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Walter Gordon

ATHLETE, OFFICER IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION,
GOVERNOR OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Volume I

Regional Oral History Office
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Walter Gordon
Governor, The Virgin Islands, 1955-1958

Regional Oral History Office
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University of California
Berkeley, California

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GOVERNOR OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Volume I

With an Introduction by
John D. Holstrom

Interviews with:

Frances Albrier
Stanley N. Barnes
William F. Dean
Lewis Drucker
Clinton P. Duffy
Lee G. Eisan
George M. Johnson
Robert S. Johnson
Harry L. Kingman
Ervis W. Lester
George McDaniel
John David Merwin

Allen Moore
Warren Olney III
Agnes Robb
W. Byron Rumford, Sr.
Minnie Ruth
Charles Schottland
Herman F. Selvin
Sol Silverman
Raymond C. Staats, Jr.
Alvin C. Sweetwyne
Meldrim Thomson
William A. Wiltberger

Interviews Conducted by
Anne Brower, Edward Farris, Amelia Fry,
Rosemary Levenson, and Caryn Prince
in 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979

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TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Walter Gordon, Volume I

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION by John D. Holstrom	iv
I. ON THE BERKELEY CAMPUS: FOOTBALL STAR, SCOUT, AND COACH	
Stanley N. Barnes	1
Herman F. Selvin	18
Lee G. Eisan	36
Robert S. Johnson	60
II. THE CROWDED YEARS: POLICEMAN, LAWYER, CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER, AND COACH	
William F. Dean	85
William Alden Wiltberger	101
Gordon H. White (Excerpt from letter)	117
George M. Johnson	118
Alvin Sweetwyne	123
Harry F. Kingman	149
Frances Albrier	155
W. Byron Rumford, Sr.	170
III. STATE SERVICE: MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN, CALIFORNIA YOUTH AUTHORITY	
Ervis W. Lester	193
Lewis Drucker	200
Clinton T. Duffy	225
Allen Moore	236
Lee Edson (Excerpt from <u>Saturday Evening Post</u> article)	268
George McDaniel	269
IV. FEDERAL SERVICE: GOVERNOR AND DISTRICT JUDGE, VIRGIN ISLANDS	
Meldrim Thomson	283
John D. Merwin	299
Charles I. Schottland	310
V. OVERVIEW	
Agnes Robb	321
Warren Olney	325
Sol Silverman	335
Minnie Ruth	353
Redmond C. Staats, Jr.	372
INDEX	389

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PREFACE

Because of his role in the athletic history of the University of California, his historic importance as a pioneer in achievement for his race, his leadership in the reform of correctional philosophy and practice in California, and his distinguished service as governor of the Virgin Islands and as federal judge there, Walter Gordon was frequently proposed for an oral history. The first opportunity to carry out this proposal came with the Earl Warren Project since much of Walter Gordon's career fitted within its guidelines.

The Earl Warren Project was a five-year project of the Regional Oral History Office to record interviews with men and women prominent in politics, governmental administration, and criminal justice during the Warren Era in California. Focusing on the years 1925-1953, the interviews were designed not only to document the life of Chief Justice Warren, but also to obtain new information on social and political change in the state. Walter Gordon, appointed in 1944 by Governor Warren to the newly formed California Adult Authority, was interviewed on three occasions in 1971 by Amelia R. Fry as part of this Project, funding coming from a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Walter Gordon's final illness overtook him before his own interview with Mrs. Fry could be completed, and later it was decided to interview his relatives, key friends, and colleagues in order to produce a full-scale oral history.

Funding was no longer available from the Earl Warren Project and Robert S. Johnson volunteered to undertake fund-raising for this second phase of the project. Mr. Johnson's wide acquaintance among Berkeley civic groups and University of California athletes, in addition to his energy and devotion, made him invaluable. He also contributed generously to other aspects of this memoir: in the form of his own interview, in his suggestions for possible interviewees, in proofreading much of the final manuscript, and in his thoughtful advice and counsel. The project owes him a very considerable debt.

For three decades Walter Gordon was associated with football at the University of California and a large part of the funding for this project came from former football players of that period, who responded generously to letters from their team captains. Contributions were also received from the Berkeley Breakfast Club, of which Walter Gordon was a member, and from other individuals.*

Twenty-four friends and colleagues of Walter Gordon were interviewed in the course of this project in an attempt to achieve a well-rounded portrait of a significant man through the recollections of people who had known him at various periods in his life. Suggestions for who these people might be came

*A list of donors to the Walter Gordon project has been placed at the front of this volume. The project is still open, and any additional donor names will appear in Volume II.

to the Regional Oral History Office from many sources and the final names were arrived at after innumerable phone calls and much correspondence.

Interviews were held from March 1976 to November 1977 in Berkeley, San Francisco, Oakland, Walnut Creek, and Los Angeles. The interviews varied in length from three-quarters of an hour to four or five hours, but the taping time is not necessarily reflected in the page length of the interview transcript. Agnes Robb, whose interview was brief to begin with, further abbreviated her remarks in her written version. Allen Moore's interview, similarly, does not appear in its entirety; on rereading he and I felt that some of it strayed too far from the subject of Walter Gordon. Herman Selvin's interview was dual-purpose; it served not only to record his recollections of Walter Gordon, but also as the first part of an interview of Mr. Selvin himself, which was completed in later tapings and presented in June of 1979. In general, the lawyers proved to be capable of the greatest number of pages per interview hour; they organized their thoughts skillfully and spoke usually in complete sentences.

References to Walter Gordon will be found in other oral histories in the Regional Oral History Office, including those of Frances Albrier, C. L. Dellums, Clinton W. Evans, Brutus Hamilton, Winifred Heard, John Holstrom (August Vollmer volume), Karl Holton (Earl Warren and the Youth Authority volume), Harry Kingman, Bernice May, Richard McGee, Julia Morgan Volume I, Tarea Hall Pittman, Agnes Robb, William Byron Rumford, Sr., Kenyon F. Scudder (Earl Warren and the Youth Authority volume), Orland W. Wilson (August Vollmer volume).

Two minor difficulties developed in the course of preparing this oral history, one interpretive, the second organizational. First, Walter Gordon has assumed larger-than-life proportions in the memories of his friends--in the literal sense; descriptions of him as a young man paint him as a giant, although his actual height was just six feet. As General William Dean put it, "Maybe I put more stature in him because of the man he was." This phenomenon accounts, perhaps, for his being awarded three Big Cs in the memory of one of his contemporaries when in fact he received only one. The second complexity, that of organization, stemmed from the durability of Walter Gordon's friendships; they lasted for a lifetime. The young Stan Barnes whom Gordon coached back onto the Wonder Team, many years later, as assistant attorney general of the United States, helped to host the party in Washington, D.C., that inaugurated his term as governor of the Virgin Islands, and Bill Dean, the newly recruited policeman with whom he shared the midnight-to-eight shift in August Vollmer's Berkeley Police Department, as a much-decorated two-star general paid his final respects to Walter Gordon as one of his honorary pall-bearers. This continuity of friendship made it necessary to divide the oral history somewhat arbitrarily and the reader will find much that overlaps and resists chronology.

A further division of the history was made, with interviews by friends as Volume I, and the unfinished Walter Gordon interview and those by family members as Volume II. This sequence came about simply because the volumes were completed in that order. At this writing, Volume II is still in process.

In addition to documenting Walter Gordon's achievements in the fields of athletics, law enforcement and administration, civil rights, and city, state,

and federal service, this memoir presents a man of courage, good humor, and integrity--the attributes of a man who values himself and therefore others; in the words of his wife, of a man who was born free.

Anne Hus Brower
Interviewer-Editor

14 November 1979
Regional Oral History Office
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University of California at Berkeley

INTRODUCTION

It seems laudable to me that The Bancroft Library is issuing a memorial volume honoring Walter Gordon, a truly exceptional alumnus of the University, a superb athlete, and an outstanding citizen in the service of his community, his state, and the nation.

Walt was born in Atlanta in 1894, and when he was ten years old his family moved to Riverside, California, where he was graduated from high school. He entered the University here in 1914 and during his undergraduate years his scholarship was considerably above average. He was active in campus affairs. He was an intercollegiate wrestler and boxer. He played on Andy Smith's early teams, playing every position except center. In 1918 Walter Camp selected him as All-American, California's first, and he received his degree in that same year.

The decade 1919 to 1929 were almost unbelievably busy years in this man's life. Andy Smith chose him to be an assistant football coach, a position that he held for twenty-four years under four different coaches, including Smith. August Vollmer invited him to become a policeman in the Police Department in Berkeley, where he served for ten years in what was a full-time job. In addition to that he enrolled in Boalt School of Law at the University at Berkeley in 1923. So concurrently he was involved in a number of projects, but that isn't all.

In 1920 he was married to Elizabeth Fisher, who was and is an intelligent, educated, attractive lady. The Gordons had two sons and a daughter in the 1920s. (Today they are grandparents four times over. They are great-grandparents, also four times over.)

It was a full decade for Walter Gordon. He received his A.B. in 1918 and had done all of those things since and had graduated from law school and had passed the California bar.

In 1930 he began a new career. He entered the practice of law in Berkeley and continued in private practice until 1943. During this time or later he found time to do a number of things. He continued his work coaching. He was president of the Alameda County Chapter of the NAACP for fourteen years. He was a member of the executive board of the University YMCA. For six years he was a member of the Oakland YMCA board. He was vice-president of the Lawyers' Guild of San Francisco and a member of the Commonwealth Club of California.

In 1943 Governor Warren selected him as a member of the California Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, on which he served until the advent of the new Adult Authority in 1945. Walter Gordon became chairman of the Authority and served in that capacity for nearly ten years.



John D. Holstrom
Chief of Police, 1944-60
In Chief's Office, circa 1950

Then, in 1955, President Eisenhower appointed him Governor of the Virgin Islands, a post he held for three years. In 1958 he was named the U.S. District Judge for the Virgin Islands, and he served on that court until his retirement in 1969.

Over the years Walter Gordon received many honors. In 1949 he was awarded his first honorary degree, an LL.D. from McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, the law school of the University of the Pacific. In 1955 he received the Benjamin Ide Wheeler Award as Berkeley's most useful citizen, and at the Charter Day banquet in 1956 it was announced that he had been selected U.C. Alumnus of the Year for 1955. In 1958 the University of California granted him an LL.D., and in 1964 he received the Boalt Hall citation for distinguished service to his profession. In 1975 Walter Gordon was elected to the National Football Foundation's College Football Hall of Fame, an honor that was celebrated at the Big C Banquet and at the preliminaries of the California-Oregon State game that year.

Walter Gordon returned to his beloved Berkeley from the Virgin Islands in 1969. He chose to live in West Berkeley and resisted all efforts on the part of many of his friends who encouraged him to live some place else. It was home to Walt.

After he came home he was active in the affairs of the community and of the University. He attended the weekly meetings and participated in the activities of the Rotary Club of Berkeley, of which he had been made an honorary member in 1957. In 1970 he was named to the Berkeley Housing Authority and the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency and he served on those bodies with vigor and distinction. He was also named to the Alameda County Grand Jury, but in 1974 he suffered a stroke that prevented his serving and cut short his other community services.

I recall a pleasant visit with Walter Gordon in the fall of 1975. His handshake was firm. He had a smile on his face. "My wife," he said--and he volunteered this--"stood by my side for fifty-five years. I don't know what I would have done without her." No tribute to Walter Gordon would be complete without acknowledgement of the loving support given him by Elizabeth Gordon.

Walter Gordon was a respected professional colleague. Our associations were most frequent in the years he served on the Parole Board and Adult Authority, where his activities in the field of corrections complemented my police administrative and academic interests in the administration of justice.

During those years and after his retirement, my wife Marian and I enjoyed a close personal friendship with Walt and Betty Gordon. Our valued relationships with the Gordons have truly enriched our lives.

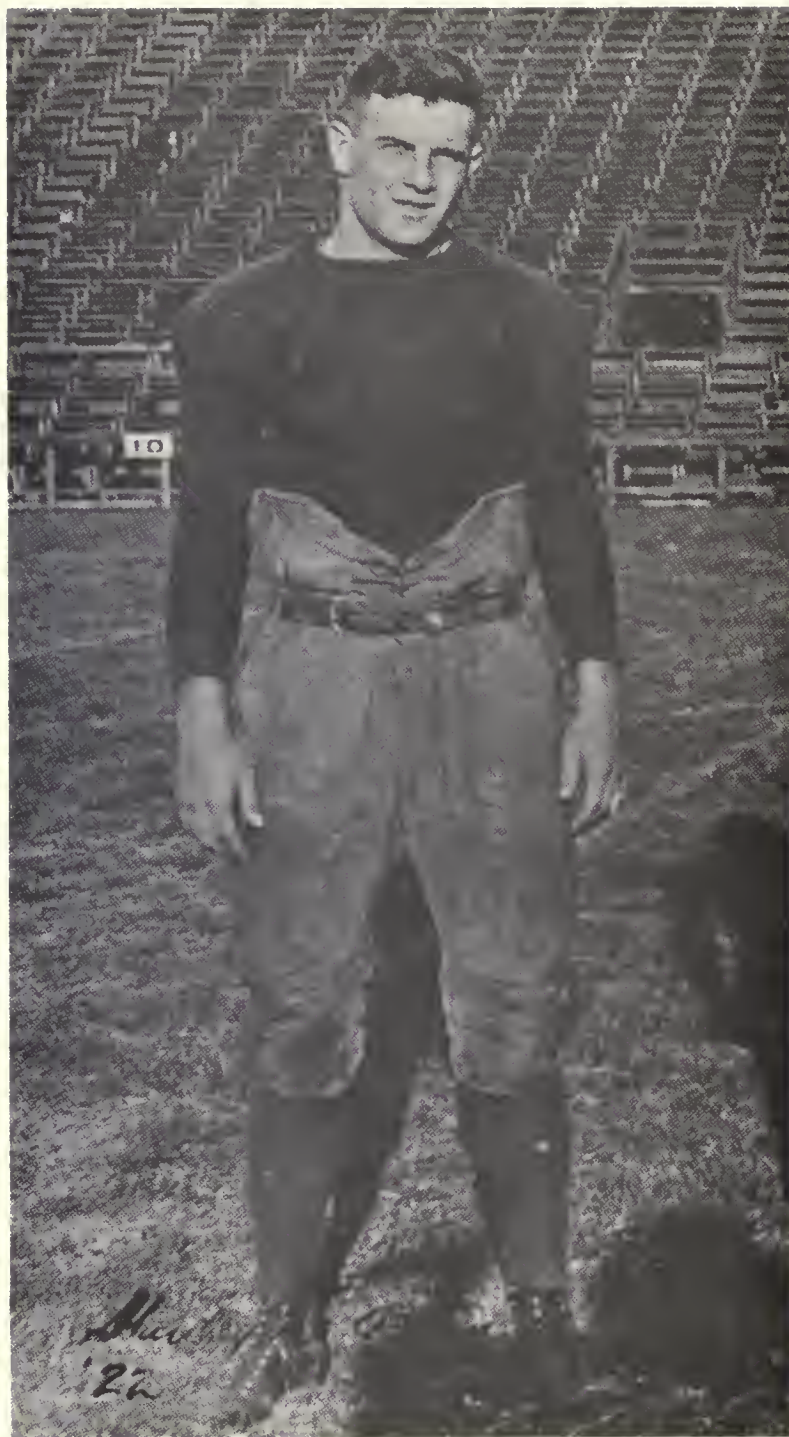
John D. Holstrom

June, 1978
Moraga, California

I. ON THE BERKELEY CAMPUS: FOOTBALL STAR, SCOUT, AND COACH

Interviews with:

Stanley N. Barnes
Herman F. Selvin
Lee G. Eisan
Robert S. Johnson



STANLEY BARNES—

Member of the National Football Hall of Fame; tackle on the 1920 Wonder Team; member of the 1921 and 1922 Rose Bowl teams; and a four-letter winner—football; currently Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Interview with Stanley N. Barnes

Interview History

U.C. Football, 1918	1
Problems Relating to Race	2
Walter Gordon Named All-American	3
Response of Walter Gordon's Old Friends to Project	4
Walter Gordon as Coach	5
The Wonder Team and Walter Gordon	7
Football Notables	8
Southern California's Contributions to U.C. Teams	9
San Diego High School	10
Coaching at U.C.	12
Integration of the Los Angeles Bar Association	13
Walter Gordon as Governor of the Virgin Islands	14
Walter Gordon Appointed to U.S. District Court, Virgin Islands	16
Walter Gordon's Last Years	17

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Judge Stanley N. Barnes was a freshman at the University of California Berkeley in 1918, Walter Gordon's senior year at the university, and both men played on the varsity football team. In Stanley Barnes's remaining undergraduate years their relationship was that of player and coach, and their association continued through Barnes's years in law school (Boalt Hall), when he and Walter Gordon were assistants to Coach Andy Smith.

The friendship begun on Old Cal Field endured. During the Eisenhower administration when Stanley Barnes was in Washington as assistant attorney general of the United States, he was consulted on Walter Gordon's appointment as governor of the Virgin Islands, and he also had a role in Gordon's appointment to the United States District Court in the Virgin Islands.

A single interview was held on June 9, 1976 in Judge Barnes's chambers in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and Post Office Building in San Francisco. These offices, which were elaborately designed in 1898, have been furnished with handsome pieces of the period salvaged nationwide from doomed old courthouses. The building, which has been described as a "monument to the Belle Epoque," constitutes an elegant anachronism on Seventh and Mission Streets.

The quickness of Stanley Barnes's mind is undiminished fifty-odd years after he used it to California's advantage on the varsity team. His eyes are keen, his memory clear, and his delivery crisp. In his recollections, the warmth of his feeling for Walter Gordon is balanced by the objectivity of a judicial intellect.

The transcription received very little editing from Judge Barnes. He said what he wanted to say when he was taped, and his few changes in the manuscript consisted of additions of names and statistical details.

Anne Brower

July 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: June 9, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH JUDGE STANLEY M. BARNES

UC Football, 1918

Brower: Could you tell me about your first meeting with Walter Gordon?

Barnes: Yes. In 1918 World War I was on, and I joined the navy and was sent to the University of California to participate in the naval training program. At that time I had the good fortune to have as my professor in naval history a person who is sainted in University of California history, Professor Henry Morse Stephens.

As part of the naval training unit I went out for football. Freshmen were allowed to play on the varsity, because of the war. Several of my friends had come up the year before from San Diego and were playing, Olin Cortis ("Cort") Majors and A.B. ("Pesky") Sprott, and others joined them. Cort Majors was our great guard and tackle, a marvelous leader, captain of the great 1920 Wonder Team.

So I went out for football, and Walter was in the army ROTC and he went out for football. He was then a senior, weighed 195 pounds, was fast--a running guard--and the Pacific Coast heavyweight collegiate boxing champion.

That's where I first met him, on Old Cal Field, when Andy Smith organized the 1918 team. That was Walter's last year as an undergraduate and his third year on the football team, and that was my first year as an undergraduate and my first year on the football team. Walter and I played the same position, but slightly different in that he was center on defense and guard on offense, and I was center on offense and guard on defense. Because we were playing the same position we became quite good friends, he as an experienced veteran and I as a very green freshman.

*See Stanley N. Barnes, "Experiences in Grass Roots Organization," in Earl Warren's Campaigns, Volume I, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

Brower: You hadn't known him by reputation before?

Barnes: No. I had known that there was a Gordon playing and that he was a great player, but I didn't know that he was black.

Brower: May I ask, was that your first contact in that sort of semisocial-situation with a black person?

Barnes: I don't know exactly what you mean by a "semisocial situation"--but I think I can answer by saying that when I was in grammar school there was a negro boy, whose name I've forgotten. In the eighth grade we had "double seats" and there was some disposition of the students not to sit with him, so he and I sat together. That's the only thing that I can recall. (That and the fact that he didn't have much money so he bought peanuts to eat that hadn't been roasted. That's one of the few little trivia that you remember about people.) I never knew what happened to him but he didn't go to San Diego High School with a good many of us, from grammar school. There were one or two negroes that participated in athletics, particularly in track, but none in football.

Problems Relating to Race

Brower: When you met Walter Gordon was he fully established as a member of the team? Initially there was a training-table difficulty, where apparently he wasn't accepted with the rest of the team, but I expect that by that time that problem was solved.

Barnes: Yes. Andy Smith had a good deal of confidence and faith in Walter and pride in his performance. (Andy Smith was the coach, an All-American full-back at Pennsylvania in 1904.)

I never heard of this training-table incident, but one incident that I heard Andy tell about--this was before I was there, but Andy Smith told us about it. I think it was the year 1916, toward the end of the year, Walter by his ability had won a place on the team and then the question came, should he go on a trip up to Seattle to play Washington? Andy had never coached a negro who was playing on the first string before, and he put it up to a vote of the members of that team. They unanimously voted that Walter had made the team by his ability and should go, that he would go with them. That was therefore arranged. When the team got up to Seattle, they left the train--they all went by train in those days--and Walter disappeared and wasn't seen again until just before the game started. He had gone, I assume, to a negro area of town to take his lodgings for the night and then showed up as though nothing had happened, in readiness for the game.

Barnes: Washington won both games, (16 to 3, and 14 to 7). The year before was the year that California had made quite a comeback, being defeated 72 to 0 in Berkeley and then going north a week later and playing a close 13 to 6 game in a loss to Washington. The Washington-Cal game was the Big Game then--Stanford was playing Rugby.

Brower: Was this the way he handled incidents of this sort? By an evasion of an encounter, of a confrontation?

Barnes: Yes, I think that he did that and I think he did it consciously and because he thought that that was the way to handle it.

I've been thinking about some of the questions you asked in our correspondence, and one of the things that I first remember about Walt was that when we passed each other on the campus, during all the time that I knew him so well, if I was walking with fellows, why there was never any lack of recognition on Walter's part, or greetings, but if I was walking with a young lady he would never say, "Hello Stan" or "Hi," or anything like that, unless I said it first. I think that was one of the things that, rightly or wrongly, he did consciously, because it happened so often. So of course I always made a point of yelling at him as soon as I saw him.

Walter Gordon Named All-American

Brower: His relationship with Andy Smith was a very good one?

Barnes: A very good one. Andy admired him and realized his potentialities. When he made third All-American in 1918, he was not the first colored man on the Coast, as I understand it--there was another one up in either Oregon or Washington, who was mentioned for a second or third All-American team--but he was the first one in the history of the University of California, most certainly.

Brower: I had heard that he was the first in the West and that actually the first two blacks were mentioned that same year; one was Paul Robeson at Princeton, who was on the first All-American and Walter Gordon, from the University of California.

Barnes: I think I can check that for you and let you know because I have the names in Mencke's Sports Encyclopedia that indicated there were two linemen in the northern part of the West Coast who preceded Walter, and one may have been black.

I remember very well when Walter made it, because when Walter Camp's article came out in Collier's in 1918, Walt, as we all know,

Barnes: was designated as third All-American, and the last category in that Collier's story was "honorable mention" and the last four words, "and Barnes of California."

Brower: How nice! Especially since Walter Camp apparently didn't know that anything existed west of the Ivy League.

Barnes: That's right. But Camp indeed had a great respect for Andy Smith's judgment.

Response of Old Friends of Walter Gordon

Brower: Was Walter Gordon equally happy in his relation with Stub Allison?

Barnes: Yes, I'm sure he was. Walter could get along with anybody. He had a great attitude, a wonderful type of guy!

You know I've been trying to raise a little money among the guys who played with him, to support this oral history project, and I have been astounded, (a) at the response, so immediate and so personal, and (b) at the high praise that is given Walter by these individuals who never talked it over between themselves. I brought along one or two letters that I've received that I think you might be interested in. Do you want me to get into that now?

Brower: I think it would be fine.

Barnes: I received this from--I'm going to name names, I don't know whether you want names?

Brower: Unless they have some objection.

Barnes: Well, there are one or two who made donations who don't want to be mentioned as having made them, because they want to stay off the so-called "sucker" lists you see.

"Marsh" [Marshall P.] Madison, who is a very prominent attorney in San Francisco, sent me a letter. Unfortunately Marsh is in a wheelchair and ill, but his wife wrote to me as follows, and I'll quote: "Marshall was delighted to receive your letter about Walter Gordon. Of course, he remembers him well and was so fond of him. He was very proud to be playing on the same team with him." And she sent a check for him, for the oral history.

I have a letter from one of the boys that I coached when he was a freshman, who knew Walt when Walt was assistant coach of the

Barnes: varsity. I have already followed this through by letter to see if I can get a copy of the letter that is referred to in his letter to me. This is from Glenn ("Scoop") Carlson, and his wife, Mildred: "Mildred and I were both very fond of Walt. We have a letter in reply to one Mildred wrote at the time he was on 'This is Your Life' on radio which we really treasure." (That's when Ralph Edwards had him on his well-known show. I was there at the time to listen to it.) So I've written to see if Scoop will send me a photostat of the letter; it might be of interest to you.

Then a letter from Don Newmeyer from Honolulu. "Dear Stan, Yes I certainly do want to contribute to any effort that will help to memorialize that great man, Walter Gordon." Then he points out: "There are two of my neighbors here in this apartment building who knew and loved Walt very much. I have asked them to write a few words." One of them is George M. Johnson, who writes: "I recall meeting Judge Barnes in Washington, D.C., when he was getting some former Californians together to greet Walt when he came through in connection with his appointment as governor of the Virgin Islands. When I finished Boalt Hall and passed the California Bar Examination, I got my first experience in the actual practice of law working out of Walter Gordon's law office in Berkeley."

Mr. Johnson, I believe, was the dean of Howard Law School at the time that Walt came through Washington when Vice President Nixon had me engineer this party for Walt. So it ties in, you see.

[Looking through letters.] Here's a chap that I didn't write to, but Don Newmeyer knew of his interest in Walter Gordon and he encloses a check. In his letter he says: "Although I attended the University of California at Berkeley a number of years after Walt, and was not a football player, I grew up in the same block on Acton Street in Berkeley with him. My strongest recollection about Walt was his forcefulness and determination. This might be best described by his wife, Sis, when we were playing contract bridge one evening. She admonished him as her partner that he wanted to be, quote, 'the whole cheese, the cloth around the cheese, and the holes in the cloth.' end quote, He was determined but never malicious." And he sends a check.

It's little incidents like that, you know, that really warm the cockles of your heart when you receive them. Oh, some of the letters, I didn't bring them all, but I'd be glad to let you see them all.

Brower: Thank you very much.

Walter Gordon as Coach

Brower: I wish you'd repeat, if you don't mind, the story of how Walter Gordon helped you get back on the varsity.

Barnes: Well, when I was a freshman I didn't think I amounted to very much in football; in fact, it was my fraternity brothers who made me go out and try to play. I guess I was what you might call a late bloomer. I was assigned by Andy to play center, which I had never touched before; I'd played guard and end in high school. So I played center in 1918, and I made the All Coast Team and received this honorable mention for All-American. I was very proud of what I'd accomplished. My older brother, Rev. C. Rankin Barnes, who had graduated from California in 1912, said, "You want to be careful, because when I was up at Berkeley anybody who made the varsity as a freshman always got pop-headed and never lasted very long." So I told him that certainly wouldn't happen to me.

Well, next year, 1919, when we started playing I started every game with the varsity right up to the Big Game, against Stanford. Then, when Andy called the starting lineup for the Big Game, I was not on the varsity.

The week after we had gone north to play Washington to see whether or not we'd win the Pacific Coast Conference championship we lost to Washington in the mud up there 7-0. In the practice before the game on the old Washington Field everybody on the squad was given a chance to work out, except me. Finally, Andy said, "Who hasn't been in?" I held up my hand; I hadn't been in. He said, "Barnsey, take that left tackle spot." I never had played tackle in my life, and I was pretty thoroughly discouraged and disgruntled and mad and the usual things that happen to a person who loses position, when he thinks he's been fighting as hard as he can. Walt came to me and said, "You can get back on that varsity if you really want to." So when the next session started (1920), because I'd been assigned in that haphazard way to play tackle, I was out for tackle and they had some pretty good tackles there, including Dan McMillan and Jim Dean and, later, Stew Beam (who was third team All-American in 1923). In '21 I was able to keep both Dean and Beam on the bench. This was through the encouragement Walt gave to me. I remember he said to me if you'll pardon a few inelegant phrases, "Stan, you do what I tell you to and we'll get you back on that varsity or by God we'll kill anybody that gets in your way!" As Andy used to say, good old Andy!, he wanted his tackles, "te-e-rific and fe-e-rocious."

