

RL: ...was his Achilles to hit him in the back of his heel. That's why they call it the Achilles

heel. So read up on Achille he was a Greek warrior. The only way you could kill Achille.

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AG: He was the son of a god right?

RL: You had to hit him exactly behind his heel. And there's a lot of people that call it the mark of Achilie. Doctors you know the Achilles heel. He was born with it. Now my name is Robert E. Lee Jr, III.

AG: Yes sir.

RL: You want to talk about coincidence? Born with the Achille heel.

AG: Wow.

Man: With a mark on it.

AG: Wow.

RL: Do you have something that can tell you who Achille is?

AG: Yes.

RL: Can you on your? Pull it up. Now look at it again son.

AG: The mark of the Achille.

RL: That is the mark of the Achille.

Man: Achilles was the son of a God and a mortal woman right?

AG: How long before you discovered was it something you always knew? When you started reading?

RL: My relatives when you were born when I was they would look over your whole body. They didn't know the word Achille. Doctors would later tell us, the doctor would tell me later when I was given a physical check up. The doctor saw it. I hadn't heard of the word Achille until the doctor said, "You've got the Achille mark." Then later I started reading about it who Achille was. See to the old heads everything is constellations so they looked at it from the full

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moon's point of view that I was born with a cosmic sign. Because when you are born back in the old days they looked over your whole body for scars.

AG: It's says that later legends state that Achilles was invulnerable in all his body except for his heel as he died because of the small wound on his heel that term Achilles heel has come to mean one's point of weakness.

RL: I'm born with it.

AG: Warrior.

RL: I'm born with and there was a positive side of being named Robert E. Lee. I remember one night man I had a pocket full of cannabis in one pocket and another pocket filled with cocaine. Driving at night you know how I drive right over here in Houston. Houston Policeman got behind me, got behind me. Stopped me and I know I'm in trouble now.

AG: Yeah.

RL: "Give me your driver's license boy." I handed him my driver's license. He say, "God damn boy this is a good southern name Robert E. Lee, Jr."

AG: That's what he said?

RL: "God damn this is a damn good southern name! Slow this car down boy!" and let me go.

AG: And let you go!

RL: Anytime I applied for a job during segregation I got the job because of my name.

Where's Robert E. Lee? It was like that morning when I got my job at the recreation center for the handicap, my partner was going over to the Urban League to get a job. He stopped by the apartment where I was staying with this lady. I didn't want her to think that, "No I didn't want to work." So he said, "I'm going by Urban League to get a job come on and go." I didn't want

her to know you know that I didn't want to work. So I said, "Yeah alright man." And got up

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and dressed and went to Urban League. I filled out an application and all my stuff was organized sports. Otherwise I'd have to be from Southern and all of that. Track, swimming. I'm just doing it. Ain't nobody going to give me no job. Then I put down ranches I used to work on ranches. I've got a strong ranch background, cattleman stuff...

AG: Okay.

RL: So we walking out cat say "Hey man where's Robert Lee?" I turn around, "Yeah." He said, "Man they've got a job location open now recreation center for the handicap." Now again, so my partner he applied for a middle job in San Francisco so again I don't want him to think I don't work. He said, "Man I'll take you over there." "Yeah come on man (god dang)" So we drive over to the Recreation Center for the Handicap, Janet Pomeroy now she's from San Antonio her husband is a CEO at that time for Pan Am Airlines.

AG: Okay.

RL: She's a good friend of John Kennedy's sister. You know the Kennedy's were really approved for sports for disabled. So we interviewed. She found out I'm from Houston and Robert E. Lee again (that name Robert E. Lee) it works negative or positive. So that's a positive... no it's a Saturday morning. They said, "Well we'll get in touch with you." "Yeah right." I got Southern University Track... all that you know all my sports. I'm doing it as a joke. Baseball, marbles...

AG: Yeah.

RL: ... on the application. So our street Olympics grew out of recreation. But anyway, I get back to the house, got my phone number. The lady said, "Hey baby this woman named Janet Pomeroy asked can you be to work Monday morning?" I didn't want to work.

AG: Monday morning?

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RL: Yeah Monday morning.

AG: It's happening quicker than you think.

RL: Yeah when I got there man I went and I never saw that many handicapped children in one time in all my life. See usually you see one kid in a wheelchair or one blind person sitting in the corner but not 100. She had volunteers from San Francisco State. She was rich. We was in the ... pool building that she had rented. It was awesome big old long building with the longest swimming pool in the world was there, salt water came in from the Pacific Ocean. She was across the street from the Pacific Ocean. That's how rich she was. But I never seen those many kids in my life.

AG: And that was your motivation thus far?

RL: Changed my whole life. So what I did, wheelchair kids Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. I wanted them to come in. I had this thing organized. It will come out. It will come out. Tuesdays and Thursdays kids who walked I wanted them to come in. So the bus driver would get and the parents were bringing them in. And we had basketball goals but the basketball goals were brought low. You always wanted them to get it up there. So wheelchair... now they have special wheelchairs. Swimming we took the kids to a special swim pool that the water was treated for them. Wheelchair track, camping, day camping, basketball, arts and crafts, golf, archery, you know.

Man: So that was the birth of the Special Olympics right?

RL: Yeah that's where the development of the Special Olympics. The book "Recreation for Handicap" ... But and that started my career and that's when I started bringing Franco in. I wanted to save my brother. I didn't want my brother, my mother told me, "Junior I want you to

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raise Franco.” My mother asked me that. He must have been about 4 days old. My mother knew I could do it.

AG: His son, Franco, Jr. just had an exhibit in the HCC?

RL: Fine guy man.

AG: I saw it in the Cougar magazine.

RL: Fine young man.

AG: Confrontational art like yourself.

RL: Yeah he lives right across the street from his dad.

AG: Okay.

RL: See we fixing to move. We bought a bigger house and that there he is there. That's Franco Jr. there. Now we were going out churches in Jasper. See before Junior birds, James Bird, Jr. was killed...

AG: Your cousin?

RL: Yeah, Klansman were burning black churches and so we were part of that cavalry to protect our churches. That's in Jasper. And that's my piece. And Jasper I'm going to show you that and then I'm going to go. [to his wife: Fiza get ready] This is my piece. See these things in here... see the Panther Party everybody had to have the same weapon 12 gauge or 6 gauge whatever your ... was. See that's what you bought, you know. Everybody had the same weapon. We trained and practiced the cavalry the fighting machine. We were the fighting machine. But everyone couldn't do that man. Anyone that came in the Panther Party they were very clear. You had 3 choices, you go to prison, you can go in exile or you are going to die.

AG: Clear choices?

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RL: That's the only choice you had. What else? Challenge the nuclear power of the world to a dual. We never thought at any time we were going to beat them. We knew that. But we wanted the ballot but in order to get to ballot we had to have the bullet. Our bullets lead to our ballots so now we are in the civil war of mouths a non violent civil war. It was some fine brave human beings. Bobby Rush is now a U.S. Congressman. This is a war room. A lot of meetings have been in here. And if you can see when...

End of Transcript.