Brower: You played tackle from then on?

Barnes: Yes, I played tackle in 1920 and '21, center in 1918, and guard in 1919. I didn't weigh very much. I was the lightest man on the line, and I weighed less than the two fullbacks, just a little more than the two halfbacks, Crip Toomey and Pesky Sprott. A hundred and seventy-seven is awfully light for a tackle. But (while it's hard to believe nowadays) I could move pretty fast and I always figured that I had the intensity of desire and the concentration to make up for lack of weight. So I concentrated on getting into the opposing backfield, particularly on kicks--to block kicks. I had some success at that.

The Wonder Teams and Walter Gordon

Brower: These were the first Wonder Team years?

Barnes: Yes, 1920 was the first Wonder Team.

Brower: From 1920 to 1924, there was no defeat in four years?

Barnes: Twenty to twenty-four would be five years, because you count '20 you see. There were 54 games in five years without any defeat, but with four ties.

To make a long story short, I fought my heart out to get back on the varsity in 1920 and I was fighting against a very good friend of mine, Jim Dean by name. Jim had played on the freshman team, with Brick Muller et al., the year before. It was a great freshman team. Jim started every game in 1920 until finally it got around to the Stanford Big Game and for the first time that year I started. Then Andy picked me on his All Coast Team, ahead of Jim Dean (God bless him, Jim's gone now). That "imprimatur" made me the All Coast center. That's when Andy picked his entire 1920 team as All Coast.

Brower: How much did Walter Gordon as coach contribute to the Wonder Teams?

Barnes: Well, it's awfully hard to say, and it's particularly hard to tell a layman who is not familiar with coaching. I coached the freshmen one year and I was assistant varsity coach for one year under Andy, when I was going to law school. And I think I understand something about coaching. In the first place you must have somebody that's a tough disciplinarian to keep control. Then you must have somebody who's a nice guy and always speaks up for the players, and who placates the taskmaster to make things smooth.

Brower: This is not all in one person? You have to have two?

Barnes: At least two. As a matter of fact it's better to have a third person that's kind of half-and-half in between. Well, Andy was the tough guy. Boles-Rosenthal (Dr. Boles now--Albert Boles--he changed his name) was a tough lineman at Minnesota. We played against Boles when he played with and coached the Olympic Club team in 1919. Nibs Price was the guy who fixed things up and made the boys feel better and kept them fighting. And Walter was kind of half in between the tough mug and the kindly approach. He had a tremendous influence, particularly in keeping alive the fervor to make your efforts and ability obvious.

Brower: Was his scouting of value also? Or had he stopped scouting?

Barnes: He was a very good scout, as is proved by the fact that he was kept on, for so many years, under so many California coaches. He knew what to look for. He made wonderful scouting reports.

Football Notables

Brower: Could I interrupt you to get some spellings? Could you help me with Pesky--?

Barnes: Pesky, P-e-s-k-y Sprott, S-p-r-o-t-t, one of the roughest, toughest football men that ever played at Cal. Never got the credit he should have had. He was badly injured part of the time. He was also a great track man. In a meet against Stanford, I think it was in either '19 or '20, he won the mile, won the half-mile, and placed second to his own teammate in the two mile, which defeated Stanford. He made the U.S. Olympic Team in 1920 in the half-mile.

Brower: Then, the improbable name of "Criptoomey", I have down here?

Barnes: Yes, Crip was crippled because he had part of one finger gone. He was quite an athlete himself, later coached football and boxing up at Davis for many years. A very likeable guy, and a great athlete. His surname was Toomey. His father was mayor of Fresno. He came to Cal, and he represented the United States in the 1926 Olympics, playing Rugby in France, which was a very successful procedure for the United States.

Brower: Speaking of Rugby, did you play American football when you came to the campus?

Barnes: Yes.

Brower: It was new, in the North, wasn't it?

Barnes: Yes. It was new in the North. When Don Newmeyer wrote me he pointed out that he had played Rugby and so he was at an utter loss when he went out for American football at Cal. He was a big guy; he was much bigger than I was. Fat Latham had the same experience. Walt helped them tremendously. He would coach out the Rugby and coach in the American football.

Brower: Presumably, as someone from Riverside, Walter Gordon had played American football too?

Barnes: I assume he had. Yes.

Brower: Was it the theory that the Wonder Team was so good in part because some of those men were in World War I and were a pretty tough bunch?

Barnes: That was my observation. They were a little bit older than the average freshman in the classes of other years because many of them had been in the service, most of them as privates and a few as officers. Some had been in the service in the United States, and a few of them overseas. Muggs Van Sant, for instance, was a Marine veteran. And Fred Brooks, a captain in 1919, was a former captain of the '17 team. He came back in 1919.

Southern California's Contribution to U.C. Teams

Barnes: Do you want to go into that matter of the Los Angeles Bar Association?

Brower: Yes, I would like to do that. One of the things I wondered was if your association with Walter Gordon had made you more sensitive than your fellows in the Los Angeles Bar Association to the inequity of the situation there?

Barnes: Not particularly, of my own age group, I don't think. I have always maintained that you should be able to pick your own friends. And I think it's up to the individual's judgment whom he wants to pick. But if you want to pick your friends there shouldn't be any restriction as to color.

Walter was doing such an outstanding job as head of the Adult Authority of the state of California that Herm [Herman] Selvin and I--

Let me give some background here. I founded down in Southern California the "Southern Seas" which was the athletic proselyting group, because I could prove to anybody who wanted to listen that whenever the University of California got a majority of their freshman squad from Southern California they would be more successful in football than if they got them from the rest of California.

Brower: This didn't relate to the business of playing American football? This was a constant?

Barnes: This was because there were larger high schools with better coaches in Southern California than there were up here. That's changed to a great extent today, and it's not so noticeable, but I could show you that the percentage from Southern California went exactly parallel to our wins and losses column in the fall. And so I and Muggs Van Sant, and Kelley Verling, and Frank Storment (those were the four of us) started Southern Seas the night after USC beat us 74 to 0, the worst licking that Cal ever took from USC. I think Nibs was coaching--yes--his last year--1930.

San Diego High School

Barnes: You see Nibs, Nibs Price, was my high school football coach, and also the coach of Brick Muller, Pesky Sprott, Cort Majors, Dutch Eells, Karl Engebretson, Karl Deeds--there were seven of us that came up from San Diego, where we won the state title. And together with four more from Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles, (McMillan, Erv, Berkey, and Toney) whom San Diego High School played for the state high school title in 1916, we all came to California to play under Nibs.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

I don't know how much you want about Brick Muller, but Brick Muller's father was the principal of the grammar school that Brick Muller, Karl Deeds and I went to, in San Diego: Florence Grammar School. Dr. Muller was a great devotee of sports. I played football with Brick Muller on the third grammar school team, Brick wearing shin guards and no shoes. [Laughter] That was about the sixth or seventh grade in grammar school.

We all went to San Diego High School, and there were Cort Majors and Bryan ("Pesky") Sprott, Karl, ("Shingles") Engebretsen, Karl Deeds, who was a great sprinter as well as a great football player, and W.H. ("Dutch") Eells, who was a great baseball player as well as a footballer. And oh I could give you half a dozen other names of those that came along right after us at Cal--Werner Schuur, Gus Harding, Lynn Cayot. We even had a young chap come up to California who had played halfback at San Diego, who was too small to be a college halfback. He became a fraternity brother of mine and got a job with the American Trust Company at their branch on Alcatraz Avenue, so he could stay in college, and he recently retired as president of Harris National Trust and Savings Bank in Chicago, and chairman of the board of Trustees of Northwestern University. His name was Kenneth Zwiener.

After the strike at San Diego High School--

Brower: Could you tell a little about what the issue in that strike was?

Barnes: The issue was the firing of about twenty professors who were closest to the students, and very popular with them. I don't know whether that was why they were fired or not. There was a battle on the school board, with a three-to-two majority favoring these dismissals. And then the students forced a recall election of the three who were responsible for this, who were very autocratic in their rule. (You

Barnes: can get the details from the Journal of San Diego History*; it's all in there, quite a lengthy article about it.) Supposedly, it was the only successful high school strike ever consummated in this country.

Brower: And your colleagues in this, were these the same men you played football with?

Barnes: Yes, for example Karl Deeds, who was the captain of the football team. We planned it pretty well. We called our own assembly in the stadium there. The president of the student body wouldn't participate so we got the vice president, Vida Weibens, to preside. We had a series of speakers. We had eight or so speakers. The first one said, "It's an awful outrage," And then each speaker used a different approach. Every speaker who got up got a little angrier and proposed a more radical remedy, and finally we got everybody worked up--"We want a strike," and we did. We marched on to the Board of Education office, where they wouldn't receive us, of course. We were eight abreast and two blocks long.

Brower: Something quite unprecedented at that time!

Barnes: Yes, quite unprecedented. I don't know whether I should tell this but I think it's amusing. My dad was a very conservative minister, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in San Diego, for some forty years, and he said, "You're going back to school," and I said, "No, I'm not, Dad." I said, "I'm partly responsible for this and I'm on the 'executive committee' to put in the papers when the students should go back to school and when they shouldn't, and I must stay in touch with them." He said, "Well, I'm going to take you back!" And I said, "Now, let's not be funny. If worst comes to worst I'm just going to have to put you on the ground and sit on you." [Laughter] This was insubordination and it didn't sit very well with him, but I had played some football by that time and I was over the effects of being a minister's son.

Brower: I'm glad it didn't come to that!

Barnes: I'm glad too. But I can still see the look of incredulity on my father's face. [Laughter]

Well, I didn't want to get into that, but it is tied up to a certain extent. Brick Muller's dad retired from the San Diego schools in protest, and moved to Oakland. So Brick Muller came up to Oakland and went to Oakland Tech, and he'd come out when he was in high school and practice with his old pals on Cal Field.

*Robert F. Heilbron, "Student Protest at its Best: San Diego, 1918," Journal of San Diego History, XX:1.

Barnes: Nibs belonged to Sigma Chi when he was at California, so Pesky and Cort and Karl Deeds and Karl Engebretsen, and Dutch Eells and I were all fraternity brothers. Because Nibs was a Sigma Chi, that was the only fraternity we ever thought about.

Coaching at UC

Barnes: Nibs didn't bring us up here. Many people have said that in the past, and it isn't true. He encouraged the boys to come to Cal and then he went in the service, and it was a year after most of us were up at Cal before Nibs came back and Andy invited him in to be his assistant coach because of what he'd produced in players.

Brower: He had a less successful career as a coach, didn't he, than Andy Smith?

Barnes: Yes, very much so.

Brower: I always thought he was an awfully nice man.

Barnes: Oh, very kind, warm, a great coach, and a gentleman.

Brower: Maybe too nice?

Barnes: Yes, that's right. That gets into the philosophy of coaching; you see, he was the nice man, to assuage the wounds that Andy would leave. Andy would kick a man right off you know, physically, run after him, try to kick him!

Brower: Andy Smith's treatment of you was pretty harsh, wasn't it, in putting you off the varsity?

Barnes: Oh-h, no, I don't resent that--I deserved it.

Brower: I bet you were pretty mad at the time.

Barnes: Oh, yes, I was mad at the time, but I could only blame myself. I didn't think it was unfair. The coaches knew whether I was performing or not and I had to perform a little better before I got back on. And it finally came about. Then in my last year I had a comparative sinecure.

Integration of the Los Angeles Bar Association

Brower: Did we somehow lose the matter of the Los Angeles Bar Association?

Barnes: Yes, we did. What I started telling about was the organization of the Southern Seas. Herm Selvin, although not an original member, was an early one. He was a lawyer in Los Angeles, of not only statewide-- but national--prominence.

Herm was a devoted Californian. He went out for football in the twenties, knew Walt Gordon very well, and he played on what we called the "Goofs" in those days. Well, he never weighed more than about 145 or 148 and he was cannon fodder for the varsity, you see. But he had and has a deep loyalty to California.

I met him on the street just after we'd decided to organize Southern Seas, and he has been a president of the organization since then, and very active in all affairs of the University of California, as well as very prominent in legal circles.

I don't know how we got started talking about it, anyway, Herm and I thought it was unfair--that they barred negroes from the Los Angeles Bar Association. So we made some inquiries from some of the directors and we were told that it had always been an invitational affair and that this was just like a country club or any other purely social club. Negroes shouldn't belong. We pointed out, both Herm and I, that that wasn't really a fair comparison because the ability to belong to the Bar Association had to do with one's ability to make a living and to make a success in your chosen profession.

I don't know whether we were on a program committee together or something, but anyway we cast about for means to get a negro that we knew would make an outstanding appearance, who would stand up as an expert in a particular field of law, and we decided that Walter Gordon was the man. So we got him down from up North to speak to the Los Angeles County Bar Association. Herm and I have both laughed about it since then, how well it worked.

Walt came down; he didn't have a note; he spoke for forty minutes, answered questions--bing, bing, bing. He had everything at his fingertips. He just made a tremendous impression, knowing what he was talking about and doing a most excellent job. And that's when they voted to admit negroes. We had it brought up again, you see, shortly after Walter's speech.

Brower: It wasn't at that same meeting that you had this vote?

Barnes: No, no no. This was all preliminary. We just wanted it as a talking card. Everybody said, "That was a hell of a fine talk! Good program." That's what we wanted, that type of reaction to what Walter could do.

Walter Gordon's Appointment to the Governorship of the Virgin Islands

Brower: You also had a role, didn't you, at the time of Walter Gordon's appointment as governor of the Virgin Islands?

Barnes: Yes, the vice president called me. We're getting into a critical area now. I was on the original committee that selected Richard Nixon to run for Congress.

Brower: Against Helen Gahagan Douglas?

Barnes: No, against Jerry Voorhis. At that time I had this client who was trying to get his son an appointment to one of the service academies and he couldn't get anything out of Congressman Voorhis.

And I said, "Well, the only answer to that is to elect some good Republican that some of us know," and so I got him to underwrite the first political meeting that Nixon ever had, at Eaton's Café out in Arcadia. We sold tickets to make it up but my client underwrote the cost, and it was the first public political appearance Nixon made. I have some interesting correspondence with Nixon in those days, about his gratefulness to me for having made the arrangements.

Well, this sounds braggadocio and I don't mean it that way, but when I went back to Washington to be assistant attorney general of the United States, I had several very close friends there, Nixon among them--although never on intimate terms; I don't want to suggest that. But--this is off the record.

Brower: Do you want me to turn off the tape?

Barnes: Yes.

[Tape off]

Brower: Can you give me your account of your role in Walter Gordon's Virgin Island appointment?

Barnes: As I recall the situation, I'm sure that Earl Warren had a great deal to do with urging the administration to appoint Walter Gordon. As I recall it, the vice president told me that he had conferred with Earl Warren and that Earl Warren had suggested that the vice president talk to me about Walter Gordon's capabilities, and whether or not he

Barnes: would make a good governor. I was strongly for him, of course, and did all I could to convince the vice president he would make an excellent man.

So, later on, when it was all worked out, Walter came back to receive his appointment from the president, and the vice president asked me to take charge of a luncheon for about forty people or so in honor of Walt and his wife, who was there. It just happened there were several people there (for example, Warren Olney) that knew Walter from Berkeley days, and the dean of the Howard Law School, Johnson by name I believe, who had had considerable contacts with Walt when Walt was practicing law, before he ever went on the Adult Authority for the state of California.

It was a very fine gathering and the highlight to me was when nearly everybody had gone and I went up to Walt and said, "Walt, this is a long way that we've come from Old Cal Field." And he said, "It sure is, Stan." That's a moment that I shall never forget.

Incidentally, when I left the Los Angeles Superior Court, that Court put on a little gathering in Los Angeles, and Walt came down with a couple of his Adult Authority members and we had our pictures taken together. Walt was always a loyal friend, and always remembered the little things that happened to you, and made mention of them.

Walt went down to the Virgin Islands, as I've often said, with stars in his eyes, convinced that he could prove that he was capable of helping his people, as he called them--his people. He had a great opportunity because the Virgin Islands had an incredible problem in that it was difficult for the natives to support themselves. I recall very clearly that there were no fish being caught outside the Virgin Islands--all the fish that they had to eat were imported fish from other areas, because nobody could go out and catch the fish; they had no boats to go out in. Likewise, the agriculture was at a very low ebb, because nobody wanted to work in the fields, at least on any continuous basis.

Walt got some appropriations from Congress, with some help from some of us in Washington--I don't mean that I helped, but I think some of his other friends did --to enable the government to obtain property from some of the large landowners in small lots so that individuals could work their own farms. And he also got some appropriations so there could be some boats built so that fishing could take place. Walter envisioned the day when the people of the Virgin Islands would be entrepreneurs on their own behalf.

He was bitterly disappointed when he found out that they weren't interested in that. By that time he not only had the individual poor people on the Islands mad at him because he wanted them to work, but also the landed gentry and those who had large holdings because some of their property had been taken for the agricultural efforts. Walter

Barnes: became disillusioned. It was a sad experience for him, I'm sure. And we used to talk it over at times.

Walter Gordon Appointed to U.S. District Court, Virgin Islands

Barnes: It became so acute from a political standpoint that the administration thought it best to have him leave as governor of the Virgin Islands and rescued him with an appointment to the United States District Court in the Virgin Islands. This is a nonconstitutional court, and does not have the same tenure for its office-holders that the federal courts ordinarily have under the United States Constitution.

When the administration changed hands, there was a question whether Walt would be let out again, and whether or not he had rights to a pension, which he didn't have; he hadn't been in civil service long enough.

So then I was able to use a little influence with a certain gentleman in the Democratic administration to persuade him that he wouldn't rock the boat, and unless somebody got up on the floor of Congress and demanded that the Democrats kick Walter out and put in somebody else, things could rock along until somebody raised such a protest. Walter finished sufficient time so that he got his retirement pay.

He was very happy to come home with that assurance. Thank God he got it.

Brower: Was there ever any question of his getting a judgeship in this country?

Barnes: There was discussion of it, but from a political standpoint it was not very possible on the federal side. You have to go on the district court, which was the one that he was qualified for, let us say. You almost always have to go to the local area to do it, unless there's an appointment in the District of Columbia; that has a wider base for judicial appointments. So it was not a very practical opportunity. I don't know that there was any discussion in high places, but I know that there were some of his friends that wondered whether or not that could be done. He had a better chance for a state job—but when he got back to California his friend Earl Warren was no longer governor.

Brower: His age would have been a problem at that time?

Barnes: Yes, his age would have been a problem.

Walter Gordon's Last Years

Brower: In retirement he was not active in his law practice, was he?

Barnes: I don't believe that he was. I never heard of his being. I think that he and his good wife had enough to live on comfortably, or at least fairly comfortably--in this day and age it's hard to say you can be too comfortable.

Brower: I wonder if he would have been happier if he had been able to be more active?

Barnes: Oh, I think he probably would have. He loved contact with people, particularly his old friends.

You know the team of 1920 has had a reunion each year for the last 45 years or so, just before the Big Game, and Walt was always invited if he was around here to attend. I know he enjoyed that very much because he told me so, sometimes with tears in his eyes.

Brower: Do you remember the last time he attended such a gathering?

Barnes: Yes, I think it was 1973. I don't think he attended the last two years.

Brower: But until then he was in good health and spirits?

Barnes: Yes.

[Pause]

Barnes: Anything else?

I heard once that when he was on the Berkeley Police Force, he was assigned to patrol the North Berkeley area in an automobile, at night. And when the people up there found out that they were going to have a colored patrolman, they protested to Chief Vollmer that they thought some other arrangement should be made. There were about twenty people that protested. About four years later when Walt got through with his nightly patrol and was put on other duties, about two hundred people signed a petition to keep him.

Brower: I'm very glad to get that story.

Thank you very much Judge Barnes.

Transcriber: Anne Brower

Final Typist: Teresa Allen



Herman F. Selvin
University of California
ca. 1925

Interview with Herman Selvin

Interview History	18
The "California Spirit"	19
University of California Graduates and California Politics	23
Walter Gordon as Football Rally Speaker	25
Integration of the Los Angeles Bar Association	25
Football: Walter Gordon as Coach and Scout	27
Racial Discrimination and Football	29
Changing Attitudes toward Criminals	31
Last Recollections of Walter Gordon	32

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Herman Selvin has had a distinguished career in the practice of law, a practice that has been continuous since 1927, when he received the J.D. degree from Boalt Hall, where he was a member of the Order of the Coif. He served on the board of governors of the State Bar of California and on the U.S. Judicial Conference Advisory Committee on Uniform Rules of Evidence for the Federal Courts. He was chairman of the California Law Revision Commission and president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association and the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners. Among the honors he has received is the Distinguished Alumnus Citation, Boalt Hall, and the Shattuck-Price Award.

However, the significance of Herman Selvin for this volume lies elsewhere---in his long association with Walter Gordon and in his steadfast loyalty and affection for the Berkeley campus of the University of California, which gives him a special eloquence in describing the quality of life on that campus when he and Walter Gordon knew it best.

Herman Selvin, an honorary member of the Big C Society, first observed Walter Gordon when he was assistant coach of the varsity football team and Herman Selvin was one of the Goofs; he describes his position on that team as "live tackling dummy." The two men remained in touch for the ensuing fifty years. Walter Gordon was invited to speak at the first meeting of the Los Angeles Bar Association over which Herman Selvin presided, and when the Walter Gordon Athlete/Citizen Award was presented to Stanley Barnes on October 17, 1975 by the Berkeley Breakfast Club, it was Herman Selvin who introduced Judge Barnes because of his long friendship with both men.

One interview was held on November 19, 1976 in Mr. Selvin's rather formidable Beverly Hills law office. The austerity of the setting and the dignity of Herman Selvin was moderated by the gentle thoughtfulness of both Mr. Selvin and his secretary, Miss Frieda Richkind, who provided coffee and materialized lunch at Mr. Selvin's impressively large desk.

The interview evoked memories of happy days and warm and long-term associations. Perhaps Mr. Selvin's is the clearest statement of the mystique of the Old Cal Spirit that is the nostalgic climate of many of these interviews. Mr. Selvin made very few editorial changes in the transcription.

An oral history of Herman Selvin himself is scheduled for taping in 1978. Illness in the Selvin family has thus far delayed this project.

Anne Brower

July, 1978
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: November 19, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH HERMAN SELVIN

The "California Spirit"

Brower: Mr. Selvin, your devotion as an alumnus of the University of California is so outstanding I wondered what created that, what it was about the atmosphere of the campus in the 1920s that made not only you but a good many of your generation so loyal?

Selvin: It's hard to describe. In fact I can't describe it. But, I have noticed over the years that a good many people, even those who had had no scholastic connections at the University, that is student connections, who come there in some position or another--take Lyn Waldorf as football coach or Ky Ebright as crew coach, or even people out of the athletic field--who come there and get in that atmosphere that used to exist on that campus, and they come out of it with an extreme devotion to and love for the campus. What it is I don't know, except that we used to have the great cliché in my day that it was "that intangible something." That was the cliché. It was "that intangible something called California spirit." But, the reason it was called the intangible something was that nobody could define it.

Brower: Was President Wheeler on the campus at that time?

Selvin: He was emeritus, but he was there, yes. You used to see him quite frequently riding that horse of his around the campus.

Brower: Would you think that it had anything to do with his legacy? Apparently he cared a great deal.

Selvin: It might have had because he was such an impressive looking old man. I look back at it now and think of how he must've looked to kids from

*See interview with Herman F. Selvin, The University of California and California Law and Lawyers, 1920-1978, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

Selvin: eighteen to twenty-two years of age. He was a distinguished looking man. He was what you would picture in your mind as the president of a great university. That might have had something to do with it, in addition to which he had an appeal to young people.

Now, I have read--of course I wasn't there--I have read the talk he made at the flagpole which is where the campanile is now situated when he first addressed the students upon being made president of the university. That's where what I once called in a talk "the California benediction" arose, "It is good to have been here."

I can remember in my freshman year I managed to get down to what would now be called the Rose Bowl game. Of course, the bowl hadn't been built then but it was the Tournament of Roses game. We were playing Ohio State. I can remember Wheeler's addressing the rooting section between halves. At that time we were leading the game by a very comfortable margin, as I hope we will be tomorrow [the California-Stanford game was played on November 20, 1976.] He made a short little talk on the theme that this was a great day for California.

That kind of enthusiasm coming from the president of the university I think is bound to have its effect on kids and it's bound, whether they realize it or not, to instill in them the idea that there must be something about this place that's wonderful.

Brower: Of course, it didn't hurt to have five years of successful football teams.

Selvin: It only hurt later when we started losing.

Brower: I know. That was my era, we were losing by the time I came along.

Selvin: So, that's the best answer I can give to what there is about California that inculcates that devotion. Whether it does today I don't know. I'll have to admit that I am not adjusted to modern day youthful styles of clothing, conduct, or thinking. I've done my best to do it and I think I have grown tolerant of it but it takes an effort on my part to be tolerant. So, I don't know what it's like up there now. As a matter of fact, there was a period of time, to be frank, when I'd go to Berkeley I'd deliberately stay off the campus because I didn't want to suffer the agonies that I knew I would suffer if I saw what was there.

Brower: I think we're having a swing now back to more conventional behavior.

Selvin: I understand that. Of course, in my day while we were not like Princeton at least we took some pride in appearing on the campus neatly clothed. Although slacks and a sweater were permissible instead of the three-piece suit as Princeton required, nevertheless that was about as informal as we got.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Brower: Do you think the traditional dress for the various classes helped this "California spirit"?

Selvin: I'm sure it did. Kids are sort of romanticists and kids are a lot more traditional than we older people will give them credit for being. I think they like the traditional sort of thing. They like to know that what they are doing is something that has been done for years and that it's been done for years because it's a good thing to be doing. The distinction of having attained senior status symbolized by the sombrero certainly had its effect. In those days on the campus we had real student self-government. Athletics for instance were not a function of the department of intercollegiate athletics, largely because we didn't have such a department, and they weren't a function of the physical education department. They were a function of the Associated Students of the University of California, which was an unincorporated association composed of all the students on the campus who paid the required ASUC fee, which in the beginning was \$5 I think. They ran athletics, they ran the Daily Cal, they ran the news bureau, and all the rest of the student activities including the then "Occident." I don't even know if the Occident still exists*.

Brower: I don't either.

Selvin: The Pelican?

Brower: The Pelican still flies, but I'm not sure about the Occident.

Selvin: The Occident was the literary magazine and there were some pretty good people who wrote for it in their day, including Sydney Coe Howard among others.

Brower: Yes.

Selvin: So, all of that, it gave you a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility and of pride in being able to meet that responsibility. Now, you ask what attached me to the university. That's probably it. I came from a little town, 3,500 people. There was no great future there for me as far as I could see. While I had been the so-called high school leader, why it was a little high school and when we compared ourselves to what was going on in that great metropolis, Salt Lake City, which at that time I think had a little less than 100,000 people, we were the country cousins for sure.

*The Occident ceased publication in 1975. [Ed.]

Selvin: California gave me a chance some way or another to prove myself. I think I must have realized that in becoming attached to the place, that it enabled me to work out my own fulfillment to the extent that I was capable of doing anything. It proved to me that I could walk on equal terms with people who to me were almost prodigies. I don't mean that the way it sounds.

Brower: You must have been something of a prodigy yourself.

Selvin: I was going to say I don't mean by that that I was a prodigy [laughter].

Brower: But you were!

Selvin: In any event the original plan was that I was going to get my bachelor's degree at Berkeley and I was going to take my law at Harvard. By the time I had spent four years on the campus I didn't want to go anywhere else. So, I stayed there and I have never regretted the seven years that I spent on the Berkeley campus. In fact, they are one of the fondest memories I have. I've tried to say why, but I really can't put my finger on it. The fact is it's there.

I'm sorry that the kids today don't get that feeling if they don't. I don't know whether they do or not. I remember sitting in my office one day with one of the young men in the office who came from another school--I've forgotten which one. An Old Blue friend of mine came in and we were reminiscing about some of our undergraduate experiences. The young man, of course, heard us and then said, somewhat wistfully, "I wish I could have had the kind of college life you two had." My reply was: "You could have had. There is plenty of time left for your generation to take on themselves all the cares and woes of the world."

Incidentally, the expression Old Blue as referring to a California alumnus originated down here. It was used by a very dear friend of mine, now dead, Frank Storment. He started referring to those of us who were primarily interested, not primarily, but intensely interested in California athletics as Old Blues, being an obvious take-off of course on Oxford or Cambridge. From that it sort of spread all around apparently. It's become a common expression now for a California alumnus, or alumna--you can see at least I got some education at Berkeley--to refer to them as Old Blues.

Brower: Did Storment play football?

Selvin: No. He was a musician. He played the piano and at one time he had a campus orchestra. But, he was just one of the ten thousand up there who knew each other and had a good time together. He was--he's dead now--he was a good friend of Stan Barnes's and he loved to needle Stan.

University of California Graduates and California Politics

Selvin: If this were Stan's oral history, why, this story would fit well into it. Without going into the long background that preceded it, I had been trying to persuade Stan to get himself into the race for attorney general of California because the Republican incumbent at that time was in my opinion a crook and later, I think, proved to be one. Anyway, I thought Stan was ideally suited for the position and Stan was very reluctant about it.

Now, Frank who was a Phi Psi--Stan of course is Mr. Sigma Chi--was always needling Stan about the fact that there was no particular honor to be a Sigma Chi. They had so many people in the order that almost anybody could be a Sigma Chi. In fact, he said, he didn't know anybody that wasn't or something to that effect.

Frank and I were having a drink with Stan at the University Club one afternoon after work, and I started in again on the campaign that I'd been carrying on to get him to consent to run for the Republican nomination for attorney general. I'm a Democrat and he knew it too, but I thought he ought to run and I thought he ought to be elected. Stan was saying no. Frank joined in the urging, agreeing with me. Stan finally said, "Oh hell, I couldn't be elected." Frank said, "What are you talking about Barnes? The Sigma Chi vote alone would elect you!" [Laughter]

Brower: Did he run?

Selvin: No. The peculiar part of that story is that the man who was probably more responsible for Earl Warren's advancement in Republican politics than anyone, who was the elder statesman of the Republican Party in California, Jesse Steinhart, a former regent of the university, as a matter of fact an alumnus--Jesse was a very good friend of the senior partner of the firm of which I was then a member and I had gotten to know him quite well. Jesse knew that I was a Democrat and he also knew that I was a good friend of Stan's--he was as much if not more concerned about the attorney generalship and the Republican incumbent than I was.

He called me one day and asked me if I personally would ask Stan to run. He authorized me to tell Stan that whatever in the way of funds and Republican support that might be needed would be made available to him without any obligation on his part. So, I told Stan that, but he still refused, which may or may not have been a good thing. It would have been a good thing for the state of California if he hadn't refused, in my opinion. On the other hand what it might have done to the career of Earl Warren to the extent that it depended on his being attorney general I don't know.

Brower: It was, then, that same election?

Selvin: No, it was before Earl ran for the office. Warren and Barnes were very close friends. That leads into a little part of Walt Gordon's life as a matter of fact. Unlike other federal judges, the federal judgeship in the Virgin Islands is an appointive office. I mean it's an office for a specified term, twelve years I think. It's not a life appointment.

I don't know whether Walter was a Democrat or a Republican. Probably, being as fond of Stan Barnes as he was and being of that same generation, he was a Republican.

Brower: Yes, Walter Gordon was a Republican.

Selvin: When Walter Gordon's term was about to expire, he had about two years to go before he would be eligible for retirement. I saw Stan one day and I told him that. I said, "Don't you think we ought to be trying to do something to see that he is reappointed?" I said, "Even though he isn't of the party of the current administration, wouldn't it be possible to get him reappointed with the promise on his part that he would retire as soon as he was eligible and so all that would mean is that the political appointment would be deferred only a matter of a couple of years?" Stan said, "I'm way ahead of you. We're already working on that in Washington."

Brower: It was very critical to Judge Gordon too because his pension depended on those extra years.

Selvin: That's right.

Brower: Do you have any views on how good a federal judge he was in the Virgin Islands?

Selvin: I haven't any idea. I never appeared before him, obviously, and I've never known anybody from the Virgin Islands outside of Walt, so I've never really heard.

Brower: You didn't visit him ever at that time?

Selvin: No. Actually, that one incident--the only connection it had with Walt's life was the fact that I had thought of something that others had thought of even ahead of me--was just about the only real connection that I had with Walt Gordon's life. I knew him and knew of him from the time I was a freshman.

Walter Gordon as Football Rally Speaker

Brower: I was going to ask you about that, what your first impression of him was.

Selvin: A big, husky, jovial, witty individual who was a good speaker. We used to have smoker rallies in those days before important football games and before the start of the football season. Walt was always a prominent speaker at those rallies and he was a good speaker.

He had a story, somewhat off color--and I don't remember the story strangely enough--the punch line of which had something to do with a shovel. Whenever Walt got to the podium the roar started from the audience, "Shovel! Shovel!" They wanted him to tell the shovel story and Walt always did with an engaging grin and chuckle.

The fact that he was black made no impression on me. I had come from a town where there weren't any blacks. There were very few blacks on the campus. There wasn't a great deal of agitation about equality. There was a great deal less self-consciousness about race distinctions then than there is now.

Brower: Would you say, however, that knowing him had made any kind of difference later in your attitude toward race?

Selvin: No, I don't think it made any difference. It probably subconsciously confirmed the way I had been brought up, and that is that people were people. It had some effect.

Integration of the Los Angeles Bar Association

Selvin: When I was senior vice-president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association, which under the system then in vogue meant that the next year I automatically would be president, a few of us set out--not a few of us, the officers: the then president, Dana Latham, myself, senior vice-president. I think Clarence Runkle was junior vice-president. I'm not going to call that roll. They're all dead except me.

Brower: I wonder if it is the story that Stan Barnes told me about integrating the Los Angeles Bar Association.

Selvin: We did it, this group of officers. We did it.

Brower: The way Stan Barnes tells it, it's you and Stan Barnes who did it.

Selvin: Stan wasn't an officer then. What happened was that after we had broken the color line so-called and my term started, the question came up of the speaker at the first meeting over which I would have to preside. I asked Stan if he had any suggestions. At that time Walt was chairman of the Adult Authority, having been appointed by Earl Warren. (Earl always took good care of the Old Blues, particularly if they could run fast or throw hard.) [Laughter] Stan said, "How about Walt Gordon?" Well, I said something to the effect, "He'd be wonderful." I said, "But do you think he would come?" I was thinking of--I didn't say so--the history of the Los Angeles Bar Association and its years of overt discrimination. Stan said, "I don't know." I said, "I think he would, Stan, if you'd ask him." Stan said, "I will." And he did and Walt said yes.

Walt came out and I introduced him. I don't remember what I said except that I'm sure that I went back to my freshman days on the campus and probably even beyond that by hearsay to the time that Walt made Walter Camp's third All-Americans and that sort of thing. He made what I can only describe as an excellent talk, although I can't tell you what he said. I've heard too many Bar Association speakers to be able to distinguish one from the other in that regard.

Walt was the first black man--in those days we could call them a Negro without self-consciousness--who had ever been at a meeting of the Los Angeles Bar Association, let alone address it. That was the first meeting of my term as president and I've always considered it to be the one real accomplishment of my term because it put the quietus on the color line that up until then had been accepted by everybody without too much protest--by almost everybody.

There were some people who objected to it, but the trouble was--and this was the inside politics of how we got the color line broken--when we, the officers, were discussing how to break it I think we had had two plebiscites at the Association at each of which a proposal to open up the doors was defeated. Now, the barring of blacks was not official. There was nothing in the constitution or by-laws of the association. It was just an unwritten rule. So, we decided to have another plebiscite and to submit a by-law that would prohibit admission to the association being made dependent upon race and to submit it as a proposal of the board of trustees rather than as coming from various members of the association.

It was my suggestion, I remember, that in my opinion the thing that had defeated the previous plebiscites had been that they had always been sponsored by a group of lawyers who were considered to be at least Communist sympathizers if not in fact Communists. In those days that was a horrible thing to be.

Brower: So, it had a radical complexion before?

Selvin: Yes. I said, "If we make this thing public before the ballots are actually in the hands of the membership these guys will grab onto it immediately and make it their cause again, and their names on the proposal will defeat it." I said, "We got to keep this as a secret among ourselves, put it in the mail with a statement from the board of trustees that it's their proposal and this is why we want it, suggest that it should be adopted and with a ballot. It will be too late for the, quote, redhots, unquote, to take hold of it and make it their cause." Well now whether that was the reason or not I don't know, but in any event it passed without any trouble.

It had an amusing aftermath as a matter of fact. I was just coming down onto the street from a meeting of the board of trustees of the Los Angeles Bar Association. At that meeting we had received a report of the membership committee recommending the acceptance of the application for membership of a group of people including John Aiso. John was Japanese. He later became an excellent judge.

But, during World War II he led the--whatever the number was of that combat team [the 442nd] composed of Nisei who were supposed to be the most decorated American outfit in World War II--well, John was their colonel. So, we had approved the application of John and just as I came out on the street I ran into him. He was walking down the street. I told John, "We just approved your application for membership in the LA Bar Association. What the hell took you so long to get around to making it?" "Well," he says, "Up until now I didn't think you'd have me."

Brower: We forget how far we've moved.

Football: Walter Gordon as Coach and Scout

Brower: Did you know Walter Gordon as a coach?

Selvin: Yes, well, I-- [laughter].

Brower: Did he coach you?

Selvin: No, the reason I'm laughing is that, as you know, Stan Barnes has a great attachment to the Wonder Team, and when he speaks of the Wonder Team he means the first one, the one in 1920, my freshman year. So, sometimes when I'm with Stan--I'm an honorary member of the Big C Society. I never made a letter. I had a tie clasp made out of it and sometimes I wear it-- I have been with Stan and somebody will see that and they'll recognize it and they say, "I didn't know you'd ever made a letter at California." "Yes, see I did." I can see Stan gritting his teeth. "What sport?" I'd say, "Football." They'd say,

Selvin: "Did you play on the Wonder Team?" I'd say, "Yes." At that point it was all Stan could do to keep from saying anything, but he'd let one more question come in. "What position?" I said, "Live tackling dummy," which was true. I was on what was called the Goofs. We used to scrimmage against the varsity and individuals would be selected from time to time to go down to the varsity and let the varsity practice tackling on live people instead of the dummy.

So, I used to see Walt out on the field coaching the varsity. He never personally coached me. In the first place I wasn't a lineman. In the second place I wasn't on varsity. Nobody paid any attention to the Goofs anyway.

Brower: Walter Gordon was the coach of the Goofs later and then the Ramblers for many years.

Selvin: That's when they got to be respectable and distinguished. But, when I was on the Goofs nobody paid any attention to us except once in a while Andy Smith would, as I say, ask a bunch of us to come on over and let the varsity practice tackling on us.

So, I saw Walt coaching linemen. My recollection of his technique was that it was an individual technique. He'd take one lineman and he'd work with him and then he'd work against him. He'd take this big young, husky kid, big for those days, fresh and-- By this time, 1920, '21, Walt's football days were two or three years behind him. Walt would take this kid and knock him all over the practice field teaching him how to be a lineman, but at the same time doing it graciously and with a grin on his face. He apparently was a good teacher because the kids listened to him and they put up with all the bumping around that he gave them. But, he could do it even then.

Brower: Do you know anything about his ability as a scout?

Selvin: Only by inference from the fact that every coach we had up until the time that Walt got too busy to take the time to do it always used him as a scout even though they had not known him before. So apparently they, either by oral tradition from coach to coach or because of what they themselves had observed of him, considered his ability to be great. He scouted for years after he had quit active coaching. All the coaches-- I think as a matter of fact, I think even down as late as Lyn Waldorf-- they used him as a scout. Apparently Walt had the ability to watch a football game and see what was going on and what was needed to counter what was going on if you were going to play them. But, I never sat with him at a football game. I don't think I ever discussed much football with Walt.

Brower: What were your contacts with Walter Gordon?

Selvin: Substantially those on Old Cal Field during practice when I was a Goof and he an assistant varsity coach, and then an occasional contact on or off the campus from that time until he spoke to the Los Angeles Bar Association, until the Berkeley Fellows were organized of whom Walt is one, or was one. I used to see Walt there once a year and we would chat and reminisce about this, that, and the other thing. But, they weren't very extensive. I was down here. He was up there.

Brower: You didn't see him in law school? He got his J.D. in '22. You didn't know him on the Adult Authority--your paths didn't cross at that time?

Selvin: No, I don't do any criminal law, so I never got before him in his official capacity. All I know by hearsay is that he was a very competent, able, and efficient chairman [of the California Adult Authority] and a human one. Of course, Walt was a great human being. He was a kindly man but he wasn't a soft man.

Racial Discrimination and Football

Selvin: Walter Gordon, I think without ever crying about it, felt very keenly the position in which blacks were and to a considerable extent still are put in this country. Stan has told me--he may've told you--that one of the great problems when Walt was playing football when they'd go on a trip was where in the hell he was going to sleep because the hotels wouldn't take him.

Brower: And even the training table, the first year he couldn't eat with the others.

Selvin: Well let's see, the first year, would that be Andy Smith?

Brower: Yes. Andy Smith didn't like it, but that's the way it was. They ate at a fraternity.

Selvin: Yes, Andy had to overcome his own prejudice, I know that. As a matter of fact--this is something that's not generally known--if you'll look at pictures or at least official pictures of the coaching staff at that time you never see Walt in them. Andy always managed to keep him out of the picture some way or another because he didn't think it would help the possibilities of getting kids to come there. I was one of Andy's greatest admirers but that happens to be the truth about Andy and there it is.

Stan has told me that when they went on a trip Walt was conscious of the situation, bound to be. He would leave them at the station and say, "I'll see you tomorrow at the game," or whatever it was. Then

Selvin: he'd go to presumably some hotel that he knew about that would take the blacks. Lyn Waldorf knew how to handle that situation, but of course he had more blacks on his team. He could do it.

Brower: How did his handling of it differ from Andy Smith's?

Selvin: In the first place he went to bat, not only personally but with whatever influence the university had, with whatever hotel he planned to stay to see to it that they would take his entire team regardless. Now, he had many more blacks on his squad than we ever had up until that time. We scheduled a game with Navy which would be played in Baltimore, at least in some place that was far enough south so that there was a real problem. I asked Lyn one day. I said, "What are you going to do with the colored boys on your squad?" You could call them colored and you could call them boys in those days without self-consciousness.

[End tape 1, side 2]

[Begin tape 2, side 1]

Brower: May I ask you to go back to the UC-Navy game in Baltimore again?

Selvin: Sure, whatever. Well, that's a story that involves the way Lyn Waldorf would have handled the race discrimination situation. At that time we had not just one, Walt Gordon, but we had quite a few blacks on the squad. I asked Lyn where the squad was going to stay in Washington. I knew they were going to stay in Washington. Lyn said that they were planning to stay at the Shoreham. I said, "How are you going to get the blacks into that place?" He said, "We're working on that." He said, "We're using all the influence we can muster in Washington to get the hotel to agree to take the entire squad." "But suppose they don't?" He said, "I'm ready for that too," or words to that effect. "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going to find out what is the best hotel in that area that will accept blacks. The varsity squad except for the blacks will stay at the Shoreham. The blacks will stay at this other hotel and I will stay there with them." I don't know that anything of that sort was ever tried in the days that Walt Gordon played. Of course, he was the only black on the squad.

Brower: There were not, I suppose, many blacks in the student body at all at that time?

Selvin: Very few. I don't recall any. No, I don't recall. I was trying to think. I know there was a black fraternity on the campus at one time and I was trying to remember whether that came into existence while I was there but I don't think so.

Brower: I rather think it was later.

Selvin: I don't recall any number of blacks on the campus. I'm sure there must

Selvin: have been some. But, of course, Walt was not a student--although he was in law school, I suppose, in the early twenties.

Brower: Would you say you knew Walter Gordon socially? I asked that of Stanley Barnes and he said he didn't know what I meant. But I mean did you go to his home or know his wife or--?

Selvin: No, I didn't and that was more the result I think of social diffidence on my part than it was on account of any bar by reason of the difference in color. I didn't do much socializing when I was in college outside of strictly college activities. I knew a lot of professors but I didn't know them in their homes. I knew a lot of students but I didn't know them in their homes, those of them who had homes in the Bay Area. I've always thought the fault was my own rather than theirs. I just didn't actively cultivate that type of association. In addition to which the difference between Walt Gordon of the class of what, 19--

Brower: '18.

Selvin: '18, and a freshman in 1920 or an undergraduate in the class of 1924, a difference of six years, was a big difference from a social standpoint, particularly I being two or three years younger than the average college student anyway. So, there were a lot of those people with whom I had no social contact that I got to know quite well on the campus and with whom I've had a great deal of social contact since.

Changing Attitudes toward Criminals

Brower: It's interesting to me in talking with people who worked with Walter Gordon on the Adult Authority to note the change in attitude toward crime from those days. Revoking the indeterminate sentences is one aspect of this change. That was hailed originally, as you know, as a great humane gesture.

Selvin: They're beginning to have second thoughts now, I notice from yesterday's newspaper.

Brower: Oh, are they? I wasn't aware of that.

Selvin: The people who were most in favor of doing away with the indeterminate sentences suddenly discovered that the flat-sentence law applied as the law was written, is going to make the sentences even shorter.

Brower: That's very interesting, isn't it?

Selvin: So, they don't want to go back to the old indeterminate sentence law but they want the present law beefed up now.

Brower: There's a much more vindictive spirit abroad in the land, understandably with the increase in crime, but I think it would make Walter Gordon sad and the people who served with him, Warden Duffy for instance.

Selvin: I don't think there's any question about it. I'm sure Walt was enough of a realist to recognize that the goal of rehabilitation was a hard one to reach and too frequently wasn't reached in the case of people who were sentenced under the indeterminate sentence law.

Brower: But, to abandon that--

Selvin: But, at least it was a good college try.

Brower: Yes.

Selvin: No, I'm sure Walter would have been against abandoning it and it shouldn't be abandoned. If you rehabilitate one convict it's worth it in my opinion. But, the trouble is you can't rehabilitate them at places like San Quentin or Folsom. You've got to have places that are equipped to do the kind of behavioristic and sociological work that has to be done to bring about rehabilitation.

Brower: Rehabilitation was very much a part of the Adult Authority as it was established, wasn't it?

Selvin: Well, that was the idea. But, the trouble is you get a bunch of people that are put up there largely to fulfill political promises of one sort or another that are laymen. They're not trained in the behavioristic sciences, psychology. They don't know penology. They have to depend on instinct and intuition.

Brower: Of course, that was true to a degree of some of that first group of men in the Adult Authority. It's just that their intuitions were better I think.

Selvin: Well, that's one of the great things about Walt Gordon, as it is about a lot of people. His instincts were good. I know I'm frequently asked what kind of a judge is So-and-So. I say, "Well, he doesn't know much but his instincts are good, so he usually lands on the right side," the right side, of course, being the side with which I agree.

Last Recollections of Walter Gordon

Brower: When did you last see Walter Gordon?

Selvin: At the last meeting of the Berkeley Fellows two or three years ago. He missed, I think, the last two meetings. By that time he'd gotten old and blind I was told. The last time I saw him was at a meeting of

- Selvin: the Berkeley Fellows at the chancellor's house on the campus. I could see even then that Walt was failing physically, not mentally, failing physically. I was surprised that he lasted as long as he did, although I think it was only a couple of years after that that he went. Except that he seemed to be weaker physically, he was not much different then from the way he'd always been when I saw him. Walt had a quirk. He could never remember my first name. He always called me Selvin.
- Brower: He begged the issue! Although that Virgin Island experience, I think was very frustrating, it doesn't really seem to have dimmed his jovial spirit from what I've heard about his return to Berkeley.
- Selvin: No, when he first came back--and I suppose the first time I saw him after he spoke at the Bar Association was at a Berkeley Fellows' meeting--he was the same jovial, pleasant, gregarious, old Walt that we'd all gotten to know. Looked a little older, didn't look as big as he'd looked to me when I was a kid and he was a football player. Of course, kids weren't as big in those days. You take Stan Barnes. Stan will deny it. Stan only weighed 178 pounds when he was playing tackle. Why, today if you're less than 230 [pounds] they won't even consider you for the job. But, Stan always looked like a big man to me and so did Walt.
- Brower: General Dean has commented on that, how big he thought Walter Gordon was when he knew him on the police force. He said, "I never saw a man shrink so."
- Selvin: That's right.
- Brower: But I think in fact, as you say, it was that men have been getting bigger.
- Selvin: I had the same reaction because in my memory I kept Walt as a big, husky, strapping individual. The first time I saw him after he got back from the Virgin Islands, as the General said, he had certainly shrunk.

Speaking of generals, I had an amusing experience with General Doolittle. Doolittle was a member of the board of directors of Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company. They lost a lawsuit out here in which they wanted to take an appeal and I was asked to join with their regular counsel in the appeal. A committee from the board of directors which included Doolittle came out to talk to us about what we thought about the case. During a lull in our formal discussion I happened to be sitting next to Doolittle. Actually, I didn't happen to be sitting next to Doolittle. I purposely chose that place. I said, "General, do you remember Andy Smith's funeral?" He said, "I certainly do." "Well," I said, "Let me tell you a story."

Selvin: Garff Wilson, professor of rhetoric on the campus, every year before the Big Game used to deliver an inspiring, hoop-em-up fight talk to the varsity squad at about midnight, gathered together in front of the Andy Smith bench at the stadium. Garff probably will give the talk tonight, as a matter of fact. I had heard about that talk and how emotional and thrilling it was.

So, I went out one night when I happened to be in Berkeley before the Big Game and I listened to it. It was really an excellent fight talk in the old Knute Rockne-Andy Smith tradition. He tells them the story of Andy Smith's funeral and the scattering of the ashes on the floor of the stadium from an airplane, which is the way it happened. I was there along with hundreds of others when it was done.

I said to Garff afterwards, "You know, that's an excellent recital that you give about the burying and depositing of Andy Smith's ashes on the stadium turf. Why don't you tell them who flew the plane?" "Well," he said, "I would but I don't know. Do you?" I said, "Yes, I know." He said, "Who was it?" I said, "It was Jimmy Doolittle, General Doolittle of the class of 1916. That's who it was. He was flying that plane."

Then I continued to tell the general, I said, "The next year I wasn't there but someone who was told me that Garff had amended his speech and he told them who was flying the plane and he had me in the plane with you at the time!" The general said, "Welcome aboard." [Laughter]

Brower: How charming! [Laughter]

That's the nicest Doolittle story I ever heard. He and Walter Gordon were friends.

Selvin: Yes. As a matter of fact, Walter Gordon was the heavyweight on the California boxing team and Stanford refused to box us because of Gordon. So, we supinely acquiesced and substituted, I think, Jimmy Doolittle for Gordon, who I am glad to say knocked out the Stanford heavyweight in the first round or something like that. The Stanford heavyweight-- or the boxer in that class incidentally was Eric Pedley.*

[End tape 2, side 1]

[Begin tape 2, side 2]

Well, I haven't told you much about Walt Gordon. I've told you an awful lot about myself.

*Jimmy Doolittle and Eric Pedley were both middleweights. [Ed.]

Brower: Well, I've been delighted that you have. Your recollections help fill out the Walter Gordon story.

Selvin: The fact is that Walt and I were not what you might call close. Oh, I left out one thing that once again involves Gordon, Barnes, and me. The Berkeley Breakfast Club several years ago, inaugurated an award to be given to the University of California athlete who had made a success in life, a distinguished success, not necessarily one who made a lot of money but who had contributed something to civilization in other words. They named it after Walt. It's the Walter A. Gordon Award and the first one to receive it was Walt himself. The second one to receive it was Stan Barnes and the club asked me to make the presentation. I don't belong to the club but they knew that I was an old friend of Stan's and one thing or another. So, they asked me to make the presentation to Stan. That was, I guess, a year ago just before the Big Game. So, I did. I told them a lot of lies about Barnes. [Laughter]

Brower: I have that tape.

Selvin: My talk?

Brower: Yes.

Selvin: I didn't know it had been taped. There was a microphone in front of me but that wasn't unusual.

Brower: You were being taped.

Selvin: Well, that's an invasion of my privacy!

Brower: They didn't tell you?

Selvin: No. That was a labor of love. I was delighted to do it because of the long relationship between Stan and myself and because of Walt's involvement in it, although Walter wasn't there. He was too ill to be there.

Brower: I think his son was there, was he not?

Selvin: Well, if he was he didn't come up. I didn't see him. I think, yes, I think I told them the story about Walt Gordon being the speaker at the L.A. Bar and what Stan had to do with it. I know I wanted to tie the three of us up together some way or another and that was as good a way as any that I could think of to do it.

Transcriber: Teresa Allen
Final typist: Lee Steinback



Lee Eisan
ca. 1929

Interview with Lee G. Eisan

Interview History	36
Walter Gordon as Football Scout	37
Walter Gordon and Coaching	39
Football Travel	42
Lee Eisan's Career	43
Changes in Racial Attitudes	44
Walter Gordon and his Family	46
Walter Gordon's Love of Eating	47
Memorable Games of the Late 20s	48
Nibs Price	56
Coaching During the Depression, and After	57

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Lee G. Eisan played quarterback on the University of California varsity team from 1927 through 1929. The rules governing football at that time resulted in a very close working relationship between the quarterback and the scouts, and this relation obtained between Lee Eisan and Walter Gordon. Shortly after Lee Eisan's graduation from the university, he became football coach at LaVerne College in southern California. Walter Gordon took two days out of a busy schedule to work out with the LaVerne team and to advise Eisan on coaching, showing himself to be an innovative coach in the process.

After five years at LaVerne College, Lee Eisan became football coach at San Francisco City College (now San Francisco State University), where he remained after he retired from coaching, teaching courses in real estate in addition to the health education course he had already been giving there. During his early days in coaching, Lee Eisan also officiated at football games, which precluded his seeing any University of California games for many years after he was out of college. He has a particular interest in the changes in football rules over the years and the implications these changes have for the nature of the game.

A single interview took place on January 12, 1977 in a conference room of the Bancroft Library. Occasional visitors wandered in, but they scarcely interrupted the replay taking place on the big library table of the great games of the twenties.

The editorial changes Lee Eisan made on reviewing the transcription were chiefly to clarify details of games that were described.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: 12 January 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH LEE G. EISAN

Walter Gordon as Football Scout

Brower: Mr. Eisan I wonder if you'd tell me, if you can remember, when you first met Walter Gordon?

Eisan: The first time I met Walter was really when I was a freshman here at the university, as I remember it. Actually, I didn't have too much to do with him until we were in our sophomore year because Walter wasn't a true coach in the sense that we think of coach, he was primarily our chief scout. While of course he came back after he had scouted these various teams and put some of our substitutes through their formations against us, he didn't individually do coaching as we generally think of a line coach today.

Brower: And you were on the varsity and the actual coaching he did do was confined to the Goofs and the Ramblers?

Eisan: That was quite true. However, Walt's main job was to go ahead and scout the defense and offense of the contending team, particularly their weaknesses and any plays that he thought would work. What you have to remember is that back in those days the quarterback was practically an offensive coach, that there were no plays that could be sent in from the sidelines, that if a player came into the game, he couldn't talk to anyone for one play. A lot of times they'd say, "Come on, gang," or something like that and they'd get a fifteen-yard penalty. It was quite different from today when the coaches have signals to send every play in because it's now legal.

As a consequence the quarterbacks always had to work with the scouts. After they came back we generally talked to them and they told us what they thought would be the plays that would work, and what wouldn't.

Eisan: Walter and I had a real good working arrangement for the last two or three years so I got to know him pretty well from that angle.

From the standpoint of Walter giving you some of the opposing team's weaknesses, I don't think anybody really even to this day with all their photographs and whatever they take, and microphones they're able to talk into now—he used to come back with some pretty good ideas of what plays would work and what defenses would work against the opponents.

Brower: He must have had a real sense for that. Some former Cal player has said that in one game he felt he was just acting out a scenario that had been written by Walter Gordon because everything happened just exactly the way he said it would.

Eisan: This was quite true. While naturally Nibs [Price], the head coach, would try to figure out some of these plays, nevertheless, once the game started the quarterback was in complete control. There was nothing that the coach could really do about it because of the rules, not only against talking from the sidelines and sending in plays, but against substituting.

In those days, if they didn't like what you did and they took you out, you couldn't go back in until the next half in some cases, and later, about the time I was finishing up, you had to be out for the rest of the quarter, so they were very cautious about who they took out and who they put in.

Brower: I hadn't realized that those rules had changed.

Eisan: I have been doing a check-up on the rules. I was going to write a couple of articles, which so far I haven't done.

Just to give you an illustration, I took the difference in the balls. Originally, when they first started, the ball had a circumference of twenty-six and a half inches, and now it's twenty-one and a half. You can imagine the difference in throwing that ball. It's trying to throw a rugby ball, practically. It was different also in receiving a pass and in kicking.

Actually, it was an easier ball to kick, but no matter how you kicked it, it only went a certain distance, where with the smaller ball, if you happen to catch it perfectly it spirals much better and goes a whole lot further.

At any rate, getting back to Walter, because of the fact that he was mostly scouting and showing offensive and defensive plays, he never really had a chance to put into effect some of his ideas about team defense. Then I think secondly, when I was playing, which was in

Eisan: '27, '28, and '29, we were still too close to the Wonder Teams where they were just so far superior to their opponents that it really didn't make any difference what kind of a defense they had. [Laughing]

Brower: It must have been a sad time, in a way, to come into football. That's when I came on the campus and there was a long losing streak, wasn't there?

Eisan: What happened was, it wasn't too bad when I was there. They started downhill in '25. I think they lost three games. Then '26 was a very disastrous season. That was Nibs's first season. He had lost a great many players and we were all freshmen and freshmen couldn't play in those days.

In the next three years, '27, '28, and '29 we lost three games our sophomore year (which today would be considered a winning season, but following the Wonder Teams where they never lost any, why we didn't look so well), and the same thing in '28 and '29 when we tied for the conference championship. We actually only lost one game in those two years.

Brower: The Wonder Team was a hard act to follow.

Eisan: That's right. We were actually unscored in 1928 up to the Big Game and then they tied us up 13-13. Then in the Stanford game my senior year, we went up to the Stanford game unbeaten and Stanford really walloped us, twenty-one to six.

Walter Gordon and Coaching

Eisan: But as I say, going back to Walter, the fact is he never really had a chance to put some of his team-defenses ideas into the picture. Nowadays, the defense has as many different formations as the offense does.

Brower: Was this because of the nature of his job, or was he sort of diffident in putting his ideas forward?

Eisan: I think it was the nature of his job, partly, and the fact that he had a whole series of line coaches, two of whom played for the Wonder Teams, Cranmer and MacMillan, and naturally, with the success they'd had with those defenses they weren't going to change very much.

Our standard defense in those days was called the seven-man line with a diamond defense, in other words one fullback and two halfbacks out, and in the safetyman. Then you got a little more daring and you

Eisan: went into a six-two, you pulled the center back and you had two line-backers. Those were your two main defenses. However, we did occasionally use a five-man defense with pulling back, generally, somebody at the last minute so we had three linebackers, but a lot of times they stayed in the line and jumped out of the line.

That was about as close as we ever came to our present-day defenses. Now you have so many it isn't even funny.

Brower: Do you think that if Walter Gordon had been the coach, let's say, he would have had a different approach?

Eisan: I think he would have been much more of an innovator. The reason I say that is that when I graduated from Cal I went directly as head coach to a small school in southern California called LaVerne College. In spite of the fact that I knew a great deal, I thought, about offensive football and sizing up plays that I thought would work, I really didn't know anything about individual line play and certainly I didn't know anything about any type of new innovative defenses that we might be able to put out.

As I was coaching a very weak team (they hadn't won a ball game I think in five years when I went there) I knew I was going to have to come up with a lot of stunts in offense and defense to ever do anything.

That spring of the first time that I went down there, Clint Evans and Walt were going down on a recruiting trip. In those days they just went to see people, and tried to talk them into Cal. Clint had coached in that area at Pomona High School. They made a special effort to have two free days, particularly Walter--Clint came for one afternoon--and I got the fellows out.

Walter put on a suit and everything and he went through various individual things that the players should do, both offense and defense, stances and so forth.

I can still remember him showing the linemen his knuckles and his hands, which were all scarred. In those days you had real hard cleats with little tiny ends to them and you got your hands stepped on all the time and they didn't cover them the way they do now either. He told them if they were going to be linemen they should make up their minds they were going to get their hands stepped on a few times.

After he had worked out with them, he showed me what were some of the things that he thought I could do playing in this type of a league with these players. He didn't say that he would like to see it any place else.

Eisan: One of them was going much more into a five-man line with three linebackers with one of the men coming sometimes off the end and sometimes off the middle, and so on, on a prearranged signal.

Brower: Don't you think he must have enjoyed this a good deal himself? He must have been, in some ways, a frustrated coach.

Eisan: I don't think there was any question that Walter was, at that time. I don't like to bring anything into the picture with regard to black and white, but at that time I don't know that there were any truly black coaches who had a really important job in the actual coaching of a team. Not that the scout isn't important now.

Now at Cal you have a regular scout team that they pick for that. I know that because my son was on the scout team for several years. They play a very important part in the campaign for the next weekend. I would say that outside of the individual first string of the varsity players, they're almost the most important people on the campus--and that includes the scout coach.

At any rate, down there [at LaVerne College] Walt showed me how to work this five-man line and we worked it very, very successfully against almost all the teams in the league until some of them started to catch on.

He also had some other gimmicks where on one play all of the linemen would charge on an angle and take the man to the left (which generally confused the offense), and on another one they'd go to the right, and so forth.

He left holes also, when we were using a five-three where the linebackers actually were no longer fullbacks they were just linemen about a yard to a yard and a half back, which is very similar to what the Oakland Raiders are using right now on a three-four. They have three men down on line and four backfield men, but to all intents and purposes about two of them are really linemen who get into the line almost immediately as the ball is snapped.

So as I say I thought Walter Gordon was really far ahead. As I look back upon it now, I didn't realize it as much then as I do now.

I feel he was a wonderful person in that he took so much interest that he was willing to give me two days of his time down south and refused any monetary reward for it, and just did it out of friendship.

Football Travel

Eisan: An interesting thing (I don't know whether you'll want to use this) about ten years later I was doing a lot of refereeing in the PAC-8 [Pacific Area Conference]. I coached five years at LaVerne and then San Francisco City College opened up and I decided I wanted to come back. There was a Depression on and things were pretty bad in the small colleges.

So I took a job at City College and I then began to do a lot of officiating in the PAC-8, at that time called the Pacific Coast Conference I guess. When we traveled we had to travel by train in those days. I met Walter going up to scout even then. I don't think he was scouting my game. I think I was going up to Oregon and he was going up to Washington State. As I say, you generally went by train (although they did have airplanes in those days).

Brower: Walter Gordon never went on an airplane then. He didn't like them.

Eisan: I don't think he ever did, but even then you weren't supposed to go on the plane because if something happened then you didn't get there and so forth--got fogged in or something like that. That was their main objection I think.

Brower: It wasn't as sure as the train?

Eisan: No, although I can give you a story on that.

Anyway, I met Walter on this one going up and we discussed for a good many hours various items. Then I remarked on the fact that he had slimmed down terrifically. He looked as trim as he must have in his playing days. (I think probably even slimmer, because that's one thing Walter liked to do was eat.)

So I said, "What happened to you? You look terrific." He said, "Well, I'll tell you, Lee. One day I just looked into the mirror and I said, 'You big, fat slob, you. You're supposed to be an inspiration to some of the members of your race and look what you look like.' I decided right then and there that I would go ahead and at least make myself look fit." And he did. He kept it up for a long period of time.

Going back to this story about plane travel, now this is not Walter's story, Lloyd Leith, a good friend of mine, was in charge of the Pacific Conference basketball officials and they were having a meeting in November and I think I was going up to work the Oregon--Oregon State game. He wanted me to fly up with him on Friday afternoon. I said, "I can't. We're not allowed to fly." His meeting was Friday night. He said, "Come on. The plane leaves at three and the train leaves at five-thirty. If something happens you can still get the train."

Eisan: He talked me into it. We got to Eugene without any problem. The next day I waited and waited for the other two officials from the Bay Area. (Luckily one was from Portland.) They didn't show up. Game time came and they still didn't show up. We didn't have an alternate in those days. We had a chain man who had some experience and there happened to be an official in the grandstand who wasn't connected with either team and I got him down there, so we had our four officials.

Just as the game ended the other two officials from San Francisco came walking onto the field with their suitcases. What had happened was they had taken the train and after they had gone about 150 miles the train had jumped the track and they were stuck out there in the wilds someplace. In this case I made it and they didn't. [Laughing]

Lloyd Leith scouts the officials for the NFL [National Football League] now.

Lee Eisan's Career

Brower: You came along seven years after Walter Gordon? You graduated eleven years after him?

Eisan: Yes, I graduated in '30 really, actually December '29 because I was a mid-year graduate. I took my fifth year here and finished up in the summer, although I already had a job in a college and didn't need the credential. I just wanted it in case.

Brower: Did you know much about the rest of Walter Gordon's life?

Eisan: Not a great deal, no.

Brower: When you came to Cal he was in law school.

Eisan: Yes, that was when he was working on that. Then he became governor of the Virgin Islands.

Brower: That was about '55. Did you remain in touch with him over the years?

Eisan: No. I kind of felt that people go out of your life a little. Particularly once he got out of the country, we never saw him at any games or anything from there on.

Brower: He was away a long time.

Eisan: Furthermore, even when he was over here, I never got to see any Cal games because I was always working and I couldn't work for Cal.

Eisan: I don't know how many years I was out of school before I ever saw a Big Game. The only reason I saw that was because I was working USC [University of Southern California]-UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] on Thanksgiving or something like that, and I saw the Cal game.

Brower: That's a shame, really.

Eisan: It really was, but in those days the extra money came in pretty handy and it kept you interested in football, too, which was a big item.

Brower: What have you done since LaVerne and S.F. City College?

Eisan: I stayed at S.F. City College the whole time I was coaching football, and later baseball. They didn't have a baseball coach for a couple of years. When they finally got one again I retired from that.

Whenever I retired from coaching I picked up something else. I was teaching health education along with my coaching for a good many years. Then when I gave up coaching I had to pick up so many units teaching and I was interested in real estate so I put some real estate courses in. They've become quite a big part of the business department now, but up to that time they weren't much really.

I taught aspects of real estate and property values. There were about four courses that we put in that the state wants you to have if you're going to be a broker, or even a salesman now, I guess.

Changes in Racial Attitudes

Brower: Did you have any racial problems at City College?

Eisan: At San Francisco we never thought anything about it. The thing that aggravates me a little bit--for instance we called someone who came over here (and because really of his race and that they were loath I think to put him on the first string, but he was terrific), a fellow named Francis, "Smoke" Francis. We wouldn't dare call him Smoke anymore.

Another kid that we had was Mocha Robinson--Mocha, like coffee or something. You didn't think anything about it. They never thought anything about it and neither did we. That's like somebody calling you Fat or Skinny or something of this nature. I don't think we had any ideas of this at all.

Eisan: I know when I was at Poly [Polytechnic] High School we had just two blacks on the squad. Before our school started we used to run out to the beach and back to get in shape. Most of us lived in the Richmond and the Sunset districts and we'd meet. They always ran along with us and when we came back we'd stop at somebody's house and they'd have cokes and cookies for us.

[Laughing] Running to get in shape and then drinking coke and cookies! In those days you weren't even supposed to drink a coke. I remember Charlie Voltz was our trainer and that was one of his things. "Don't drink cokes, they're bad for you." Whether they are or not I don't know. Bad for your teeth, at least.

We didn't have any feelings at all really of that nature against anyone. I don't think that there has been too much race feeling in athletics, actually.

I think some of the feelings probably that have come up at various times are perhaps jealousy, and jealousy now more on the part of the whites because some of the blacks are really so good, and particularly in professional ball are getting so much more money than they are (largely because they seem to be all ends and backfield men, although there's a lot of good linesmen).

Brower: Did you ever hear anything about Walter Gordon's boxing experience?

Eisan: No, I never did.

Brower: That was a case where Stanford did have a color line.

Eisan: I didn't realize that. But there were very few--

In the first place we didn't have that many blacks, really. There were only about five thousand blacks in San Francisco at the time. There weren't many, really, on the whole coast. So the numbers that were actually even in high school athletics were very few.

You would think that a place like Poly, which theoretically at least was supposed to be for the blue-collar class, would have a great many of them. But we didn't. Actually Commerce had more, although I will admit that a great many of them were women who were typists and were going in for typing and that type of thing (although Commerce taught a regular college course, too, that was what you went to Commerce for).

Brower: There was only a small black population in the area then.

Eisan: At Cal, here, I had the James Kenney Playground down by Eighth and Delaware and had it for three years. That was almost a complete Mexican group there. Our black group was more over by San Pablo. We never had

Eisan: any problem at all in our interplay between various schools. Softball, baseball, basketball, and touch football were generally what we played.

For some reason or another, very few of our Mexican group went to high school in those days. We had the junior high and then they seemed to do an awful lot of dropping out. I imagine this might have been pretty well true of the black group also.

They just weren't encouraged to go on by parents, probably, and friends and that. Of course, it was a lot easier to get a job in those days, even if the jobs were not going to lead to anything in most instances

Walter Gordon and His Family

Brower: You didn't ever know Mrs. Gordon, then?

Eisan: No. I knew the son, Walter, Jr.

I know Walt was quite disappointed in his son. He got married and left school.

Brower: They married very young, both sons.

Eisan: Yes, he told me that. He said, "I tried to show them that if you want to be a truck driver, that's exactly what you're going to be." He couldn't put it over.

Brower: In the end I guess he was pretty happy because Walt Gordon followed him in the Adult Authority and Ed Gordon is a dentist.

Eisan: Yes, they turned out real well, but he didn't think--

Brower: He was worried about that early marriage, I think.

Eisan: Yes, that was the thing. He just felt, "Now, okay, they're not going to be able to go to school, they're going to have to go to work, they're going to have to take the best-paying job they can find like driving a truck, and they'll be making the same money forty years from now as they are now, and so forth and so on." He kind of felt that for all the direction he had tried to give them and all the examples and that, he had been almost a failure as a father from that standpoint.

Brower: Of course, he couldn't have spent very much time with them when he was doing so many things.

Eisan: [Laughing] No, that was another point.

Brower: Ed Gordon told me his father and mother did everything they could to persuade him and his brother not to marry so young, but once the boys made the decision and they saw they couldn't change their minds, they did everything they could to help. I thought that was very nice, because some parents would have kept on making problems.

Eisan: Walt had talked to me just before Walt Gordon, Jr. got married and said that he was still trying to persuade him in every manner shape and form. [Laughter] Like I told him, trying to overcome love is something different.

In this day and age they would have just probably lived together and both of them work.

Brower: Yes, but you didn't do that then.

Eisan: No, you certainly didn't.

Brower: His daughters-in-law were very devoted to him. I talked with Ed Gordon's wife. I'm sure that in a very short time the senior Gordons reconciled themselves to the early marriage.

Eisan: I imagine so. Walter was too--

I never ever heard Walter ever say one word in criticism of anybody, really, other coaches, other players, or anybody else. He might say they were tough, or something else, but he would never say they were dirty or anything like that. He didn't use those kind of words.

Walter Gordon's Love of Eating

Eisan: Those are most of my recollections of him. I know he was a very heavy eater. I had been to lunch and other places with him, and a couple of days he had stayed at my house. But on the train on the way up there, after my talk with him, we were having dinner together and he ate almost nothing. I exclaimed, "What happened to your appetite?" He said, "The same thing that happened to my weight. I just lost it." I guess he probably had a tendency to put on weight anyway. Some people do, and you fight it all your life. Put weight on and take it off.

Brower: Do you remember the kind of food he ate? Was he a soul-food man?

Eisan: No, not as near as I could see. He liked lots of meat and potatoes and so forth.

Eisan: When he was down at our place the beginning of the Depression was on. I can still remember we bought pork chops which was almost an insult to him, you might say, probably, but we never even thought of it. My wife and I and Walter were there, only the three of us, and we had about six or seven pretty good pork chops. In those days pork was very, very cheap. We used to live a lot off of pork. We could get a big pork roast, not ham or a picnic, for about twelve cents a pound and if you got about a ten pounder it lasted you almost the week until you didn't know what to do with it, really.

Brower: Unless you had Walter Gordon to dinner!

Eisan: Yes. [Laughter]

Memorable Games of the Late '20s

Brower: I'm glad to hear about the innovative coaching that apparently he would have done.

Eisan: I certainly think he would have. I imagine those were his own ideas.

Like I said, as a quarterback I went to a great many games. As a matter of fact, my senior year some of us went out and scouted Stanford-USC and didn't play. They booked the Olympic Club game as a second-string game and so we were free to go down there.

From that I think we won the game. I watched Arbelbide. Walter had told me about him before, also--to watch the way he came in. He came in like Brick Muller, but he used too much of a pattern. He'd come in two plays and then stay out one or three, or whatever it was, so you could figure it out after awhile.

This is what happened the second half. I waited and took a little chance on a punt formation on the third down and Bennie [Lom] went eighty-five yards for a touchdown. When Arbelbide came in we had the fullback take him on in and as I came around I was able to get the first fullback and somebody hit the half and all Ben had to do was out-manuever the safety man and he went eighty-five yards for a touchdown. I think a lot of that was due to Walter telling me to keep an eye on Arbelbide, who he thought was a key to the defense.

Brower: I've written Ben Lom a letter asking him to describe that game to me and he hasn't acknowledged it. Maybe you'd be willing to give that game in a little more detail.

Eisan: We clearly out-played them. We had them fifteen to nothing. If we hadn't played a very conservative game we should have scored a couple more touchdowns against them.

Brower: Could I back up just a minute? When you said you went down and scouted, did you go down with Walter?

Eisan: No. We went down with a team group and I think Walter was there ahead of us.

Brower: You didn't get together? He watched from the end zones didn't he?

Eisan: Yes, a great deal. Most of us did. You have a much better chance on an angle. You don't want the real end, but if you get an angle, right about the five-yard line up high--as a matter of fact I still sit there and if you go up there you'll see that that's where Pappy Waldorf always sits.

You can see whether they've made any yardage, you still can see the hole as it opens, and you have a much better chance of seeing who's blocking and who isn't. If you're straight in you can see a hole, but you really can't tell who makes a good block and who can't. You're much better off in the angle. I never sit in the middle unless I have to.

Brower: You scouted the Stanford-USC game, but not in the company of Walter Gordon?

Eisan: No.

Brower: Just tell me once more how the following Cal-USC game went, because it has so much interest to so many people.

Eisan: I don't remember all of the things, but I remember one touchdown we made. We went down on various number of plays and we used to save a lot of third-down plays for me because I got to the point where I didn't pack the ball much anymore. I was blocking, calling signals, and catching passes and little short-screen passes, generally. I had caught one pass that gave us the ball about on the seven-yard line. On the next play we used a reverse from Lom to Griffiths, I think. Generally we had a fullback on that play. I guess it was Griffiths who went over the goal line on that one, which I think was the first touchdown.

In those days, both in '28 and '29, if we ever made thirteen points we figured we had the game won, because we had a really good defensive team. I think we spent almost more time on defense than we did on offense, particularly our kicking game. Bennie was a wonderful kicker. When things were tough, that's when he kicked best.

Eisan: We used to kick on third down and not take a chance that somebody might block a kick on fourth or a bad pass. I still think it's not a bad idea.

Brower: [Laughing] It used to madden me!

Eisan: When you get down on your own five-yard line and you've got eighteen yards to go and third down, I think you're ridiculous not to kick. Then, once in a while you can run a punt play from it.

This is what we did on third down. We'd been kicking on third down in that situation. Arbelbide came in to block the kick and somebody just kept him right on going, which was our fullback who was playing that left spot. On a punt formation you have two men here and a third man here [making hand motions], which was me, and Bennie back here. He'd make a good fake. He wouldn't stop running. He'd make the fake on the kick and then I'd cross over and they'd follow me.

In the meantime they took Arbelbide in and the end instead of going down, picked off the tackle and took him in, and that left only the halfback and the linebacker on that side, who was [Nate] Barringer, and I was lucky enough to get Barringer. One of the guards had cut through and taken down the halfback, at least bumped into him and by that time Bennie was by him. The safety man had been back to get the kick so [laughing] he was quite a ways down all by himself.

It's almost impossible to tackle a man with Bennie's speed and shiftiness when you're all by yourself out there. You might slow him up a little. But by that time there was nobody behind to catch up with Bennie so he continued on for eighty-five yards.

Then we got a safety which gave us fifteen to nothing and from there on we just played pretty much of a defensive game.

Right at the end of the game they finally got down to about the four-yard line and finally went over.

I don't think they should have. I think we had relaxed quite a bit. As a matter of fact, I also think we had quite a few subs in at that time.

Brower: They used to put men in like that, didn't they, at the last minute?

Eisan: Yes. We did a lot of that, so they could get their letters.

I don't like to say this, but this is probably one of the things that cost us the Stanford game in my junior year.

Eisan: We were winning thirteen to nothing. Then they got thirteen to seven and we had five seconds to go. Of course it didn't look like they could possibly score. They had the ball out on our forty-five yard line, I think, and one play left. They took me out for safety and put someone else in. This player is all tied up, but he doesn't expect anybody's going to get a forty-five yard pass.

They took a tackle back and he wound up and threw one to the end.

I still think the guy was clean out of the end--I hadn't even gotten to the bench yet when the guy caught the ball and they tied the score.

Then they still had the chance to beat us by kicking the extra point, but in those days, if the defensive team was offside, they automatically got the extra point.

We blocked the kick, but I wouldn't doubt that there were five guys offside on the play. I'm just guessing this. There wouldn't have been an official in the world who would have dared to call it because you had about forty thousand Cal people already on the field [laughing] who had just expected to celebrate five seconds before. If it had turned out like that I think they would have mobbed everybody in sight.

Brower: The best thing to do was accept the tie.

Eisan: Yes. They didn't do anything [laughing] and we ran off the field and that was the end of that.

That was a disappointing end because we had clearly outplayed them throughout the whole ballgame.

Brower: That was in '28?

Eisan: Yes, that was in 1928.

Then of course we had our problems at the Rose Bowl after that, as you know. Roy [Riegels] ran the wrong way, which is easy to do.

There were a lot of funny commentaries on that. Bert Schwarz had had a chance to pick the ball up too and Riegels picked it up in front of him, ran to the side a little, and then down the field the wrong way. Everybody chased him down. I was sitting on the bench at that time. (I always tell all my players that I did because they used to say I blocked for him as he ran the wrong way. [Laughter] I have to disclaim that, of course. At any rate, I was sitting on the bench.) As they ran down the field, Schwarz and Bancroft slowed up and Bert said, "I'm sure glad Roy picked that ball up. If I'd of picked it up I'd have run the other way." [Laughter] Which would have been the right way. Bert was our All-American Guard that year. They both told me this afterwards.

Eisan: Another one which was a really ridiculous one was when Bennie was kicking. They made their own score by blocking a kick and we lost eight to seven. As a matter of fact they blocked two kicks.

Bennie had caught Roy about the one-yard line, but very close over by the sideline.

Again, in those days, you put the ball where it came down unless it went out of bounds. You didn't do any of this moving it in eighteen yards. This meant sometimes the center was even on the end of the line. They put about ten men on the line to block the kick.

This was another point. Clint used to send me in right then and there and throw a pass. We had a fake kick and a little short pass to me, which I thought would have been completed. Nibs said, "No, it's too early in the game. Let's wait and see how they get out of it." (This was the first quarter.) They blocked the kick and got a safety.

A little later we hadn't made any yardage to speak of. I had had a bad back and that's one reason I hadn't started. I just wrenched it, nothing really serious, but I hadn't practiced for a couple of days and so Nibs started Breckenridge.

At any rate, Bennie went to kick the ball. (Again, in those days, the only legal ball was a ball that you pumped up through a stem. Then you bent the stem over and you put it under the laces and you laced it up. We had other balls at that time, but they weren't legalized yet.) Evidently, when Ben kicked this ball the thing went off. [Making loud clap] We don't know whether it was when he kicked it or when the guy blocked it, but the ball went dead, collapsed. They recovered it on our fifteen-yard line and [laughing] went in on the first play on the setup from there. That was another screwy thing. All kinds of things happened.

Then we scored.

Later we were not doing too well offensively. Towards the end of the game Phillips--Irv could throw a pass just about as far as Muller. When Brick Muller threw a pass (of course we're off Walter Gordon by a good deal) why it went about eight feet in the air just like a shot.

Drifting aside again for a minute, when I was a high school kid we used to go over and watch the games from San Francisco, not too often, but once in a while. Before one game in practice Brick had chased a ball, I guess this was in 1921, over to the sideline. He was about five yards outside the field of play. He picked it up and started to throw it back to the guy who had thrown him the ball. The field was 160 feet across, five yards outside was another fifteen feet, and a

Eisan: player was drinking out of the bucket, one of his own men on the other sideline. (We weren't too clean, I guess, in those days. Now you squirt that thing into your mouth.) [Laughter]

Instead of throwing it back to the man who threw it to him, he threw that ball and he hit that bucket. Probably broke that guy's teeth, a stupid thing to do. He probably couldn't do it again in a hundred years, but he did it that day. We saw it. We were watching. What a show! You can figure a sixty-yard pass and he hit that bucket.

He used to throw passes to me down the field and the only way I could ever get it back was to have somebody about half way to relay it back to him, when we were out there in practice and he was helping the coach.

Irv Phillips could throw a pass about as far as Brick, but when he threw it it was like a punt. We had the same play where I would come around from the right halfback behind the line of scrimmage, Phillips would drop back and they'd throw him a lateral (we used it a little differently than Muller, who used to go down in the backfield), and while they were watching him then I'd go down the sideline. In this particular case, no one was near me. I got down the field and so far behind everybody that when he threw the pass and it was supposed to come on the left sideline, I looked up and the ball was coming down the middle of the field. In trying to get over to it it's like you're skating and you cross your feet. They had put mud cleats on my shoes and they were quite a bit bigger than the other. (I use this as an excuse, of course.) I hit a clod about the twenty-yard line and I started to stumble. I stumbled for about fifteen yards and fell flat on my face on the three-yard line. I don't think the ball landed more than about six feet away from me. If I had caught it it would have been the longest pass at that time probably on record and it would have also won the ballgame.

People forget all about that. Although when we got out afterwards and the papers were being sold outside the stadium. In those days they put most of the stuff in the front headlines on special paper. They had big headlines "Georgia Tech wins eight to seven." The second headline, about an inch thing, "Riegels runs wrong way." And then the third line, about a half inch thing, "Eisan faw down and go boom." Somebody with a very perverted sense of humor. [Laughter]

I don't know how many papers I had sent to me. My mother used to keep clippings on it. We threw all the bad ones away [laughing] so I don't have any, but it would be worth while having it.

Bower: That would be '29?

Eisan: That was January 1, '29.

Eisan: In the '29 season we were pretty well picked for the Rose Bowl. At that time the Rose Bowl had a committee. They could pick nearly anybody, but they always picked the winner of the Coast Conference. Of course we had beaten USC rather handily, but Stanford had beaten us and USC had beaten Stanford. I think Stanford had lost to someone else. So it was USC and ourselves for a tie.

We were trying to get the Big Ten winners to come. They more or less offer you the game without coming out in the open about it. If we could get Purdue out we wanted to play.

But we couldn't get Purdue and they were going to pick Pittsburg. We had so many cries of, "Professional team," "They haven't finished high school," and all this stuff, about Pitt.

We weren't that anxious to play. We, the players, the seniors, had played Pennsylvania in a post-season game my sophomore year, on the thirty-first, or something of December, then the Rose Bowl game our junior year. Going again, three years in a row, to the Rose Bowl really didn't seem to be that big. Plus there was the fact that some of us had to work. This was a chance to work for three or four weeks during the Christmas holidays. We had lost that for two years.

Not to mention the fact that I'd been out for basketball the first two years and never got out until the first or second of January, which practically killed any chance of me making the team. I always ended up making the squad, but that was about it.

Looking back we had a really wonderful time at Cal and Walter certainly was, to me, a large part of it because I had a closer contact because of the scouting than most people, except perhaps for Riegels.

Riegels was pretty much the defensive captain. He called the defensive plays, whether they were going to be a six—or a seven-man line. I'm sure that he must have had the same kind of relationship with Walter as I did, particularly when he knew what plays they were going to throw a pass on, or what they had been doing in passes, and this type of thing.

Brower: In your days in football then, did you ever have Andy Smith as a coach?

Eisan: No. What happened with me was that I finished high school in '23 and I stayed out two years. I played for the Olympic Club.

The first year, in '24, I think Cal beat us six to nothing. Then in 1925 we beat them, the first team to beat them in five years. I think we beat them very decisively fifteen to nothing, which against them was quite a good score. Then Saint Mary's beat them and Stanford beat them that year. So they lost three games, which still wasn't bad, but by the standards they had set, it was very poor.

Eisan: Then I was recruited to go to Cal, and so was Bennie [Lom], and Russ Avery. We were all former high school kids who hadn't been in college yet.

Andy died that December of pneumonia. In the meantime we had made our arrangements to come, and we would have come anyway.

Then Nibs stepped in and had a pretty disastrous 1926 season. But I think Andy would have had a tough time too because he had lost that group that had all come along at the same time.

They didn't have that many replacements. Actually the line in those days--I don't like to say this because some of the backs were terrific players like Duke Morrison, and Tut Imlay, and Pesky Sprott, and so on--but the line was so good that you could have put almost anybody back there and they would have really looked good.

Poor Charlie Erb was a great deal like I was, he was a terrific signal caller. (I didn't mean it that way [laughing]. I'm sorry.) I meant that he was a really good signal caller, but he could have called almost anything, and he never packed the ball.

One day they were leading about sixty to nothing and they were on the one-yard line. Erb wanted to make a touchdown. He'd never made a touchdown in spite of all the tremendous scores they ran up. Fat Latham was more or less the captain and he told everybody, "All right, Erb wants to make a touchdown." They had a signal all set: "We run around and pack the ball over."

His signal was that when he packed the ball they were all just going to lie down. [Laughter] And that's what they did. [Laughing] The other team just came right through, picked up Erb and threw him back about ten yards. [Laughter] That was the last time he tried to make a touchdown down on the goal line. That was Latham's idea.

Brower: That must have been a horrible thing to witness.

Eisan: Yes [laughing], it was a terrible thing for Erb. He was their leader and everything and they wouldn't even let him make a touchdown.

We're a little bit off the subject of Walter.

Brower: What did you think of Nibs Price as a coach?

Eisan: I think Nibs was a terrific coach along some lines. I don't think there's any question of that.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Nibs Price

Eisan: I think that Nibs very often felt a certain amount of affection for somebody and he would go ahead and try to give them every break that a person could have. On the other hand, sometimes he would lose his temper and really ball someone out, which he did with me one time, which I thought was unfair, and which he acknowledged later. I thought that was a big thing for a coach to do, as I'll explain.

We were trying to make a play around tackle go. They had a guy named Brick Williamson on the second team who was stocky and tough. He was charging straight across. It was impossible to make the play go around him.

After he had made two or three tackles (after all I was a quarter-back and should be sizing up things), we got back into the huddle and I said, "Why don't we go inside him a couple of times and make him behave?"

Nibs was mad at us, I guess, for not making the play work. He took off his megaphone and said, "You coach the team. You coach--you, you--You tell them what to play and what not to. Don't pay any attention to me, anybody." I hung my head dejectedly and said nothing and he knew I was pretty badly hurt.

That night at training table he got up from the table and stood behind me and said, "I'd like to have your attention." Everybody got quiet and stopped eating. He said, "Lee was right. There was no question on the setup. It was ridiculous to keep trying to run a play like that. He is the quarterback and I'm glad that he picked up that that was not the play that we should have been running."

Brower: That was a pretty big thing to do.

Eisan: Yes, for a coach, I think it was. He could have apologized to me privately but instead he didn't. He did it in front of everybody.

So, I sort of--well, I always had thought an awful lot of Nibs.

Of course, he was still under Andy's shadow a little bit, I think. During the first couple of years there was no question on that.

Brower: Andy Smith himself might have found it pretty difficult to go on with a different bunch of players.

Eisan: That's right. We were still playing kick and wait for the break, which was a good form of football. But we still had a really good passing attack, people who could catch passes.

I don't think we ever had the fullback that Nibs wanted. We ran our plays through Bennie [Lom], all of them except reverses. Nibs really wanted a good fullback who could handle the ball better and who could also play defense. We never really had one.

Remember, you had to play offense and defense. Actually, particularly when you were using a seven diamond, the fullback was the key man on defense. When you used a six, it was both he and the center. So it was pretty hard to get somebody who could really be the defensive man that you needed and still be able to handle the ball on some of the tricky reverses that Nibs wanted and still have a man able to cut through holes. They just didn't come along too often, and we never really had that in spite of the fact that we had some good fullbacks.

Rusty Gill was probably the closest to that that we had. I won't say anything about Rusty because he was a screwbox.

Charlie Schmidt was good in some things; Cockburn was good in some.

Moose Garrity was good in some--provided you told him on offense what to do. He had a good sense on defense, timing and that. On offense he got so excited--the same thing with kicking. He could kick the ball a mile if he could remember the steps, but you had to calm him down before his kick. He was about as nervous and high-strung as a colt, I guess.

Coaching During the Depression, and After

Brower: Can you think of anything else that we should cover? I wonder if you ran into Walter on any of the meetings before the Big Game, at Big C Society meetings, and things like that?

Eisan: No, because it was a good many years before I ever attended any. You see, I was down south for five years. Then, after that I was doing a great deal of officiating, not only for this conference but in high school.

At City College we practiced from 12:00 to 2:30, the only time we could get a field. So, I was free in the afternoons actually, and they were playing football every day in the afternoon in high school in San Francisco. They only had one field, and they played ball Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. I had almost every single game, plus the Saturday game sometimes.

Eisan: Then, if I had a local game like USF or Saint Mary's or Santa Clara on a Sunday, I would either take the Saturday game or Friday night game for Far Western, or something of that nature. So, I was really busy.

Same thing when you worked basketball. Basketball was worse because they would play at night. They were playing, like, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights. But, in those days you wanted to keep in with things. Plus, the extra money was very important then. It wasn't till after the war that schoolteachers or coaches really made a lot of money.

Brower: Or anybody else as I remember [laughter].

Eisan: No, but you take Nibs, and Clint. They never made any great amount of money here. Today the head coach does pretty well. I don't think the assistant coaches do--I don't know what the salaries are here, but Christianson was only getting \$27,000 down at Stanford as head coach, and here he had been coach of the Forty Niners. I think Stanford pays pretty poorly anyway. They have some other amenities that help out. You can live on campus.

Brower: Oh, you can?

Eisan: Well, you can buy a lot, or I guess you can build or you can buy a house from somebody that's transferring some place. You probably are not going to get a lot more for your money when you sell it or anything of that nature. But, then you have a golf course there. It's a terrific set up. You're really part of the campus, much more so than you are here, more like your Eastern campuses, I suppose.

Brower: I don't know that any other college quite offers that kind of living arrangement. It's a beautiful setting.

Eisan: No. I think in your small towns it's different. The whole town is there, and around the campus, and a lot of the professors live within a block of the campus and you don't have any commute. My brother teaches, is a professor at Hanover, teaches history, and he lives about half a block from the campus in his own house. I don't know how big Hanover College in Indiana is. But, it's fairly small. Of course, nothing is small now. Everything is three or four thousand I guess. But, in those days colleges were smaller.

Brower: Actually, this campus had faculty houses on it once, down where the Life Sciences Building is now.

Eisan: I don't remember that.

Brower: Do you think we've pretty well covered your memories of Walter Gordon?

Eisan: Yes. I think so.

Brower: Well, thank you and good-bye.

Transcribers: Gretchen Wolfe, Teresa Allen
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Robert Johnson
1928

Interview with Robert S. Johnson

Interview History	60
U.C. Athletes in the Twenties	62
Recruitment of Athletes	63
Status of Minority Students at U.C.	68
Walter Gordon and Race	71
Stanford's Color Line	73
Changes in Sports over the Years	74
U.C. Athletic Policy	76
Changes in the California Spirit	78
Walter Gordon's Place in History	81

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Robert S. ("Skinny") Johnson came to the University of California from Modesto Junior College in 1925 and was graduated in 1928. This was ten years after Walter Gordon's graduation, but the two men were students on essentially the same campus, imbued with the same California Spirit--the big changes were to come later.

Bob Johnson was a letterman in track, and over the years he had many opportunities to form friendships with UC athletes in all sports. Among his jobs as a student were guard duty at Old Cal Field and passing out athletic equipment in Harmon Gym, two places where these friendships began. On his graduation he was given the job of organizing Big C alumni into a dues-paying organization, and shortly thereafter he also took on the recruitment of athletes for all sports. One of his associated duties was to find summer and part-time jobs to keep needy athletes in school--not an easy task in the Depression years. The jobs were real ones, not sinecures, and the only inducement offered prospective recruits was "the best education on the West Coast."

In his many years of association with UC athletes Mr. Johnson has collected a rich folklore. When we discussed Walter Gordon, it became evident he must be among the interviewees, in spite of his protests that others could contribute first-hand material that he could not.

The Walter Gordon Project owes a significant debt to Robert Johnson. His long and painstaking labor in compiling lists of names and addresses of former football team members underlay the greater part of the fund-raising for the project. Most of the people interviewed in the course of this oral history were approached at Mr. Johnson's suggestion. His advice and counsel have been invaluable.

Robert Johnson's efforts in behalf of the Walter Gordon Project have been motivated not only by affection and respect for Walter Gordon, but also by his sense of Walter Gordon's place in history. He also has deep feeling for his alma mater and this contribution to the history of the University of California is clearly a labor of love.

Two interviews were held, on September 29 and October 6, 1977. With typical consideration, Mr. Johnson came to the Regional Oral History Office to tape them. There, in a crowded room in the middle of a campus whose buildings and denizens resemble those of the '20s very little, Robert Johnson gave this account. His emphasis was on Walter Gordon's place in the history of race relations as they

affected athletics, the University, the state, and the country. The interviews point up the dramatic changes that have occurred in the last decades and the long way yet to go.

Mr. Johnson had few editorial changes to make in the transcription; he had exercised thought and care in his responses when he was taped, and found little to alter.

Anne Brower

July 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: 29 September 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT S. JOHNSON

UC Athletes in the Twenties

Brower: I wanted to ask you first about your own first-hand recollections of Walter Gordon. When did you first meet him?

Johnson: I first saw Walter in the fall of 1925. I was one of the guards on the football field. Andy Smith was still coaching and Walter had his group of players down in one end of the field.

Brower: His group would be the Goofs?

Johnson: His group at that time was called the Goofs. Sometimes they were called the Reserves. Many years later during Stub Allison's time they came to be called the Ramblers.

Brower: There seems to be no indication in the letters from former players that they minded being called the Goofs.

Johnson: They were always referred to and they referred to themselves as the Goofs and I think you will find in some of the Daily Californian newspapers they were referred to as the Goofs. I don't think they thought of it as anything as far as they were concerned as demeaning. It was sort of a humorous appellation.

Brower: They had a very real role in helping California win?

Johnson: Indeed. One can only have the greatest admiration for them. Very few of them ever had any hope of getting to play in a regular game or of winning their Big C. They went out purely because they liked to play football and, above all, because they wanted to do something that was important to the success of the team.

Brower: When you saw him that day in 1925, do you remember how he impressed you?

Johnson: No, I don't. My attention was probably focused on the first team being coached by Andy and by Nibs Price at the time.

Brower: You were a guard on the football field. Did you often serve that way?

Johnson: Yes, several of us were paid to guard the fence around the field to keep St. Mary's---and I put this in quotes---"spies" and others from getting the plays and the formations.

Brower: Football was not your sport?

Johnson: It was in junior college. I played two years but when I came here I did not for two reasons. One, I was probably too light (I weighed 155 pounds). Second, and more important, I couldn't afford, since I was entirely self-supporting, to go out for any but one sport--track.

Brower: Track was your sport? What was your event?

Johnson: The low hurdles and the relay.

Brower: When was the next time you had some contact with Walter Gordon?

Johnson: My next occasion was when I came in physically to the coaches' offices. Bill Monahan had asked me upon my graduation in 1928 to take over the organization of the alumni Big C men to make a dues-paying organization of them and through this to defray my own salary. I then aided the coaches of all sports in organizing recruitment through our alumni and students and in assisting to secure jobs during both the summer and, part-time, during the regular year.

Recruitment of Athletes

Brower: This job of organizing the former Big C men was not your entire assignment---you also aided in recruitment of new players?

Johnson: Yes, I did.

Brower: For all sports?

Johnson: For all sports, yes.

Brower: What did that entail?

Johnson: Well, it entailed--at that time you must understand that the coaches were forbidden by Conference rules themselves to directly approach any of the athletes. We had no organization at the time. The University of Southern California had organized its Trojan Club and had paid recruiters and Stanford was also active in organized recruitment. That isn't to say that recruitment didn't go on at that time at Berkeley, but it was very disorganized and informal. I, for example, was brought up to the university by Jim Corley, then a Cal student and a friend from Modesto High School days, with no promise of anything except that he would try to help me find a job.

I must tell you honestly, that that was all that I ever could or did offer any of those I, myself, later recruited. But I did say one thing--that I could offer them something far more important for them in the long run, and that was the best education on the Pacific Coast. That was my selling point--that the University of California did not buy athletes, that we were too proud to buy them. We had something to offer and my program was to sell the university. My program was to sell the university.

Brower: Why didn't you offer financial subsidies to promising athletes?

Johnson: Because it was against the Conference rules, which all the members had agreed to honor.

Brower: Speaking of accidental recruitment, I guess a great many Wonder Team members came up from San Diego simply because Brick Muller's father had been their principal in grammar school.

Johnson: And because Nibs Price who had played football at Berkeley, was their high school coach and encouraged them to come. San Diego had a great team and won the state championship in the previous year. Most of them interestingly enough joined one fraternity, Sigma Chi, Nibs Price's fraternity. Also, Clint Evans, another old Cal football player, had had very successful high school teams at Pomona and a number of his players came up. There had been one man who almost personally, so I'm told, went out on his own and spent a lot of his spare time recruiting athletes for Andy Smith, a friend of Andy's called Jerry Mooma. He was an alumnus of this university. But after his death there was, as far as I could learn, very little being done except on a very individual basis--individual alumni or students would see some boy in a high school and talk to him about coming to this university.

Brower: But your recruitment brought you into the coaches' office and into contact with the coaches, including Walter Gordon?

Johnson: Yes, I had a desk across from Clint Evans, the assistant coach. Whenever they wanted to know something about a boy in high school they would ask me to find out, or if they had a boy on our team who needed a job they would ask if I couldn't help him to find one.

Johnson: I must also tell you that a great amount of the recruitment was done by the fraternities. As you may know, athletes in those days had a rather high amount of prestige. Members of the fraternities and the fraternities would rush the athletes even when they were in high school and sometimes pledged them. There was no rule at that time against it.

Brower: Were you in a fraternity?

Johnson: Yes, I was in a fraternity, Sigma Phi Epsilon, which, by the way, was the fraternity of the friend who brought me here, Jim Corley. I was pledged during the summer before I came to Berkeley.

Brower: But football wasn't an exclusive property of the fraternities, was it? Or people like Walter Gordon wouldn't have gotten on the team. The fraternities didn't totally control football?

Johnson: Oh, no, no, no. Not at all, not at all. In fact, the fraternities had no control of the membership of the teams. The coaches controlled them completely. When they were accused of racial bias, I remember Nibs saying, "That's stupid. I want to win games and I'll play the best players regardless of their race or their background or anything else. I want to win games."

Brower: Also, there wasn't a clique kind of thing, was there, where one fraternity man would pass to another fraternity member and not to anybody else? I remember hearing later on that you'd get a group within the team that sort of supported each other's plays to the detriment of the total--

Johnson: Oh, there's always been that rumor. That's charged, but I don't believe it.

Brower: You don't believe it ever happened?

Johnson: I don't believe it, not at any time. The first loyalty of the boys was to the university and the team. If it had been otherwise, their team mates and the coaches would have spotted it immediately and the guys would have been sent to the locker room.

The fraternities did help in the support of the athletes by furnishing them with what was known as hashing jobs. They waited on tables. Stanford did the same thing and those were regarded as among the best jobs on the campus because they required very little time outside of the noon hour or evening hour. During the football season, the team was on a training table and so the job would then, at least in our fraternity, usually go to some other athlete.

It's honest to tell you that I think that later this began to break down and that they began to give breaks in some of the fraternities--that was not true in my fraternity but in some of the fraternities, I understood--to the athletes so that the amount of work that was required of them became less and less.

Johnson: Also, about '29 or '30, a very large proportion of the first team was in one fraternity and that happened to be the time when we had a very poor year. There was some belief on the campus that there were some of the fraternity politics that you were talking about. I never believed it but I think Bill Ingram did because when Bill came he almost broke up the relationship between the fraternities and the team, which reduced by a great amount the financial support that the athletes were getting by means of hashing jobs and bed-making jobs and occasionally a job as a house manager. In our fraternity we may have had one or two athletes who were managers but nearly all of them were not because we thought of business ability rather than athletic ability as being the prime qualification for house manager. He had to collect the dues, buy the food and supplies, and keep the books.

In this connection, I do recall that I used to--after I came back from my summer survey around the state--I had a list of boys who were regarded by their coaches and by game officials as outstanding prospects. I not only gave this list to the coaches and had them follow up through some of their friends among the alumni high school coaches and officials, but I also turned this list over to all of the fraternities and many of them did follow up on this list. And I would write to local alumni, asking them to talk to the boys. This was our method of recruitment.

Brower: Were your expenses paid for these trips?

Johnson: Yes.

Brower: Minimally, I expect?

Johnson: [Laughs] Yes, I didn't make any money on the expense, I remember that. I stayed whenever I could in a home or sometimes, very rarely, in a hotel, sometimes in a fraternity house, believe it or not, of another institution. I think I got enough money to pay for my gasoline but not for my car.

Brower: Did you find better recruitment possibilities in the South than in the North?

Johnson: Indeed.

Brower: What do you attribute that to?

Johnson: I think to the better climate, to the larger number of athletes in the South, and to the greater emphasis given to athletics at that time in the South than in the North. To tell you the truth, as far as I know, many of our athletes then were what we now call walk-ons. They came onto the campus without any substantial amount of solicitation, waited until the Daily Californian announced a sign-up, and then showed up for the sign-up.

Brower: You must have had some pleasant surprises that way.

Johnson: Indeed. One of my friends told me about going out for football; he weighed about 150 pounds and got a uniform about twice too big for him but he said alongside of him with another cast-away uniform was a chap named Red Gill who also came from a very small little high school.

Brower: That family produced four great athletes.

Johnson: Yes, there were Red, Rusty, Harry, and Carol, or "Pinky." In addition, two of their cousins were also great athletes. One was a man who I think made both the football and the track teams; I can't recall his name. And a girl who was an outstanding tennis player. So that was quite a family.

They were all from a little town called Orcutt just south of Santa Maria.

My problem and the problem of the coaches was sometimes the letters we would get from alumni who would tell of some outstanding youngster. When we checked up we found that he was fine for high school football but entirely too small to play in college football, and then we had to somehow or other keep the alumnus mollified without giving the youngster too much encouragement, because we knew that he couldn't make the team and on the other hand the numbers of jobs that we had available were always limited.

We depended primarily upon summer jobs. We tried our best to get jobs with some of the oil companies and in warehouses and on the docks and other places. We hoped that the boys--and told them so--would come back with enough money to get through the fall.

Now, I know there's been talk about undercover financial help and I don't know how much of that went on. There may have been a few alumni who, on a person-to-person basis, helped some of the youngsters out.

Brower: It wasn't institutionalized though, was it?

Johnson: I personally was not aware of it. I don't believe that there was very much of it because when I think of an All-American like Ted Beckett coming in and asking for a job and of sending him down along with the Gill boys and others to Gerry Beuker's coal yard in Berkeley to sack coal at forty or fifty cents an hour, I can't believe they were making very much money under the table.

Brower: Was Walter Gordon involved in this recruitment effort?

Johnson: No.

Brower: So your contact with him in that office probably wasn't very great.

Johnson: No, he would come in on Mondays and say hello and give his notes to the coaches and that afternoon would take over the coaching of the Goofs for next week.

I must tell you though that Nibs once said that whenever he had a problem with one of the black athletes (Negroes we called them in those days), he always referred him to Walter Gordon, that Walter Gordon was a sort of father confessor to them. Some youngster would come in, hurt or upset or indignant, and he would have them go have a fatherly talk with Walter about it.

Status of Minority Students at UC

Brower: But Walter Gordon made no special effort to recruit black athletes?

Johnson: No, not at all. In fact, we had very few black athletes. I doubt if any black athletes were recruited by the University of California at that time, to tell you the truth. I don't recall personally ever recruiting a black athlete.

Brower: I noticed in going through the Blue and Gold for 1918 yesterday that there seemed to be Walter Gordon, period. No other black face appeared anywhere. I suppose there were other blacks on the campus at that time?

Johnson: I went through my 1928 Blue and Gold, that was ten years later, and I didn't see a single black face except on our track team where there were two or three boys. I will also say, frankly, that aside from those two or three boys I have no memory of any black people being on the campus--I'm sure there were but apparently I was not conscious of them.

Actually, even the Orientals had their own clubs and kept apart. It was not, I think, until the International House was established on the campus that we became conscious of other races. I'm sure that there were black students on the campus, as I've said, but, aside from athletics, I can't recall any of them being present--and only in two major sports, track and football. They took no part in any other athletics (except possibly boxing, then a minor sport).

Brower: In my day the only non-Caucasian athlete I can remember was Ted Ohashi on the basketball team.

Johnson: Yes, that was much later. That was regarded as almost unique, I think, to finally have someone of any other race on the basketball team.

Brower: One of the reasons I wanted to talk with you is that you told me so many good stories. As I look back over the interviews and letters I recall stories that the documentation isn't there for. I think you must have been the source of a great many. Would you like to go into those now?

Johnson: Yes. Well, I might explain that in those days the Big C Society was almost a fraternity of its own. We met every week for lunch at some fraternity house and so the members of the various major sports as they were then called became quite well-acquainted. Also, during my second fall at the university I had a job handing out athletic equipment in the gymnasium so I had an unusual opportunity to become acquainted with the football players. Then, of course, through my job in the athletic department I got to know many players. So I think I've had a rather extensive acquaintance with the members of football teams although I was not a part of the teams themselves. I presume it was through these connections that I picked up these stories that I'm telling you.

May I ask you did anyone tell you how Walter at first went north by train?

Brower: If you would like to record that I think that would be good.

Johnson: Well, I was told something about that, and I would be glad to confirm this by trying to call up some of the members at that time. That--of course, you realize again, this was during the period of Plessy v. Ferguson.

Brower: Would you explain the significance of Plessy v. Ferguson?

Johnson: The Plessy-Ferguson decision of 1893 allowed the races "separate but equal" (and I put those in quotations) accommodations on the train. Later this was extended, of course, to all other accommodations, hotels, restaurants, and so on, throughout the country, particularly in the South but also in the North, including this state.

Brower: But the original decision dealt specifically with trains?

Johnson: Yes, but it was extended to all accommodations so that when Walter initially would go on his tours, he would go by day coach, even to Seattle. It was the only way he could go. But soon friendly porters would give him a blanket so that he could lie down and get his rest in the men's room on the way north.

Brower: When he went with the team this would apply too, wouldn't it? Before he traveled alone for scouting?

Johnson: I don't know. I would like to find that out from some of the team members. Perhaps Stan Barnes could tell you or some of the earlier ones, some of the ones from his own team. I do know that--this was

Johnson: ten years later in 1926 to 1928--that the Negro members of our team would ride with us--we all rode by day coach to Los Angeles--and at the railroad station, Walter Christie, the coach, would give each of them a certain amount of money and tell them that we would meet them at the stadium.

I also am informed that Walter Gordon at first, when he arrived at these other cities, was not acceptable by any of the regular hotels and that he had to find his own accommodations either among hotels catering to Negroes or among friends, Negro friends.

Brower: Do I recall that you said that the Olympic Hotel in Seattle was the first to--

Johnson: I am informed (and I don't know who told me) that the Olympic Hotel, where our players also stayed, was persuaded by the coaches to admit Walter when he came up on his coaching expeditions. I understand that the Olympic Hotel at Seattle was the first to give way and that this was followed by the other hotels in the other cities, Los Angeles and elsewhere, who gave him the same privilege. It was almost, I would have to say, an individual privilege.

Brower: It was not a breaking down of racial barriers in a general sense? It was specifically for Walter Gordon?

Johnson: I think it was specifically for Walter. I'm sure that it was, although it was a breakthrough and probably made it easier for others later on to be admitted, especially if they were distinguished people of his race.

I also was told that the trains later gave way, probably through the traveling passenger agent, Henry Greenrose, who arranged all of the trips for our team, and that Walter was given a compartment in the Pullman section. I'm told that when he was a scout and when, on some trips North, he and the teams went together he always stayed in his compartment and that if any of the other members of the group, coaches or players, wanted to see him, they went to his compartment. I expect that this was also useful to him personally because as you may recall he was, in addition to working on the police force, studying to pass his bar examination.

Brower: I should think he would have just liked to sleep for awhile, poor man, with that schedule!

Johnson: Well, I have been told that through the football season he normally slept only about four hours out of the twenty-four.

Brower: You didn't have occasion with the black track men to go to Washington let us say--

Johnson: No, none of them went East the year I went to the national championships in the ICAAAA at Harvard. But one did go the previous year. He had my same name, by the way, and he also ran the quarter mile so that for a few weeks after my own career started I bore his name to the amusement of everyone else on the track team. But I don't know. I could check on that, where they put the black team members when the team went East.

Brower: Do you think the coaches were very aggressive in trying to get this changed?

Johnson: I don't know the extent to which they did. I know they were known to be friendly with Walter and would have done anything that they thought that they could do.

Brower: I was thinking in more general terms.

Walter Gordon and Race

Johnson: On the other hand, our track coach was prejudiced against the blacks.

Brower: This was Walter Christie?

Johnson: Walter Christie. He used to refer to them in opprobrious terms and epithets. The football teams may have been prejudiced, not against Walter Gordon but some of the other black men. I know it was true that the attitude on race of our team was mixed. There were some of us who treated Negroes in a friendly fashion and others of us who always referred to them with epithets. When the track team went on trips the black athletes, in general, stayed pretty much to themselves, even on the same day coach. They didn't have Walter Gordon's balance. They tended to be either very quiet and beaten down or, several of them, almost overly compensative and were thought of as loud and pushy. They were either one way or the other, but Walter Gordon always looked you in the face, and his behavior was like any other well-liked guy, neither too quiet and withdrawn nor too loud and aggressive.

Brower: Mrs. Gordon made a very interesting comment on that, I think. She said, "There are some people who are born free" and I think that's a superb way of expressing it.

Johnson: That's it, that's right.

Brower: But those epithets did disturb Walter Gordon because he remembered after all these years and mentioned in his interview with Mrs. Fry the name of a man who said something rude, I don't know what it was but it was offensive.

Brower: Among the other stories I got from you and I think nowhere else was the chocolate éclair story. Do you remember that one?

Johnson: Oh, I have heard this two or three times from different people so I'm certain that it must be true. This involved Malcolm Coombs who apparently had a very close relationship to Walter. They loved to kid each other. Apparently Walter was coaching the reserves and he noticed that Mal wasn't charging across the line as sharply as he should have been and he said, "Mal, with that kind of charge you couldn't crush a cream puff." Mal said, "Walter, if you'll just get down across from me here I'll see what I can do to a chocolate éclair."

Walter enjoyed this story so much that he told it many times himself and chuckled.

Brower: So he didn't resent references to race then when they were--

Johnson: When they were funny. When they were done by someone who was not deprecating him but just was kidding in the same way that one might laugh about a red-headed person.

Brower: Do you remember Walter Gordon as a speaker at the rallies?

Johnson: No.

Agnes Robb told me about a speech of Walter Gordon's.

Brower: That was at the University meeting?

Johnson: Yes.

I know that sometimes I've heard that some of the black community felt that Walter didn't fight enough for his race but I do know that I recently reviewed the Daily Cals of around 1923 and 1924 and in those Walter was a very vigorous critic of the university and also the city because of its discrimination in housing.

More recently I talked to Walter about this subject and I can tell you that Walter did not believe in racial discrimination one way or another. He felt that race should be forgotten, that it was unimportant, that the individual was important. He was highly indignant at the idea of quotas and giving black people special breaks because they were black. All that he ever wanted was an even break. I'm sure that he was convinced that the only long-range solution of the racial problem was, as soon as possible, to forget race, to ignore race as having any significance one way or another insofar as our rights and opportunities are concerned. I've discussed this with him so I know how he felt.

Stanford's Color Line

Brower: Speaking of the race situation in his time, could you tell me a little bit about the boxing problem with Stanford? That has been touched upon but I was interested in the background that you gave to it.

Johnson: What I have been told is that Stanford demanded that there be no Negro boxers on the University of California team and that the head of our department of physical education, who was in charge of boxing at that time, gave in to their demands in order to keep boxing alive between the two schools. This, of course, was all hush-hush until, I think it must have been 1922 or 1923, when the boxer who was supposed to box against one of the Stanford men became ill at the last moment and so the university found itself obliged to substitute a black boxer whereupon Stanford protested very vigorously and almost threatened to abandon the series.

Brower: That threat would have been made sub rosa, wouldn't it?

Johnson: All of this was sub rosa, but--and you may have this story--I did understand that Walter Gordon was very indignant and that the captain of our boxing team, Sol Silverman, informed the sports editor of one of the San Francisco newspapers, which came out the next day with a large headline: "Stanford Draws Color Line." This so embarrassed Stanford and I presume California, too, that the color line was dropped.

When I was in school we had colored boxers on the team, very good ones, and Stanford boxed against them. [Chuckles]

Brower: What were your years at UC?

Johnson: I came in from Modesto Junior College in the fall of 1925. I spent three years here and was graduated in 1928. Because I was working full time as well as going out for athletics, I took less than the regular number of units. I think I used to take thirteen or fourteen units.

Brower: You did better than I. It took me thirteen years on the same basis and I didn't go out for track!

Johnson: Well, going out for athletics in those days was a little different from now. We always regarded it as a sacrifice as well as a privilege and I think the student body felt the same way about it so that it gave us a certain amount of status among our fellows. It was very important to us.

Brower: Yes, it was. The track team was almost an administrative entity, wasn't it, because of President Sproul and Jim Corley. I always think of the administration as being drawn from the track team.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Date of Interview: October 6, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Changes in Sports Over the Years

Brower: When we talked last week we mentioned some of the differences in football at the time Walter Gordon was playing. Would you fill in a little more of the background of how the rules and situation at that time differed from now.

Johnson: Well, at that time, once a player had been removed from the game he could not re-enter during the same quarter. This meant that on the whole probably not over thirteen or fourteen men played in a given game and about the same number won their big Cs each year. This was because the only way at that time in which one could earn a Big C was to play in a game or enter in a track meet against Stanford University.

As far as I can recall, there was no spring practice. The season started off with interclass games and the regular practice season began two or three weeks later.

Brower: You're speaking now of the fall?

Johnson: I'm speaking of the fall. The result of all of this was that there was not on the whole very much time for practice during the season, or rather during the school year. Moreover, there were not more than two or three full-time coaches. The remainder, like Walter or Dan MacMillan or Dr. Boles-Rosenthal, later called Dr. Boles, or Brick Muller, and so on were all part-time coaches who came only in the afternoons. They came each afternoon during the practice time.

Actually, then the game was a much simpler game than it is today. Moreover, because a good offense takes timing, very precise timing, it was difficult to move the football from one end of the field to another without surrendering it or without a turnover. For this reason, Andy Smith always used what he called a kicking game. He had a number of very good long punters like Archie Nesbitt and Duke Morrison and later Nibs had Benny Lom. Kicking frequently then when you were deep in your own territory was on your first or second down.

Brower: And always on third down!

Johnson: That's right, always on a third down unless you had only a yard or two to go. The reason for this was that if you were to kick on these downs, the safety man had to be playing up closer and the ball could be kicked

Johnson: over his head so that you could gain an extra ten or fifteen yards. So Andy played a game called 'kick and wait for the breaks.' You would hope that the other team would make some mistake, that there would be a fumble or some other turnover, let us say, within the other team's half of the field and hopefully within the twenty- or thirty-yard line. Then, from this short distance, Andy's teams would punch on in for a score.

In addition, the passing game had not been developed to the extent that it has today, so that there was a general rule of thumb that you never passed within your own twenty- or thirty-yard line and you never made a shallow pass toward the side line. If you watch today's game you will see that there are many of these passes and you'll also see that even in college games and particularly in professional games the ball can start at the ten-yard line and be moved the entire distance of the field for a touchdown.

Brower: Was the different size of the ball at that time a factor in this do you think?

Johnson: I'm sure that it was as far as forward passing is concerned and probably as far as punting because it was not as thin as the present ball. In fact, Brick Muller's passes were around fifty yards and were then regarded as unbelievable. Today any quarterback could throw farther than that if he's worth his salt.

Brower: But this isn't because they weren't giants in those days? It's because the ball is different?

Johnson: Both. [Laughter] The younger men are bigger as a group, as you know, both taller and heavier than they were in those days. I would say that even in my time a large-sized football player weighed two hundred, two hundred and five pounds. I think that Walter Gordon, as I recall, weighed around 185 when he was playing and many of the backfield men weighed from 150 to 185 or 190.

Brower: Barnes, for instance, weighed 177.

Johnson: Is that true? I hadn't realized that. So the players are much bigger. We have many more high schools. With the advent of professional football the game itself has become important so that we have many more men who are playing. Also, at that time there were very few Negro players, other than at Southern Negro universities, at any university throughout the country. This has changed the game, not only football but, of course, basketball, track, and baseball. The great addition has been these black athletes. In fact, as you will note, probably the majority of the athletes today are black.

Brower: I can see where it changes the game in basketball where there are so many very tall guys that seem to be black, but I wonder exactly why it changed the game in football. Is it because they really are good, natural athletes

Johnson: Because they devote more time to it on the playgrounds, far more time, and because it's more important to them, frankly.

Brower: It's an area where they can excell and be recognized?

Johnson: This has always been true of minorities. The first prizefighters were Irish, then Italians, then Jewish. I can recall what a tremendous stir there was when I was very young when a black man, Jack Johnson, for the first time became the world's champion heavyweight prize fighter. But then, as you know, until very recently, the time of Jackie Robinson, black men were not allowed to play in baseball and although a few played in football I doubt if many of them were recruited at that time.

UC Athletic Policy

Brower: Nobody else was much either, according to what you tell me.

Johnson: I don't believe I said that. Individual alumni and students did encourage local athletes to come to Berkeley, but, before and during my college days, it was not organized. I can say this positively, athletes were heavily recruited at the University of Southern California and there were one or two black players on their team who may well have been recruited. I don't know.

Brower: Would you talk about the recruit you lost to this campus because he had a job at USC, a job consisting of winding the clock?

Johnson: I don't like to use his name because he's still alive.

Brower: No, and I'm afraid I spoiled the story by giving the punch line.

Johnson: My attention was called to him by a young woman who was teaching in a Los Angeles or Glendale high school, I've forgotten which. She was a very ardent graduate of this university and had been talking to a great football star in her high school. She informed me that he was very interested in coming to Berkeley, and she arranged an interview for me with him at the high school. I talked to him and he said yes, he would like to come to Berkeley but he had no finances and with no financial support assured from home what could we offer him? I said what I said to all of the other athletes at that time, the only thing that the University of California could offer was what had been offered me and that was to bend every effort to find an honest job both in the summer time and during the school year and that if he came I offered to do this for him, but I pointed out that the most important thing to me, and I hoped it was to him, was that a person only went once to a

Johnson: university and to a very considerable extent his career after that time would depend upon the quality of education he received and I asserted that the University of California with all its prestige could offer him a far better education than he could receive at the University of Southern California.

He agreed but said that nevertheless he had been offered a job. I can't recall whether it was a \$40- or \$50-a-month job. I think he was being humorous about it, but when I asked him about the job offer he said, "Winding the campus clock or something of this sort" and that was the last of our interview. He did go to USC, he did become an All-American, and a very great one. I had a similar experience with several others, all of whose names are well known. [Break in tape]

Brower: So there were other such occasions?

Johnson: One of them, as I look back now, was very humorous. The boy displayed such interest in Berkeley that he indicated that he would like to come. He also had a great interest in flying an airplane. So we arranged with one of the members of the military staff to have him put on a military plane that was flying in this direction. However, it struck a heavy cloud bank as it crossed over into the San Joaquin Valley and landed at Bakersfield. It was unable to continue and this boy, too, ended up in USC and became an All-American. [Laughs]

Brower: At least he didn't end in Bakersfield!

I gather from what you've said that not only were athletes treated without special favor but sometimes at Berkeley in some campus offices they were discriminated against.

Johnson: We always felt that. For example, we had to be very careful with the admissions office. The admissions office seemed to us to lean over backward to keep out an athlete in any doubtful or marginal case. For example, we had a young chap who had a great reputation and who arrived from Idaho. He weighed about 200 pounds and was tremendously strong. He later became a regular member of the team.

Brower: The football team?

Johnson: Yes. But we were so afraid that his size and his muscular structure would prejudice the admissions officer against him that we put glasses on him. [Laughs]

Brower: Did it work?

Johnson: It seemed to; he made it. We all breathed a sigh of relief! [Laughs]

Brower: I remember Miss Robb summing it up by saying that President Sproul wanted students who played at athletics and not athletes who played at studying.

Johnson: That was his favorite description of his athletic policy--he said that many times and those were his instructions to me and to the coaches.

Brower: Apparently that was the attitude of his predecessors as well.

Johnson: I'm sure it was. I've always felt that in many respects Sproul was a continuation of Wheeler. He had gone to school during the Wheeler days and he wanted as long as he could to continue and effect the precepts that President Wheeler had established at the university with regard to student government, athletics.

Changes in the California Spirit

Brower: There was something very influential in Wheeler's attitudes I think. You catch it in so many different interviews from people who felt a special feeling for California I think largely because of Wheeler's approach to the whole thing.

Johnson: I know that now people rather hoot at the idea, but Wheeler emphasized loyalty and the students understood what he meant. His attitude and that of Sproul was that this is a very great institution, that the students who attend this institution at the expense of the taxpayers, many of them with children not qualified for admission, entailed responsibility upon all of us and that was to protect the good name of the university and to do everything that we could to advance its interest. I'm sure if you were to talk to Dick Erickson [Assistant Chancellor and Executive Director, UC Berkeley Foundation] and Dick Hafner [Public Affairs Officer, UCB], and other campus authorities today you will find that those precepts are reflected in the attitude of the alumni of those periods and I'm frank to say that I don't feel it reflected in the attitude of many students and graduates of the last decade.

For example, the Big C Society--the graduate members of the Big C Society--when we organized it and established a dues-paying system in 1928 or '29 were nearly all fairly young people, in their twenties and early thirties. We started a tradition of reunions, Big C reunions of graduates in the spring and in the fall. Those reunions have continued but they're rarely attended by very many graduates of the last ten or fifteen years. It's rather disheartening because the members are getting older and older and older and one wonders about the future. One also wonders about the future since so much of the support of the university is derived from, I think I may say, from the older people, the graduates of the Wheeler-Sproul era in particular, [Pauses]

- Brower: You were saying that UC got its support from older people, largely from the graduates of the Wheeler-Sproul era.
- Johnson: Yes, I suspect that's true of the financial support, too, but this would have to be checked.
- Brower: Would you guess that that is common to many universities or do you think we're--
- Johnson: I think we then had an unusually high spirit. When we went to Harvard in 1926 to the IC4A national trackmeet, we found that there was very little warmth in the spectator section.
- Brower: You mean in support of their own team?
- Johnson: Yes, and it struck us forcibly. In fact, we used to have a story that we told about the Eastern cheerleaders which was that they instructed their rooting sections, "Let us have a cheer, boys, but not too loud lest we be raucous." [Laughs]
- Brower: Do you think that would have applied to football to the degree that it did to track?
- Johnson: This did not apply to Harvard and Yale in 1900 because I've read some of the stories at that time and the novels and the other things of that era. I remember reading With Stover at Yale and gaining an impression of a very spirited student body.
- Brower: But I wonder if you had gone to a Harvard-Yale game if you would have been equally disappointed or if that--
- Johnson: I wouldn't be surprised if that isn't like a California-Stanford game even today, yes. As you know, that's still true with the Big Game. Although not as spirited as it was during our day but there's still excitement.
- Brower: You can sort of understand perhaps a more sophisticated generation finding the uncritical attitude of the earlier graduates a little hard to accept when you look at the words to "Hail to California." Is it "queen in whom we're blest, spreading light and goodness over all the West"?
- Johnson: Right, and "for thee we'll die," in "All Hail, Blue and Gold."
- Brower: That's a bit strong for any young people for the last thirty years.
- Johnson: Oh, yes. I remember, I think it was Stan Barnes talking to a group of younger athletes four or five years ago in an emotional way about loyalty to the university and to the country and that it seemed to me

Johnson: his words, unfortunately, fell flat. Of course, all one has to do is to look at the Daily Cals of that period and the Daily Cals of today. This particular phenomenon though is not restricted to this campus. I think it's occurring all over the world, a critical attitude toward authority and a disillusionment with authority.

Brower: I think that it began in a way even in my generation. I came on campus in 1930 and the Depression made students more critical I think. Also, we were pretty grim, fun was something that many couldn't afford.

Johnson: Well, that's true. The big change also--there was a break. The war created a break. I was here then when only women attended the campus. I felt sorry for the poor girls wandering around without dates, going to theaters together. But some of the traditions were never revived after the war. For example, class spirit which used to run pretty high. There was a lot of spirit, of course, during Pappy Waldorf's days. But after that it seemed to me there was a letdown because I was on the campus at the time and I could feel a gradual change.

Brower: And then that was much accelerated in the sixties with the feeling about Vietnam.

Johnson: As you've indicated, I think that President Sproul, as I look back over his career, found an increasing resistance and resentment of the exercise of authority. President Wheeler, President Barrows, and in my day President Campbell, and President Sproul were really father figures. We had an affection for them and also a certain sense of awe.

Brower: Actually, your campus was very close to Walter Gordon's campus in spirit I think.

Johnson: I'm sure it was. I'm sure there's very little change until at least the Depression. I think that may have changed matters somewhat because as you said many students could no longer have the fun that we used to have. In our period, we were all joiners. We were told that we were part of an active community, perhaps as large as the city of Berkeley, and that by delegation the president had entrusted us with the government of that community and that each of us had an obligation to make some sort of contribution outside of the classroom. If you look through old Blue and Golds, you'll find that a very large percentage of people belonged to committees of one sort or another to organize class dances, to direct plays, to sell subscriptions to the Associated Students, and on and on and on.

Walter Gordon's Place in History

Brower: In looking at those Blue and Golds in the years from Walter Gordon's through yours, the total absence of black faces on any of those many committees is interesting. I know it reflects in large part how few blacks were on the campus.

Johnson: I think so, but I think that it's also due to the spirit that still survived from the pre-Civil War days and particularly from the Plessy-Ferguson Supreme Court decision which had authorized separate but equal accommodations. While the decision was restricted only to trains, it extended to other accommodations and to housing.

I do not think that it in any way affected our admissions policy to the university directly. But I do think that the deprivation of opportunity black people suffered and the fact that even university education for the most part would offer very little additional opportunity to them, discouraged them from continuing on. They found that if they had any opportunities it would be in blue-collar jobs.

Brower: I think that's one of the significant things people forget when they wonder why minority people were not more ambitious in getting educations. I knew of a black lawyer who could only get a job as a janitor and you, I think, told me about Robert ("Smoke") Francis, who had a Ph.D.

Johnson: Right, a Ph.D in history from this university. He made an effort and could not find a position in any university in the country except in one of the black Southern institutions, but after several years he found that he just could not endure the discrimination that he found in every direction there. He returned to Berkeley, was raising dogs in West Berkeley, and died. I remember attending his funeral. It was very sad.

Brower: That history brings up again the curious phenomenon of Walter Gordon, that somehow he seemed to transcend these disadvantages, and I wondered if you felt that it was a case of personality, of a more secure home situation, or just what the factors were that made his life so exceptional for that time?

Johnson: I think that it was due first to the fact that Walter was a great athlete in a period when athletics were very important in the university and second, to the fact that he was extremely well poised, sure of himself, proud of his family. In fact, proud of his race.

Brower: How did he manifest that pride of race?

Johnson: Because he made no apology for it and because he talked about his grandparents and his parents and his background. Another fact--and I think this was because he was secure, and also because he recognized the conditions of the times in which he lived and accepted them without

Johnson: displaying rancor, Walter never, as far as I know, personally pushed forward. He waited and was ready but you will notice that every position that he took throughout his life was offered to him. His behavior was, as some of the fellows would say, and they thought it was a great tribute at the time, "Walter Gordon may have had black skin but he was a white man." By this I mean his behavior was so much like any other individual that you accepted him as an individual and thought of his skin color as being of little more importance than the color of his hair or of his eyes.

Brower: You knew both him and Smoke Francis. Would you say that Smoke Francis behaved differently?

Johnson: Yes, he did.

Brower: Was he more defensive?

Johnson: Somewhat. He at times I think was hurt and showed hurt. On the whole, he tended to be, as we would say at that time, a little loud. We liked him and he was funny. We laughed. But you noticed him and you noticed him as a black man. On the other hand, some of the other fellows on the track team reacted in the opposite way. They withdrew to themselves.

Brower: That is, black track men?

Johnson: Black track men, I'm saying. They withdrew into themselves and we said, "hello" and they said "hello" in a courteous way but there was very little rapport between us.

Brower: I suppose they avoided hurt that way.

Johnson: Yes, well, I must confess that there were some fellows on all the teams who overtly displayed their prejudice toward blacks by using offensive names--Jigs. I can't remember all of the others.

Brower: Openly to these men?

Johnson: No, but in referring to them. [Pause] I'm sure that their attitude was felt by the black men and that they were probably insecure as a result toward all of us, even those who tried to befriend them.

Brower: Can you think of other aspects of Walter Gordon's attitude that made him different from these other black athletes?

Johnson: Well, I said this in another way before but the fact was in my judgment that Walter accepted himself and that he accepted the handicaps, although, in fact, I think he rather prided himself in overcoming the handicaps, as some of us might think of them. I don't think that he had any more resentment or self pity than do many other people with

Johnson: handicaps--and I refer to the blind, the crippled, the people with speech impediments, and so on. As you know, there are some of these people who--a few I think--who've become resentful and live unhappy lives but there are an extremely large number who accept them and accept them as challenges and overcome them. We have many students at this university now of that type. This to me was Walter Gordon. In the climate in which he lived as a student and afterward as a graduate.

Brower: I've asked other people I've interviewed this question and would like to ask you--you seem yourself to have an attitude that is remarkably free of prejudice and I wondered if your contact with Walter Gordon in any way affected that?

Johnson: I think that it did. I must tell you that I am not sure that even now I am free of prejudice. I recognize it and have done everything that I can to overcome it. You must understand that my father was born in Virginia and that he initially had a deep antipathy toward the acceptance of black people as people but he was also very deeply religious and fought as hard as he could to overcome these feelings. For example, at one of the church meetings a friend of his who had a perverted sense of humor, I suppose, introduced him to a black fellow member. In this particular church the method of salutation was by a kiss and my father kissed the man and always said that afterward he felt much better. [Pause] So perhaps, like Walter Gordon, I, too, [Pause] have tried to be like my father.

Brower: Walter Gordon did try to be like his father, didn't he, and said so?

Johnson: Yes, yes. So when I see a lonely black man or a black woman in a white gathering I do go out of my way to approach them and make them feel at home. This occurred last night.

Brower: I think for everybody who knew Walter Gordon, at least the point must have been made that black people were capable of great achievement. You couldn't fail to notice that and it must certainly have gotten into people's thinking however little they were aware of it.

Johnson: I'm sure that's what I meant when I said he was proud of his race. He felt that it had great potentiality and he resented paternalism, which he felt was, I think, another form of discrimination. Walter wanted people to be treated as individuals.

[End tape 1, side 2]

[Date of Interview: October 17, 1977]

[Begin tape 2, side 1]

Brower: Mr. Johnson, you have had a great deal to do with the Walter Gordon Project from its inception, what was your motivation in getting so deeply involved in it?

Johnson: Well, although I didn't know Walter Gordon as well as many other UC alumni who had played football with him or as well as people like General Dean who served with him on the Berkeley Police force, I did have the opportunity to know him and I valued the experience.

Brower: You became involved because of your affection for Walter Gordon then?

Johnson: Yes, I certainly did feel affection and respect for him. However, perhaps more than that, I believe the story of his life is a significant one in the history of the races in the university, in the state, and even in the country.

If you ask me why I undertook the task I think it was that, given the environment that ensued after the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of the Supreme Court, the attitude and the methods that Walter Gordon pursued, which were not dissimilar from those of George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington, and of the earlier years of the Urban League, were of the kind most appropriate to that time. Walter Gordon accepted as fact that it would take much patience and a long time for the black man to win acceptance from the white. He believed the black man's role had to be to work slowly to gain the acceptance and respect of the white man as a member of the human race of which both are members.

After the Brown v. Board of Education decision it was obvious that the black man did not have the patience to follow this line of action, nor could it have been expected of him.

Whether this more militant approach, for which the black man cannot be blamed, will in the long run solve or only exacerbate the problems of race still remains to be seen. Nor is it by any means certain that the more patient, understanding, and indeed loving approach of the Walter Gordons would have resulted in acceptance by the dominant whites of more than a relatively small percentage of the black minority.

Brower: Thank you, Mr. Johnson. I am glad to have this additional comment on your view of Walter Gordon's place in history.

Transcriber: Michelle Stafford
Final Typist: Teresa Allen

II. THE CROWDED YEARS: Policeman, Lawyer, Civil Rights Leader, and Coach

Interviews with:

William F. Dean
William Alden Wiltberger
George M. Johnson
Alvin Sweetwyne
Harry F. Kingman
Frances Albrier
W. Byron Rumford, Sr.



General Wm. Dean

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- William F. Dean

INTERVIEW HISTORY	85
Early Berkeley Recollections of Walter Gordon	87
Later Contacts with Walter Gordon	89
Walter Gordon's Influence	91
Walter Gordon's Final Illness	92
Walter Gordon as Student, Coach, and Police Officer	93
Walter Gordon's Arrival in Berkeley	95
Walter Gordon and the NAACP	96
"The man Walter was"	97
Nature of Berkeley Police Work in the 1920s	98

INTERVIEW HISTORY

William F. Dean and Walter Gordon were fellow police officers on the Berkeley police force under Chief August Vollmer in the early 1920s. They were widely separated in the ensuing years, but they remained in touch, and in the late fifties, when both men retired to Berkeley, their friendship was fully resumed. General Dean was interviewed as one with first-hand knowledge of both Walter Gordon's service as a Berkeley policeman and his final Berkeley years.

William F. Dean, Major General, USA, Retired, is a recipient of the nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. General Dean, who in 1947 was named military governor of the United States occupied area of Korea, was a prisoner of war in the Korean Action from 1950 to August 1953. His return to Berkeley was the occasion of public celebration and he has remained a beloved hero and citizen of Berkeley.

The chief interview was held on May 8, 1976, in the large, sunny kitchen of General Dean's Park Hills home in Berkeley. In his total lack of arrogance and his gentleness, General Dean is far from the stereotype of the military man, but his direct manner and his bearing--despite his years and the rigors of his imprisonment--still suggest the soldier. During the interview Mrs. Dean, who was acquainted with both Mr. and Mrs. Walter Gordon, occasionally injected a reminder or added a brief reminiscence.

General Dean's extreme modesty proved a small difficulty when he edited the transcript of the interview. He rigorously deleted any material he construed as self-aggrandizing and cut out one amusing anecdote because in his judgment it dealt too much with himself. The final transcript is confined to matters General Dean could report on at first hand, chiefly recollections from the Berkeley Police Department years and Walter Gordon's early scouting experience for the University of California, but including remembrances of the last years as well.

As a young man from the Middle West with no football experience, William Dean had the greatest admiration for Walter Gordon the football hero. Later, in his various other roles, Walter Gordon continued to merit and receive that admiration.

On October 13, 1977 a second, very brief, interview with General Dean took place in the same setting, with occasional interruptions from the cuckoo clock.

The interview was scheduled to get answers to certain questions that had been raised about the racial composition of arrests by the Berkeley policemen in the twenties, specifically about Walter Gordon's arrests. In the eighteen-month interval between the first and second interviews, General Dean had suffered a broken hip and a long period of hospitalization. It was a pleasant surprise, therefore, to find him active and alert, although severely bent, and it was good to learn that he has resumed driving a car. He was able to recall readily the information we were seeking.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: April 19, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL WILLIAM DEAN

Early Berkeley Recollections of Walter Gordon

Brower: Did you know Walter Gordon before you were on the Berkeley police force?

Dean: I knew of him. I knew him by sight. But I didn't really know him to speak to even. In my book he was a big hero, on the football team. I came here from southern Illinois in 1917 and I had never seen a football game in my life, an American football game. I observed him all through my university years, when he received different athletic honors--for example an award for football player of the year--and I had a great respect for him before I ever met him.

Brower: What was that honor you said he got?

Dean: He was the outstanding player of the 1918 season, I think. The award was given in the Greek Theater and I was in attendance.

Brower: Did you look forward to meeting him--to working with him?

Dean: No, I can't say I looked forward to it because I didn't realize he was on the Berkeley Police Department, doing the same type of work I was expected to do.

Brower: How many men were on the force at that time?

Dean: I think that there were not more than thirty. But on our shift, the one I went to work on initially, there were only four out on the pavement, and there were about four in the department in headquarters; they were in the department of records, and then there was the sergeant on duty.

*See William F. Dean, "Vollmer's Influence on the Career of an Army General," in August Vollmer: Pioneer in Police Professionalism, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1972.

Brower: So it must have been a rather intimate group. You must have gotten to know each other pretty well.

Dean: Oh, we did get to know each other. Yes.

We were on from midnight until 8 o'clock in the morning.

Brower: Was that when you first came to be fond of Walter Gordon, to know him?

Dean: Yes, to know him well. He had only been on the force a short time before, a little in excess of a year.

Brower: Was he on good terms with his colleagues?

Dean: Yes. He was. He was on excellent terms. Everybody seemed to like Walt. There was one individual, I'd rather not mention the man's name; he didn't stay with the force long. I wasn't there long enough to get to know him, but he was...he was let go. I didn't know him, and Walt didn't talk about him, but I sensed that they hadn't gotten along at all.

Brower: Do you think of any stories from those police force days that illustrate the kind of man Walter Gordon was?

Dean: Well, Walt was a man that was able to take charge when he thought leadership was needed.

I remember we went up to a building one time and there were people in there. I was a new young police officer--I came rushing up and I said, "Come on, let's go!" Walt said, "Now wait a minute, Bill. Let's look this over. There's no use being foolish about this. We must use judgment. We mustn't get hurt, and we mustn't hurt the man who's in there."

He often quoted August Vollmer: "We're not out to punish people; we're out to prohibit them, prevent them, from harming society." That was his belief and he lived up to it.

One time, I remember--these little things may not be important, but they made an impression on me--Walt had apprehended an individual, on University Avenue. As I came up this man pulled a gun and stuck it right in Walt's abdomen--and Walt had quite a copious abdomen in those days; at that time he weighed about 242 pounds, and yet he was lithe as a--a panther. I've never known a man that had more physical strength, more quickness, and ability to use his hands. And Walt in a flash had that man's wrist and the gun clattered on the pavement. He was strong! At the time I thought, boy, he broke that wrist! But evidently he didn't because I never heard anything later of it. A lesser man would have been intimidated with that gun sticking in there--when he was out without a gun in his hand.

Brower: Were policemen unarmed at that time?

Dean: No. We were armed. But Walt just didn't feel the occasion demanded the use of firearms at that time. He was never one to be careless with firearms, or to make a display of them. And usually he didn't have to.

Brower: He seems to have combined great physical courage with a kind of an amiable personality.

Dean: He was very amiable, pleasant--always pleasant, always--a gentleman. And he was never in the position that he was kowtowing to anyone. With him it was never whether a man was white, black, or green, they were all the same. Walt treated every person as a man, until he proved otherwise, and then Walt seemed to know how to handle him. He was genial, had a sense of humor. It was a pleasure, and an inspiration, to work with him.

Later Contacts with Walter Gordon

Brower: Your friendship wasn't limited to just those years? Did you keep in touch when he was with the Adult Authority?

Dean: Unfortunately, I'm a very poor correspondent, and I'm afraid Walt was too.

Brower: You were a pretty busy man during those years!

Dean: Yes, well, I did receive a letter from Walt. I was an assistant secretary in the chief of staff's office; the secretary's office was right down there--you felt like you were in the secretary of war's office. At any rate, I received a letter from Walt, asking me what should he, as a colored man, do now that the war was on. What was my advice? And I said, "Walt, you have a job there in Berkeley and it's more important now than it's ever been, with the war at hand. I feel it's your duty to stay there and do the good job you're doing." I didn't hear from him, but--

Brower: He followed your advice.

Dean: When I came back I apologized because I hadn't given him better advice, because I was right there in the office where the secretary--the special assistant to Secretary of War Hastie was working and so on.

Brower: Would you tell me again what your particular job was, and the name of the office, so I can get it absolutely right?

Dean: At that time I was an assistant secretary to the chief of staff, General George Marshall. As assistant secretary it was my job to study and condense the reports received each day by the Office of the Chief of

- Dean: Staff, except the reports hand-carried by various chiefs of divisions. These daily reports had to be condensed so that the final recommendation of each particular staff report was expressed in a single paragraph. I was one of the six assistant secretaries.
- Brower: General Marshall was a wonderful man, wasn't he?
- Dean: He's one of only two men I've ever known that made me feel that they were looking through me when I saw them and had me in awe--one of them was August Vollmer and the other was George Marshall. They just cowed me.
- Brower: [Laughing] I can't believe that!
- Dean: [Murmurs confirmation of what he just said.]
- Brower: But when you came back to Berkeley you resumed your friendship with Walter Gordon?
- Dean: Yes, he was at that time on the Adult Authority and he had an office over at San Quentin. He was always asking me to come over and visit him there.
- Brower: He must have spent considerable time there.
- Dean: Oh, yes, you see for parole hearings they'd visit the prisons. Rather than bringing the prisoners all up to Sacramento, the board would visit various penal institutions.
- Brower: Did he ever talk about his work with you? I guess his attitudes were probably much the same as those he had had in the police department?
- Dean: Yes, they were.
- Brower: And you knew Elizabeth Gordon at this time, too?
- Dean: No, I didn't know her well. I've learned to know her since I came home. I was often at his house, calling at his house. I proposed him for membership in the Berkeley Breakfast Club, you know. He wasn't driving. He didn't drive after he came home; Betty did all the driving.
- Brower: You mean when he returned from the Virgin Islands?
- Dean: Yes, exactly. And I suggested to our pool, our driving pool, that we take him in as a nondriving member.

At that time, we had Claude Hutchison, Ted Mueller (also a non-driving member), and Walter Howell (he's an ex-manager of the Berkeley Pacific Gas & Electric office of about thirty years ago; when he retired he was one of the assistant vice-presidents of PG&E).

Brower: Did the ride group take kindly to the idea of adding Walter Gordon?

Dean: Oh, yes, they were delighted. No one was more delighted than Claude Hutchison. Claude was 'specially fond of Walt. He had known Walt ever since he, Claude, had come to the University of California at Berkeley, and Claude had great respect and admiration for Walt. And so did Walter Howell, and Ted Mueller, and, later, Fitz Rollins.

Brower: The Breakfast Club gave an award to Walter Gordon, didn't they?

Dean: Yes, I thought that was great. The same individuals that thought that up and put that across, were the ones that espoused these tapes--Dick Erickson, and Hank Waring, and Bob Johnson.

Walter Gordon's Influence

Brower: Let's see what other questions I had. Do you feel that knowing Walter Gordon influenced you?

Dean: Yes. In the service, especially, having known Walt, I felt in a better position to handle the very few color incidents that I had any control over in the service.

When I was in Kokura, Japan, we had a colored ammunition company there, and one pay day started off with some soldiers having had too much to drink. They were in a bar where colored boys took some of the white boys' girls away and it ended up in a kind of a riot--it looked like it was going to turn out to be a serious race riot. So I immediately had all soldiers, white and black, confined to barracks, and I went and addressed them. I used Walter's name. I said, "I'm your boss here. The fact that I'm white makes no difference. One of my dearest friends is a negro. Both sides are making mistakes here." I called on how Walter Gordon would have handled it. He was an inspiration to me in handling people, white and dark--black--we're all the same.

Brower: It would be hard to believe in any inherent inferiority of black people after you knew Walter Gordon.

Dean: That's right.

Brower: Did he ever talk to you about the Virgin Islands experience?

Dean: Yes.

Brower: We have very little about that.

Dean: [Pause] I think Betty [Gordon] could give you the best account. I might slant it, a little bit, one way or the other. I think you ought to have full facts when what you say is going to be recorded.

Brower: Yes. That's true.

Dean: I know that he was well loved down there by many people, many influential people. Betty had newspapers that have been sent to her since his death, and they say the same things that so many people said when he left, twenty years ago now.

Walter Gordon's Final Illness

Brower: Do you remember when you saw him last?

Dean: Yes, it was about the first of March. He was in the hospital, with this broken leg he had suffered.

Brower: When you saw him in March, how were his spirits?

Dean: Well, he was always seemingly cheerful, but he wasn't the full Walter Gordon. He was disappointed. The last time I saw him he kept saying, "I want to go home." He didn't like it there, wanted to go home.

Brower: His son had a splendid record in World War II, didn't he?

Dean: Yes, that was Walter, Jr. He's the older of the two sons. A little smaller than his brother.

Brower: How do they compare with their father in size? Are they big men too?

Dean: Yes. But--that's a thing I've never gotten over! I've never known anyone to shrink as much as Walter Gordon. I mean not just in the last months, but--when I came back [from Korea]--I recalled him as much larger. Maybe I put more stature in him because of the man he was. But he was so big and strong.

Brower: Didn't he have a heart attack and wasn't he encouraged to lose weight? And he lost quite a lot of weight. I suppose that would make a good deal of difference.

Dean: Well, even before he started losing that weight, he wasn't as tall a man as--

Brower: Certainly when you were both on the Berkeley police force you must have been a very impressive duo!

Dean: Well, I felt very small beside him always.

Walter Gordon as Student, Coach, and Police Officer

Brower: What about his coaching days? Do you have any recollections of those?

Dean: Yes. I used to be amazed. I didn't know much about his coaching until I was on the police department with him.

I was on from midnight to eight in the morning--you see I always worked one of two shifts: midnight to eight or four to midnight--never the daylight shift. And Walt would begin his shift at midnight. He asked to be on that shift so he could have the other time to study. He would go to Boalt Hall immediately after he came off duty. He would try to get a nine o'clock class. Then, after his classes in the morning, he'd go home and sleep the first part of the afternoon. Then he'd get up and study a little bit and go back to bed and get up at 11 p.m. and report at the police station by ten minutes of twelve. That was the way of it.

Now, in football season he would get an eight o'clock class, then he would try to get two hours sleep and then get out to football practice.

He was a great man on fundamentals and techniques--with each player. They remembered that. Some years ago there was a Wonder Team dinner, just members of the team, but I was invited; Duke Morrison invited me. Walt was there too, as ex-coach. And a fellow would come up to Walt and say, "Let me see your knuckles." When he found they were smooth he'd say to Walt, "You're not doing what I told you!" That happened several times. They were kidding Walt about his coaching days, when he wanted them to use their knuckles and not their palms and the tips of their fingers. He was convinced this gave them a quicker charge.

A lot of Walt's job wasn't going away to scout the other teams so much as watching California play. He had the ability to pick errors committed by the Cal team, and from his notes he would reconstruct the plays, indicating in detail specific errors made by the Cal players. I used to be amazed. He would say, "On play so-and-so Muller did this--" something that was a departure from what he should have done.

I learned about this because he would be there when we came off duty the night of the game. He would go right into the records bureau and there was a young man by the name of Abbey who was a stenographer and who worked in the department of records in the police department and Abbey would take the dictation. Walt had notes. They were both doing this on after-duty hours. Abbey would have been on from midnight to eight in the morning in the bureau of records, working on MOs

Dean: [modus operandi] and finger-print files, all those things. And Walt would start: "Play 1, Muller was supposed to get the ball, but delayed two steps" or something.

Brower: That was Muller, Brick Muller"

Dean: Yes, Brick Muller. Or "So-and-so did this." He saw so much! I didn't see how he could see so much and remember so much! And after that was typed he would take it up to Andy Smith's room at the Shattuck Hotel--or the Whitecotton Hotel--I've forgotten which it was called then; it changed names a couple of times. He would take it up there and Andy would memorize it Sunday afternoon. He must have memorized it because that afternoon he would go over the game and people used to wonder how he could have watched anything because he was drinking water all the time, out of a big bucket, during the game. But Walter was putting it down for him. He was Andy Smith's alter self!

Brower: Walter Gordon was better than instant replay!

Dean: Oh, he was amazing! What used to amaze me, I remember, as a young man, not cognizant with football, as many of my contemporaries were (they had been born and raised with it)--I wondered--I'd seen that game--I wondered how he saw so much and how people like Brick Muller and Duke Morrison and others--how they could ever make mistakes. And it seemed to me they made a lot of them, to hear Walt tell it.

Brower: I'd like to ask, did your wives know each other? Did Mrs. Dean know Betty Gordon?

Dean and Mrs. Dean: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Dean: Do you know Betty?

Brower: No, I don't. I hope to meet her.

Mrs. Dean: She's a charming lady.

Dean: Mildred met her since we retired really. Had you ever met her before, Mother?

Mrs. Dean: Yes. Well, you know I met her just before they went down to the Virgin Islands. There was a party for Walt and Betty.

They had this party at the old Shattuck Hotel, and I didn't know them very well. I talked to Betty that evening, but we really became acquainted when he retired and they lived in Berkeley, because Bill and Walt were very good friends.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Dean: According to Walt, August Vollmer called him (Walt) into the Elks Club, where Vollmer was living and put it up to him. Vollmer said, "What are you doing now?" and Walt told him that he was going on to get his J.D.-- Doctor of Jurisprudence. Vollmer said, "How about going to work in the police department?" Walt said, "No, I want to get my degree." Vollmer said, "Well, I can arrange it so you can do both. You can be a student. You can always work at night. It might take a little longer, but you can get your J.D., I'm sure." Walt said, "The chief was evidently attracted because he had watched me box." Groups used to come down from the university to entertain them there at the Elks Club. In fact, that's the way Andy Smith first saw Walt, when he came down there. Walt told me this, and he said, "And he invited me out--wanted me for football because he thought I had good speed and could handle my hands."

But to get back to the police department. So Walt thought over Vollmer's offer and said, "I'll take it up!" And that's how he got on the police department.

Brower: I presume he encountered incidents of racial bias?

Dean: I'm sure he did. Because I've found out, there were a lot of little, tiny, situations, but I don't know enough to make the telling. Walt did have difficulties as a black athlete and as a black coach. As a black coach, right at first it didn't look as if they were going to give him any place to stay in the same hotel with the other coaches.

Brower: He seemed to handle incidents like that well, without bitterness. How did he? Did you ever see him in a situation like that?

Dean: No. I haven't.

Walter Gordon's Arrival in Berkeley

Mrs. Dean: You know, Bill, did you tell Mrs. Brower about when Walt first came up here from Riverside?

Dean: Well, when he first went to public school in southern California. You've heard this story?

Brower: No, I've heard about the Y, but not about public school.

Dean: This is about his father. His father came here from Atlanta, brought the family. His father had been on the railroad for years as a Pullman porter. When they came up to Riverside and he and his brother went to

Dean: school, his father told them, "Now, listen. You're going to a new experience, you're going to a school where there are whites and blacks, and I don't want either of you to come home and say that you're suffering prejudice, that you're not getting a fair deal. It's up to you to get a fair deal, and you can't ever use your color as an excuse, remember that. "I'm going to break your neck if you ever come home crying to me, telling me that you're not getting a square deal on account of your color."

Brower: His father had a great deal of influence on him, didn't he?

Dean: Yes. He was always quoting his father.

Mrs. Dean: You know, Walt had a terrific personality. You couldn't help but love Walt. And when he first came up here, alone, alone, and he had to go to the university and make himself known. And the first thing he did, he got off the train, and he had this suit that he wanted to have pressed. He wanted to make a good appearance, you know. So he met this man who ran this tailoring shop. They became buddies after that.

Dean: He just kind of took Walt in and gave him a job.

Brower: That's right. He lived with a tailor, didn't he, in Oakland?

Dean: Yes. I should know that man's name. I used to know him years ago. I'll have to ask Betty.

Mrs. Dean: I think if you can get hold of Betty, she will give you a lot.

Brower: Yes, but this is all good.

Dean: It's one story I always like; it's so different, and I've seen it so often. His first thing was to get pressed and laundered before he showed his face at the university. He wasn't on his way to a job, yet--he was going to get an education.

Mrs. Dean: When you stop to think--of course now, when we're all so much more liberal--but these were the days when everyone wasn't so liberal, and he really had to put up a fight, you know, to establish himself. But he had a winning way about him--that soft voice--and charm, he had a lot of charm. And he made a lot of friends, good, loyal friends. And he did it himself.

Walter Gordon and the NAACP

Brower: I was reading about his NAACP experience, when he was president of the local chapter. Apparently these were the qualities that he called upon to get things accomplished. He was very low key and not aggressive or

Brower: demanding and very good-humored. But an awful lot came out of that. Do you know any of the stories of that period?

Dean: The trouble is that you don't understand things that you take so much for granted. I took it that Walt would run it that way. I remember when they were going to have a big parade in Oakland and he was the one that voted against this; he said he was in a turmoil whether to permit these colored people to march. I think they were led by somebody by the name of Garvey. To my surprise Walt said this would just cause a lot of trouble.

Brower: Was this a protest march of some kind?

Dean: Yes, headed by Garvey, and Walt, I think as a member of the NAACP, stated that he didn't think it was in the best interests of the city or of the movement.

Brower: I wondered if Walter Gordon had ever told you about his NAACP experiences?

Dean: I had an opportunity, but I don't think-- I should have made notes.

Mrs. Dean: Well, you were busy, honey. I do think you can get a lot more from Betty.

Brower: Well, I look forward to talking to her, but she wasn't on the Berkeley police force!

Dean: But she was his wife all that time.

Brower: It must have been a tough job right then, too!

Mrs. Dean: There weren't so many on the force then, were there?

Brower: There weren't so many in the city!

[Long pause]

Brower: Well, do you think we've sort of done it, or would you like to rest a minute and then--

"The Man Walter Was"

Dean: No. I can't think of a thing that I could tell you except the man I think Walter was. I think he was a man of integrity. I don't think any bribe or emolument outside the line of duty would have swayed him at any time. I can't imagine Walt ever wanting to take vengeance on a white man that wronged a colored man, I just can't imagine that. But I don't think any threat of actual physical danger would have ever deterred Walt from whatever he thought was right.

Brower: That certainly is the way he comes across in everything everybody says about him.

Dean: He never backed up and he never got as violent as his adversary, it seemed.

Nature of Police Work in Berkeley in the 1920s

[Interview 2: October 13, 1977]

[Begin tape 2, side 1]

Brower: What would you say was the chief crime for which arrests were made in Berkeley in the early twenties?

Dean: I would say housebreaking. Most of these were in daylight. And the burglars were not local people. They came in to Berkeley on either the Key Route or the Southern Pacific trains. We had both of them. They would get off one of those lines. The Claremont line went all the way up into the Claremont Hotel. These were trains not buses. We didn't have buses then.

Brower: We had a very good public transportation system then, didn't we?

Dean: Yes, we did.

Brower: But I suppose that had the disadvantage that it brought undesirable people into Berkeley?

Dean: Then the burglars would get away on a parallel or adjacent line. I can't remember what the fare was.

Brower: It was very low. I think it was ten cents, or seven cents, something like that.

Dean: I was working on the streetcars myself when the fare went up to six cents.

Brower: And that would have been about--?

Dean: 1919. After the First World War.

Brower: Then there were not so many muggings? There were not many street crimes?

Dean: No. There weren't many street crimes. There weren't nearly as many. They didn't have the automobile to get away.

Dean: Only burglaries. And there were these young gangs. They would only steal certain cars, like Stutz or Marmon. One of these gang members had his car break down on Kittredge and this policeman helped him push it and get it started.

Brower: And it was a stolen car!

Dean: A stolen car and one of this gang we were looking for; we had posters out. But that's the way cops were in those days. We were so helpful! And sometimes we helped the wrong people.

Brower: When you speak of these gangs, were they white kids or black kids?

Dean: They were white kids. We didn't have that many black people here.

Brower: So the arrests that you made were probably more of whites than blacks?

Dean: Yes. You see the big ingress of blacks coming out here was in World War II, when Kaiser brought trainloads of workers from the South to work in the shipyards. And a lot of them settled here and made good citizens. And they brought many relatives out here.

Brower: It changed the character of the population, didn't it? I wondered about Walter Gordon's arrests, because he was stationed, I guess, in a black neighborhood.

Dean: For a long time he was in the San Pablo Avenue area.

Brower: Do you think he would have arrested mostly blacks in that area?

Dean: No. He wouldn't have arrested mostly blacks. There were more Italians and Mexicans than anyone in that area. I tell you, he only arrested those that had to be arrested.

Brower: Regardless of color?

Dean: Of course. He had a personal feeling about a man of his own color doing something he shouldn't.

Brower: You mean it distressed him more, made him more angry, when it was a black person? Because it reflected on his race?

Dean: Because it reflected on that man's race. As I say, Walt was just one good citizen who happened to be black. He came to the university here not because he was recruited. His father asked him.

[Chatting on other subjects]

Dean: I think being with Walter Gordon taught me to be a better cop than I would have been otherwise.

Brower: How was that?

Dean: I watched him. And I always felt, if you had to pick up a real bad man it was good to have Walt by my side. He was the intercollegiate heavyweight boxer; he could take care of any occurrence. It was a great source of security having him by your side.

Brower: As far as you knew he arrested people that needed to be arrested regardless?

Dean: Regardless. But he didn't make arrests that didn't help society. He didn't arrest fraternity boys that were drunk after having too much beer. He'd help to get them home, get them to their fraternity, and get them in. He was looked on with affection by all the houses up there, not because he was black but because he was Walt Gordon.

Brower: People speak of him as being the University of California cop, but that's not exactly true is it?

Dean: Oh, they mean that he was a student who was working as a policeman on one of the two night shifts in the Berkeley city police department to make it possible for him to go to law school.

Brower: I thought that perhaps the University of California campus lay within his beat?

Dean: Sometimes it did. He often worked a swing beat, a different beat every time. Whoever is off. Each one of us was supposed to get one day a week off.

Brower: And Walter Gordon would substitute for the man who was off? And that would move him around?

Dean: Yes.

Brower: I wondered when the University of California established its own police force. When I phoned them to ask they said in 1886, and I found that hard to believe.

Dean: Well, they had Chief Lee down there the whole time I was a member of the Berkeley Police Department, and he took an active interest in the other cops. On football-game days he asked for a number of officers to work on the campus under his command, and we looked forward to that--not that we got to see much of the game because we were used largely for crowd control and to give first-aid assistance. We would be paid by the campus, \$5.00 each for the afternoon, and it did not interfere with our regular working hours.

Brower: Well, this is great. You have told me just the things I wanted to know. Thank you very much.

Transcriber: Anne Brower

Final Typist: Teresa Allen



William A. Wiltberger
February 25, 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- William Alden Wiltberger

INTERVIEW HISTORY	101
Berkeley Police Department, 1920s	102
Walter Gordon's Physique and Personality	105
Walter Gordon and Football	106a
Walter Gordon as Policeman	107
"This is Your Life"	108
Law Practice	109
Walter Gordon's Influence	110

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Lieutenant-Colonel William Alden Wiltberger (USAF-RET) has a long and distinguished career in police work, police education, and as consultant to several police agencies. He was the first successful police-school administrator in the country when he made a success of the revamped program at San Jose State College in 1936. Prior to that time he had served as chief of police in Evanston, Illinois, and was one of August Vollmer's famous college cops in Berkeley, where he worked with and supervised Walter Gordon as a Berkeley police officer. He was asked to contribute some comments about Walter Gordon because of this close association and his memory is excellent even for a man of his age, as the interview indicates.

The setting and process for the interview held on March 6, 1977, was a recorded telephone conversation with an adapter to transfer the information to a cassette recorder. The interview lasted perhaps an hour and the results are this transcription regarding Walter Gordon. The typed transcript was edited and then reviewed by Col. Wiltberger during the summer of 1977 and returned to the Regional Oral History Office in the fall of 1977. Interviewer was Professor Edward A. Farris, New Mexico State University, who also handled the administrative details in securing this interview.

Edward Farris
Las Cruces, New Mexico
October 2, 1977

Edward Farris is a professor in the Department of Police Science at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico. Dr. Farris' interest in the late August Vollmer led him to visit the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library and to undertake the following interview with Col. William Wiltberger, for which we are grateful - Ed.

[Date of Interview: March 6, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM ALDEN WILTBERGER

Berkeley Police Department, 1920s

Farris: I'm going to try to record this thing through the telephone. We'll see how it works. Is that all right with you?

WAW: Yes.

Farris: Okay. We're going to try to talk about Walter Gordon only, for this go-around. When did you first meet him, Bill?

WAW: In the Berkeley Police Department.

Farris: Do you recall when?

WAW: I went on duty on the 16th of November 1920.

Farris: And he was already there?

WAW: He was on the department working the midnight shift and going to school, coaching football and scouting for Cal and so forth, going to school getting his law degree.

Farris: Did you work with him pretty close?

WAW: Not then.

Farris: When did you?

WAW: When I became desk sergeant and head of the third platoon after midnight in 1929, about.

Farris: That was after you came back from Chicago the second time, right?

WAW: Yes.

Farris: He was still on the department.

WAW: Yes.

Farris: When did he leave?

WAW: I don't remember the date. He was there all the time I was there. I left in February 1931.

Farris: And he was still there then?

WAW: Yes. He was practicing law then, and was coach for Cal and a scout for Cal, one of the finest scouts of teams that Cal ever had, in my opinion. He used to let me read his scouting reports. He was the one who discovered how to beat Howard Jones' "Thundering Herd" of USC, which no one else could do. He discovered that the backfield gave away the play and which way it was going. Even old Pop Warner didn't catch it. He told me about it and I went down to watch the Stanford-USC game there, and I saw what he had discovered. So, discovering that, they just played like wild men and dumped that famous Thundering Herd. He was one of the smartest scouts. He let me read a lot of his reports before he turned them in.

Farris: Well, what kind of a cop was he? Same kind?

WAW: A good cop. He saved my life once, I think.

Barris: How's that, Bill?

WAW: I got a call. There was a burglar in a store over on College Avenue, way down there on the south side, and as I got up there the guy ran out of the store; down the street. I tried to stop him, shot at him and missed him. The guy turned up the street, went through the yard of a house and dove over a fence through a lot of shrubs. I got confused between two of these high radio aerial poles they installed in the yards in those days. I went over on the other side of the fence on the next street and I couldn't see anything. I got opposite the wrong aerial pole. I was bumming around there and Walter Gordon came out to give me a hand. My flashlight was weak. First time in my life I had a weak flashlight. He walked up and down and put his flashlight in several yards, and I told him what the story was. He said, "There he is, Bill." So he put his flashlight on him and I went in first. I saw this guy lying there on his belly, and I couldn't see it but I knew that he had a gun and was pointing it at me. I could get up close to him then and I told him, "Put that gun behind you or I'll kill you." And, of course, Walter was there

WAW: and we had more firepower and he was smart enough to roll over a little and put the gun toward the bushes. We picked him up. And Walter tucked him under his arms like a bag of flour, carried him to his car while I went back to investigate the store. Had he not assisted me with a strong flashlight and added fire power I would have been shot by the ex-convict.

Farris: Was the guy a little guy or was Walter a big guy?

WAW: Oh, no, he was about 5'10' or 6', Mexican, just out of prison.

Farris: But Walter was a strong man?

WAW: Oh, strong. So he carried the burglar out under his arm. He took him into the station while I finished making the investigation out there. But I always laughed about how he just tucked him under his arm like a sack of flour and put him into his car. That was one thing that I remember.

Then there was another time that I remember when Sergeant Ralph Pidgeon went down to serve a warrant on some Negro down on the south-west side of Berkeley. He went upstairs. Ralph was recovering from a bad cold, you know, kind of weak, like you are when you work and you're just getting over a cold or have got one. This guy, unsuspecting to old Pidgeon, started beating up Ralph, caught him by surprise, knocked him down the stairs. Pidgeon went back and got him, though. Finally got him. Pidgeon was pretty good, you know. He was very good at handling people and taking care of himself. He finally got the guy under control and sent for the patrol wagon, and brought him in. It turned out he was kind of a half-baked colored punk. Well, I didn't see it but I heard the boys all talking about it. Walt was so mad that this colored fellow had attacked a white brother-policeman that he got madder than I've ever heard of him getting mad. He took his coat off, his gunbelt, club, and handgun--you know we carried them all--went in and got the keys, opened that cell door and took him out. It was the first time I'd ever heard that Walt used some pretty strong "mule-skinner" language.

Farris: Kind of salty, huh?

WAW: Salty! Walt called him a "nigger." This is how I recall it, what the boys all told me: "Now you so-and-so nigger, you come out here; you wanted to fight somebody, now you put 'em up cause you fight with me." [The guy said,] "No sir, no, sir, Mr. Gordon." Walt didn't hit him. But oh, he was mad. I remember that, he called him "nigger." Colored people use the word--for no-good colored people they use the word "nigger" themselves. First time I have ever heard of him using it but he sure did then, and this guy ran back in his cell. Oh, Walt was mad that a "nigger"--not a colored man but a "nigger"--would attack one of his fellow officers and especially a white man.

Farris: Walt was not a racist like...?

WAW: Oh, no. He had problems. They tell me that when Gordon first went on-- I don't remember the exact date that he went on, about 1918, you can get that from Chief Dick Young out there in Alameda. He used to have a list of when everybody went on and left the department. He was captain of the record bureau of the Berkeley Police Department then.

Farris: He was in the Records Division?

WAW: Records Division. I know he used to pull open his desk drawer and pick up this list and tell me when somebody came on and so forth. Gus Mehrstens was the first one. He was an instructor in the University of California Chemistry Department, and he went on, maybe, in 1917. But Walt went on in 1918. The boys told me that when he first went on--the chief was for the right kind of people regardless of who they were--he put him up in a white east-side district. It was a little new you know in those days for people on the east side of Berkeley to have a colored man on the beat, and there were some people that hollered. So Vollmer put him on the west Berkeley beat, where Walt lived, and down there everybody liked Walt. They all admired him. White people on the west side were not racist. There were just a few of them on the east side but they did enough hollering that the chief had to move Walt down to the west side. This was the first attempt at having a colored man on the beat. But they looked up to and admired Walt down in west Berkeley.

Walter Gordon's Physique and Personality

WAW: He was a famous football player. He was the first colored man that Walter Camp ever recognized for his All American football team, and he put him on his third All American football team.* And Walter Camp was alleged to have been prejudiced against Negroes. Gordon was a great football player. I'll tell you how great he was. When I was there he played on the alumni team against the first team, when old [Andy] Smith was coach there. I didn't see it, the boys that were there saw it and told about it, but Walt was madder than hell. They only let him play two minutes because old Andy Smith, I guess, was afraid that he might injure some of his players. He used to take the whole side of the line opposite him out of play.

Farris: Is that right?

WAW: Oh, hell yes.

*Paul Robeson was named All American that same year, 1918. [Ed.]

Farris: He didn't flaunt his toughness, did he, Bill?

WAW: Oh, no, no, no. He was very nice. He was a gentleman.

Farris: He was a mild-mannered type?

WAW: Mild, happy, smiling and a cultured intellectual. Oh, but he could play football. Of course, he weighed, I think it was 320 pounds.

Farris: Walter did?

WAW: Or 230. No, it was 320 I'm pretty sure. That's questionable being exact, but I know, oh, he was big.

Farris: How big was he?

WAW: He must have worn a 48 belt. He was big, and about 6'4" as I recall. He played in there as tackle on the right side of the line on the alumni team, and he just took their first team's guard, tackle, end, then pushed them all back.

Farris: Is that right?

WAW: That's what the boys told me that saw it. They only let him play two minutes, then they took him out so the first team wouldn't get hurt. He wasn't trying to hurt people--he was just big and powerful.

Once in a while he'd spar a little with some of the boys around the police station. I remember he sparred with me once. He just tapped me and, boy, it felt like a cyclone hit me. I'll tell you how good a boxer he was. He was Pacific Coast Conference heavyweight boxing champion. He was a great athlete. I'll tell you how good he was as a fighter. He told me this. He used to talk with me, you know, I was his sergeant (1929-31) and he used to tell me lots of things. We were very good friends. I don't remember who it was, but some well-known and influential promoters in the fight game tried to get him to go out for the heavyweight champion title of the world to fight Jack Johnson. And he had quite a decision to make. He thought it over and finally decided to stick with his law profession and the direction he was going instead of getting into that game.

Farris: Was he an only child, Bill?

WAW: I don't know that.

Farris: You don't know anything about his parents then?

WAW: No, nothing about his parents. But you take people that knew Walter, they thought a great deal of Walter. He had a beautiful, cultured and lovely wife. Walt was a good Christian, he went to church. He had, I think, one or two children and they were nice, well brought up, and well bred. He was high class.

Farris: Did he have any impact on you personally?

WAW: Well, I don't know, just like a good friend might have some impact.

Farris: He would listen and you would talk and you would listen and he would talk?

Walter Gordon and Football

WAW: Yes. He used to discuss football with me. I was a great lover of football. I played high school football and was going to be in a football career and go to college, and then I got hurt and was put on the shelf in high school and had to quit. The people I played against, and I was able to play to a standstill with them, went to Big Ten Conferences and became all Big Conference tackles, so I know I'd have made it. I understood football, and I used to be able to diagnose plays and the coach used to let me pull out of the line and take off to the side after them, and I was the slowest man on the team. So I knew a little bit about football, and understood how Walt diagnosed how the Thundering Herd (USC) tipped off their plays. I was a great lover of football. Walt was a great lover of football. We talked football a good deal. I had to cut out going to college, football, but I knew a little bit about it. Not like he did, but just a little bit and I was interested. He used to talk with me about scouting certain teams and let me read his reports and talk with me about the things, and I'm telling you, that's why I know first-hand.

Farris: He would have made a hell of a good coach, huh?

WAW: Oh, hell yes. Andy Smith had a great respect--he was the top coach. The year they set out to beat the Thundering Herd of USC, he scouted every one of their games. That was the top team. They'd been the champions the year before. That was the top team in the conference and Andy wanted to beat them and he just put Walt Gordon on them for that year. They never knew what happened. When they played, I was on duty that Saturday afternoon and I used to stop by that old cigar store there on Shattuck and University, slide over there for a "minute" and listen to the radio. And he told me about it afterwards. He said they went in there pretty rough. Knocked 'em over. Not trying to hurt people, but really going after them.

Farris: They were really up for the game then?

WAW: They were up and they knew what to do because of what Walt Gordon discovered, their movements which gave away their plays, and that was the first time that Thundering Herd of USC was defeated in I think it was several years.

WAW: They never knew what hit 'em. And even old Pop Warner never caught their weakness. Walter said, "I don't think Pop Warner has discovered their weakness, giving the plays away." They'd look or move their shoulder or foot or something like that in the back field. One of those habits, you know. That's what I used to watch and that's how I used to be able to read them when I was playing in high school.

Walter Gordon as Policeman

Farris: What kind of a policeman was Walter?

WAW: Oh, he was good. He never had much trouble down there.

Farris: Was he a good investigator?

WAW: Well, I don't know, but he was sharp. You know the Berkeley patrol system. He kept his beat very "clean," discovered criminals working and was shot at by that notorious hole-in-the-wall burglar, Berger. When Walt told them to do something down on the west Berkeley beat they did it. Berkeley is not like of course, these other cities when you speak of the "other side of the railroad tracks," but west of Sacramento Street that was Berkeley's "the other side of the railroad tracks." Of course, the railroad tracks ran along the bay. I used the expression frequently, that that was the type of beat that was usually called the "other side of the railroad tracks," except it was much higher in quality than most such districts in other cities. A higher level. They were nice people. I got along with them, too, down there. I was one of the few "college cops" that could go down there that the gangs, the boys liked. But Walt, when he'd tell them to do something in a very nice, quiet way, they did it better.

Farris: He was a quiet man, then?

WAW: Yes, he didn't do any shouting. Very quiet. Because he was big, you know, "soft voice and a big stick." When you've got so-called fire power with muscle, there are not many people who are going to argue with you. And that was the thing. He'd tell them in a nice way and sometimes ask them to do this, and they'd do it. They thought a lot of him down there. I guess it helped because he was a great football player and a gentleman and a good officer. He looked after them. He protected them when they needed protection.

I remember another time in west Berkeley. Talk about his power. Down on University Avenue about a block before you get to the Southern Pacific Railroad depot, there was a Mexican place; it wasn't a hall, but it was some kind of recreation place, soft drinks and that. They had a

WAW: riot there one night--so-called, that's the way it came in. Course, riots in Berkeley, you know, they give them a big name. But the Mexicans were fighting each other with knives. Walt was first man in. The boys all told me. I didn't get down there in time enough to see it. But they sent in other officers, of course. When they got down there these Mexicans were coming out the front door head first. He just threw them out the front door, knives and all. The officers outside picked up the Mexicans and put them in the patrol wagon.

Farris: Knives and all?

WAW: Knives and all. It was wonderful when it came to muscle power in police work. These people who are shouting for little guys don't appreciate what a big guy can do. Just like in Chicago. There was a big colored fellow called "Big Six" that was something like Walter Gordon, an elder in his church and so forth. He had that whole colored district in Chicago under control. Morgan Collins, the commissioner of police at the time when I was back there as chief in Evanston, told me that old Big Six was worth a dozen policemen. When he went to a place and he had to open the door, the door came down, and colored fighters came out the doorway head first.

When I'd travel on the train, the pullman, and talked with the porters from Chicago, "Do you know Big Six?" "Oh, yes sir, yes sir. He's a great man, great policeman." They all looked up to him because he could protect them from the bad ones. Morgan said he was carrying six bullets in his body and he said he was the toughest cop in Chicago. And yet a fine Christian gentleman. That's something like Walt was to Berkeley. A good Christian gentleman, and I mean Christian too because he was a religious man. The only time I ever heard of him swearing was that time when this "nigger" beat up Ralph Pidgeon, and that was too much, having a person of his race beat up a white brother officer.

Barris: You wouldn't call him an "Uncle Tom" in light of today's thinking, would you?

WAW: No, you couldn't compare him with any of those characters.

"This is Your Life"

WAW: When I went on the famous program [honoring Walter Gordon], "This is Your Life," by Ralph Edwards, I represented the police field. I was police consultant out at Fresno, California, when they invited me down there to represent Walter Gordon's police field. And Earl Warren was down there as governor. Walter was head of the California Adult Authority.

Farris: Did he go to that after he left Berkeley?

WAW: No, while he was at Berkeley, while he was practicing law. He used to have a law office down there in that bank on the corner of University and San Pablo, upstairs. There's another story, remind me, of that law practice.

Governor Warren was there [on "This is Your Life"] to represent his work for the state in the Adult Authority. Brick Muller, the famous football player of Cal who threw a 65-yard completed pass to win a Big Game.

Farris: He later became a doctor.

WAW: Yes, he was a doctor then. He represented Walt's coaching days on the football team at Cal [on Ralph Edward's program]. And I represented his police department activities. That was quite an experience. I went down there to Los Angeles; they, of course, paid my expenses, put me up in a nice hotel. I guess I was the only white man who attended the banquet for him afterwards because the governor had a previous engagement and Brick Muller wasn't able to stay.

I stayed with all the rest of the colored people and all his friends. A lot of them I knew--the guy that used to be the shoe shiner in that cigar store on University and Shattuck. I knew a lot of the colored fellows. We had very nice colored people in Berkeley. This s.o.b. that attacked Pidgeon was the exception among Berkeley colored people. They had a nice colony of colored people down there, and I used to know all those good ones in Berkeley myself and we used to always talk. They were good friends of mine. That was a nice banquet where so many got up and testified just how much they loved Gordon and so forth. It was quite an experience.

Law Practice

WAW: And about his law practice. It was a funny thing. Now, that had an influence on me. When I was heading the police school at San Jose State College and taking in colored people--not that I'm prejudiced. I'm not prejudiced of colored people. I don't like bad "niggers" and I like good colored people, always have.

Farris: You don't like bad Irishmen either, do you Bill?

WAW: Well, I'm proud of my friends and proud of my enemies.

Farris: Right, that makes two of us.

WAW: The bastards can't be my friends, the tough ones, the wrong ones.

But when Walt was practicing law and he was having a struggle. Do you know the colored people very seldom would hire Walter for their attorney?

Farris: Why?

WAW: They wanted a white man. They thought it would prejudice the jury against them because of they being colored and Walter being colored. So Walter had mostly white clients.

Farris: Is that right?

WAW: Yes, he had mostly white clients. And he was a good lawyer. Smart, and an honest lawyer. He wasn't like some of these famous names that used to fix the juries.

Farris: He was a good defense man, though, wasn't he?

WAW: Yes.

Farris: When you came up against him did you have to really be prepared?

WAW: Well, I would suggest that. I never had to.

Farris: Did you hear of any stories of policemen who did?

WAW: No. The people in the big colored colony in north Oakland didn't hire him too much. It was people, more or less, in west Berkeley--not the colored people, but the white people.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Walter Gordon's Influence

Farris: Was Walter Gordon an influential man in Berkeley? Did he have any influence on people in the community as a whole?

WAW: No, whatever his politics, I don't even know which political party he belonged to. I would suspect, from our many conversations and from what I know of Walter, I imagine he was for the right man regardless of party.

Farris: But, by influential I mean did he have an impact on people in terms of their behavior?

WAW: Oh yes. That's what I wanted to know for sure, what you meant by influence.

Farris: I'm not speaking of political influence.

WAW: I just wanted to be sure that didn't get into it, because he was respected and liked and his opinions were asked by the people down there [in west Berkeley] and he looked after them. He was one of Vollmer's kind of policemen. Now, you know what that means.

Farris: Yeah, I sure do.

WAW: He was not only a tough policeman with tough guys--but I mean but tough, he'd pick 'em up and carry them to the station like a sack of flour--and he never had to hit anybody that I ever heard of. He was just big enough, he had enough potential fire power that nobody wanted to tackle him. And they knew he was Pacific Coast heavyweight boxing champion and nobody wanted to fool with him. He just brought them in quietly.

Farris: People would listen to him, then?

WAW: He was what Vollmer liked to say--not exactly a social worker but that type of thing. Preventing crimes by dealing with people's behavior in a preventive way.

Farris: Do you know of any kids he worked with?

WAW: No, but I know he--take a kid doing wrong--he'd talk to them, and the kids respected him and the kids listened to him. He was on duty after midnight most of the time. He preferred that so he could go to school and work and do things in the daytime, so he worked the after-midnight shift; and, therefore, you don't come in contact with kids too much down there. I never heard him talk to anybody but from what I know and from what I've heard and so forth I would say that if some kid was running around where he shouldn't be, Walter would say, "You better get home, young fellow. This is no place for you. You're the right kind of a boy and you don't belong out here. You're not that kind of a boy."

Farris: That would be his approach, then?

WAW: That's my opinion. I've had some wonderful colored people working for me. I had a very famous undercover man in the fourth layer of intelligence when I was chief of police in Evanston. A wonderful colored fellow. When I was in Lowry there in intelligence school there was a colored fellow in Denver that worked for me--a wonderful, wonderful fellow. I've had mighty good colored friends. Walt was one of my favorite colored people. In other words, with Walter Gordon you weren't conscious--or I wasn't--very conscious of his color.

Farris: He was just a good person.

WAW: A wonderful person. And he was just the same as any white man, not any white man, any good white man. You just didn't feel any color barrier or racial feeling at all with Walter. He was a man.

Farris: Would that backfire in terms of his relationship with other colored folks?

WAW: They just loved him and looked up to him. You should have seen that big crowd of colored people at the banquet, after the "This is Your Life" show pay great tributes to Walter.

Farris: There wasn't that feeling that maybe he might have been an Uncle Tom?

WAW: Oh, no, no, no. He was a leader. He had all the respect and love of a leader, a good leader. He was more like an Abraham Lincoln. People loved him and looked up to him--white and colored people--they just thought the world of him. If Walter Gordon said, "Would you please do this for me?" they'd do it. That's the kind that I mean when I say a "leader." He wasn't active politically. He was no activist or anything like that. He was a good conservative in his politics--whatever party he belonged to, I wouldn't ever know.

Farris: But at the same time he was not saying, in effect, "I got mine made, you guys get your own," either.

WAW: No, no. He was honest as they make them. I mean true honesty, true integrity.

Farris: After he left the department and law school and so forth, did you have contact with him?

WAW: He didn't leave while he was in the law school. He was in the department while he was in law school.

Farris: Right. But when he went to the Adult Authority, did you still have contact with him?

WAW: No, I didn't have any contact. I met him on the train once when I was police consultant out there in Fresno. Whether I was police consultant or not then, I don't know. Anyway, I was on the train in the San Joaquin Valley and Walt was on the train. As soon as we saw each other we sat down and had a great talk-fest, reunion, the good old times. He used to have a lot of--well, I don't know, I don't want to brag--but he used to like me and he had a lot of respect for my police ability. I'd been chief of police back there and he was proud of the fact that he'd known me and all that. He respected me and I respected him. We were good friends.

You remember Chief Charlie Dullea of the San Francisco Police Department?

Farris: Yes.

WAW: If you recall, when Vollmer retired, one day he made some statement to the newspaper about some moron cop in the San Francisco Police Department. Charlie Dullea was madder than hell at him and he didn't have too much respect for the whole Berkeley Police Department after that statement.

Farris: He used to drive around Berkeley rather than going through it!

WAW: I don't know too much about that except I know that he reacted. And he was off Vollmer for good. I felt it, too, when I first came out there and became head of the police school at San Jose State College.

Farris: You were a Berkeley cop so therefore you were automatically--

WAW: Yeah, I was a Berkeley cop--so Charlie was friendly enough on the surface but there was just that little wondering. He was always good to me, but he and I had quite an argument one time. Then old Sheriff [Eugene] Biscailuz got us together at the police convention and said, "You two are fine fellows and good friends of mine, and I don't want to see you battle." I had been claiming it was time for other police departments to hire police school graduates. It was an academic argument. In other words, I was in at a time that police departments hired college-trained policemen. Charlie was against it because he had to be because the guys that really ran the San Francisco department wanted it that way. So I said, "Charlie's a good friend of mine and I have a lot of respect for him, and I'm really begging the question because we can't place our men fast enough. The war's coming on and we should have unity, and I'll be glad to back down on my position in favor of Charlie's position because I realize what he's up against." So from that time on we were very good friends.

Vollmer told me about his hassle and how Dullea was attacking him and so forth. I said, "Well, I tell you, frankly, I don't know what I can do. I'd like to do something and try to bring peace and that sort of thing." Walter Gordon did. Walter Gordon talked with Charlie Dullea and after talking together, Dullea dropped the battle with Vollmer.

Farris: Is that right?

WAW: Absolutely. I don't remember just how it was.

Farris: Was Walter Gordon the guy that did that?

WAW: He was the guy that did that.

Farris: He was chairman of the Adult Authority then, wasn't he?

WAW: Yeah, that's it. Charlie Dullea said to me, "You know, Bill, we elected Walter chairman of the Adult Authority because he was doing a great job

WAW: and we wanted him to get up to the top." Charlie was on the Adult Authority, too. So that's the kind of a guy that Walter was, you see? He settled that with his diplomacy and good offices, that split, and after that Charlie Dullea was a good friend again of August Vollmer.

Farris: And Holstrom benefitted from that, too, you know?

WAW: They all did. I'll show you how far that went, too. I have no reason to suspect that Charlie Dullea had held any feelings against me. I knew about the thing and thought maybe he did because of our argument on that.

When I came back from World War II, I was looking for a new police school job in some of the universities. I felt it was time to move into a university rather than go back to San Jose State College. It was time to make a change. I'd been there eight years and I was ready to go to a university. It so happened that one of the alumni, a friend of mine--I can't think of his name. He was a big banker in San Francisco. I happened to be talking to him at one of those police gatherings, the Bay County Peace Officers, he belonged. He was a great backer of Charlie Dullea's, too. He said, "I'd like to see you at San Francisco University." I don't know if they called it San Francisco yet--it was a Jesuit school then. I don't remember whether it was Saint Joseph's or what.

Farris: University of San Francisco, isn't it?

WAW: Before that I think it had a Catholic name [Saint Ignatius]. Father Feeley was the president, I recall. So, this banker told me to go see Father Feeley. He was the chaplain of our Bay County Peace Officers--an awful fine priest. College president. I always liked him. I went up to see him and he said, "We'd be interested." This banker said, "You helped Dud De Groot get a lot of fine football players at your police school, and I'd like to see that happen here at San Francisco. Then we could get a lot of good football players. Dud De Groot got a lot of top football players away from USC, UCLA, California and Stanford, because they wanted to be a policeman instead of a physical education instructor." He did have a famous team then. We had eight men on the first squad in our police school. So this banker wanted to do that thing. He was looking at the football team to get the police school in there.

So, I talked with Father Feeley. He said, "Can you get Chief Dullea's approval?" So I thought, "Charlie's a good friend of mine and I'll go see him." I went to see Charlie. I told him what Father Feeley told me. I told this banker, "You know, I'm a Protestant and I happen to be a Mason. Of course, I'm not prejudiced religiously against Catholics. I'm for 'em. I just happen to be a Protestant." He said, "That won't make any difference. Knute Rockne went to Notre Dame, you know." So, I went to Charlie and told him what this banker wanted me to do--quite an

WAW: influential man, too, in San Francisco. Can't think of his name. He wore glasses, a short fellow, a very fine Irish personality, the smile and all that. And I always considered Father Feeley a friend of mine. I told Charlie Dullea what Father Feeley said.

And he thought a minute and I said, "You know, Charlie, when I run the police school I work very closely with the chief of police. You will recall I worked very close with Chief John Black in San Jose. As a matter of fact, I helped him to keep his job when some shyster politicians tried to get after him. You know, I like you and would work closely with you." He said, "Okay, Bill. I know you're a good friend of mine. I'll approve it." That was the first big move that Charlie made in that field. So I went back to the banker and to Father Feeley and told them exactly what Charlie said. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I'll back it." But then this G.I. Bill went through. Father Feeley said, "We just couldn't add another thing. We've got students hanging from the ceiling and flood the school. We couldn't take on another thing for anything."

Farris: That kind of went by the board.

WAW: But Charlie Dullea's backing me was a big factor in that thing. If it hadn't been that situation I'd have gone with them.

Farris: And Walter Gordon was the guy that broke the ice on Vollmer and helped you, too, then.

WAW: And the Berkeley Police Department. I assumed that on myself. We were always a pretty good thing. I knew how he [Charles Dullea] did hate Vollmer, and I was a Vollmer man so I inferred that he felt a little something down there, although he didn't show it.

Farris: In some ways, then, in his own quiet way, Walter Gordon was very, very important.

WAW: He was a diplomat.

Farris: He was very important to breaking that log-jam.

WAW: That's the thing he did do. He broke that log-jam, which was a lot of misunderstanding. There had been, I think, a mental test given at the San Francisco department and they had one cop that tested out a moron. And Vollner referred to that--in plain language.

Farris: He wasn't immune from making mistakes either once in awhile.

WAW: I think he was trying to put over the idea of getting rid of morons in police departments. An academic thing.

WAW: As I recall, though, on Walt, I can't think of anything else except he was a wonderful fellow and a good, fine, fine police officer.

Farris: That statement about any person, I think, is as much as a man could ask for, really.

WAW: And one thing, too. When you were talking to Walter, if you weren't a prejudiced guy in the first place, you forgot about his color, being different. I mean he was that kind of a person. He was accepted same as a white man. A colored white man. A white man colored. Any way you want to put it. A wonderful personality. I haven't mentioned the word "personality," but he had a wonderful personality. Made friends easily and all that sort of thing. That sums it up pretty good.

Farris: Bill, I sure thank you for your time.

Transcriber: Marilyn White
Final Typist: Teresa Allen

A FOOTNOTE ON WALTER GORDON AS A POLICEMAN

The following anecdote is an excerpt from a letter to Judge Stanley Barnes. It illustrates the humane and sensible attitude that Walter Gordon had toward his police work, which has been referred to in many of the interviews included in this volume. [Ed.]

Walt was one of the greatest men I have known. I spent many nights riding with him on his night police patrol.

Once, at 2 a.m., I woke up to see enormous Walt in police uniform holding one of my fraternity brothers--who was obviously very drunk. Walt said, "Gordon, I found one of your brothers with his car in a ditch and waving his arms all over North Berkeley. Do you want to get up and take care of him or shall I just put him in the can?" I got up. Walt went by the police station to pick up a rope, took me to the car, hauled it out of the ditch, waved good-bye, and I drove the car back to the fraternity house.

Gordon H. White

June, 1976
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



George M. Johnson

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- George M. Johnson

INTERVIEW HISTORY	118
Joint Law Practice with Walter Gordon	119
The Nature of the Joint Practice	121
Party for Walter Gordon as New Governor of the Virgin Islands	122

INTERVIEW HISTORY

George Marion Johnson, a retired attorney and educator, has had a distinguished career in the fields of both law and education including service as acting general counsel for the President's Commission on Fair Employment Practice, as a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and as dean of the Law School of Howard University. Dr. Johnson's law career began, upon his graduation in 1929 from Boalt Hall, in the law offices of Walter Gordon. It was because of this association that George Johnson was asked by the Regional Oral History Office to contribute to this volume.

On November 8, 1976, a beautifully sunny day in Honolulu, I interviewed Dr. George M. Johnson for the Walter Gordon oral history project. His fourth-floor suite in the 1350 Ala Moana Boulevard Building, overlooking Ala Moana Park with its talkative tropical birds, made a wonderfully comfortable setting for an interview.

When I arrived at about 2 P.M., Dr. Johnson was out for a few minutes, but Mrs. Johnson, his lovely wife, helped me find a nice place in the living room for the interview. Dr. Johnson came in, shortly after, smiling, with several neatly typed index cards containing exactly what he wanted to say, in chronological order. His material was well organized in advance, and he made no later editorial changes.

I had imagined I would have to put him at ease before we started the taping, but with his organization and preciseness he put me at ease. The twenty-minute interview was very pleasant for both of us.

When I went back to his home after the interview for a visit and to follow up, I found myself calling him both Dr. Johnson and Mr. Johnson, so I asked, "Would you rather I call you Mr. Johnson, or Dr. Johnson?" He looked at me and replied, "At this point you may call me George."

November, 1976
Honolulu, Hawaii

Caryn Prince
Interviewer

This interview was taped by Miss Caryn Prince, who in her high school vacations had been employed in the Regional Oral History Office. At the time of the interview, Miss Prince was seventeen and living in Honolulu. This circumstance led to our asking her to undertake the interview and she generously agreed to do so. Ed.

[Date of Interview: November 8, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE M. JOHNSON

Joint Law Practice with Walter Gordon

Prince: Go ahead, Mr. Johnson:

Johnson: The late Walter A. Gordon, who was widely known as "Walt," was raised in Riverside, California, which is only about eleven miles from San Bernardino, California, where I was raised. He was several years my senior, however, and I did not know anything about him--even though we were raised only eleven miles apart--until after 1918, when I first enrolled myself at the University of California at Berkeley. I then heard about Walter Gordon as an All-American football player and an intercollegiate boxing champion. I also learned that he had graduated, or was about to graduate, from the University of California's law school, which was then referred to as Boalt Hall.

I received my A.B. degree from the University of California in 1923 and had planned to enroll in the law school, but for financial reasons it was necessary for me to postpone my enrollment in order to get enough money to continue my graduate education, and it turned out that this was a three-year postponement; that is to say, I got my A.B. in '23 and I didn't enroll in the law school until '26. So during this period '23 to '26, while I was out looking for employment, whether it was permanent or part-time or whatnot, I came to know Walt quite well. He had married and begun to raise a family and had decided to accept full-time employment as an officer of the Berkeley police force. He concluded that because of his family obligations, it would be unwise to attempt to open a new office and for that reason he postponed it.

He secured a night-time assignment on the police force. Berkeley had a motorized police force and [the chief was] the outstanding police

Johnson: educator, August Vollmer. He was widely known. So, by getting this night-time [assignment], he [Walter Gordon] had his days free where he could pick up a few cases that didn't involve his police work. And we had a mutual friend who had an office in Oakland, and so he would practice some out of that office. He assisted me in getting employment on a number of occasions, and because he worked at night I frequently would go around his beat with him, and we would talk about a variety of things.

Prince: So you folks were also friends socially, not just--

Johnson: Oh yes, and I was a frequent guest at his home. He had first a boy and then another boy and then finally a girl. I was in and out of their house, and on some occasions when his wife was not feeling well, he would ask me if I would go by and stay until he got off from work. They would invite me to dinner when there was some question as to whether I had made enough money to buy my own dinner. It was that kind of a relationship.

Prince: I see.

Johnson: Now, Walter's prowess as a football player led to his appointment as a part-time assistant coach of the University of California football team and scout. I guess everyone knows what a scout's responsibilities are, but to make it clear, he watches teams play that the University of California team will play in the future.

Prince: I see, like a spy.

Johnson: That's right. So, it meant that if we were going to play Washington at Pullman, he would have to leave on Thursday or Friday (we didn't have planes like in these days), and this gave me an opportunity to be helpful to him. You see, it turned out that when I graduated I took the bar. (I graduated in 1929, having enrolled in 1926.) I took and passed the bar examination, so the question arose, "What do I do?" Well, in our riding around Walter Gordon would always dream, "I just hope that I can reach the point where I can open up my own office."

Now, I don't recall whether it was the year I passed the bar or the year after. It was either 1929 or '30 that Walter Gordon resigned from the police force and opened up his own office for the full-time practice of law. Well, that was at the same time that I was in a position, and I knew that he didn't have any money to pay me as a law clerk, and I had no way to even predict when I would be in a position to open my own office. So he suggested that I come in there and work, and the cases that would come in to him I could help work on them and, as we used to say, "learn the difference between law in action and law in theory."

Now that gives some special significance to the fact that he had this assignment as assistant football coach and scout, because it meant

Johnson: that I had to run the shop, and you get what most young lawyers need, petty criminal practice--weekend drunks and that sort of thing, but it's terrific practice. So that worked out to our mutual advantage.

The Nature of the Joint Practice

Prince: What sort of clients did you have in the law office when he first began?

Johnson: Well, when he first began--you see, he was a very popular person because he set up his office in west Berkeley, which had been his beat. I think the third case he got was a big estate; a man in the community had died--they had known him for some reason or other (I don't even recall). But he began to get the kinds of cases that you would not normally get if you hadn't worked in the community in the capacity in which he worked. And so he got them around the mill--because west Berkeley was then somewhat Tenderloin, part of it; you got a series of petty criminal cases, and then I was able to bring in a murder case, someone who knew I'd been in school, and a murder took place, and asked me if I could be of some help, so I recommended Walter and this friend who had the office in Oakland. So they took the case together.

So we had a fairly wide assortment of cases. Well, as time went on I had to begin thinking in terms of my own future. It was suggested, because my specialization--oh, pardon me, I neglected to mention that when I graduated, at that same time, I was awarded a Sheffield-Sanborn scholarship to work on the J.S.D. degree, that's Doctor of the Science of Jurisprudence. Now, even though I wasn't bringing in cases except by accident, I was completing my residence requirements for my doctor's degree. And then when that got over, I said, "Now."

A civil service examination was given for the state board of equalization, a tax attorney. Well, I had written my doctor's thesis in the field of taxation, and so I took that examination and stood high. No one with a doctor's degree had taken that exam, and I was offered starting as the assistant tax counsel to the state board of equalization. That was in 1933. So that meant that I had to sever my relationship with Walter Gordon, because, shortly after I took the appointment, I was promoted to Sacramento and it so happened that from that time forward we saw each other infrequently.

So, that's my story about him.

Party for Walter Gordon as New Governor of the Virgin Islands

Prince: Okay, let me just ask you a few questions to see if we can bring back anything else. When you met in Washington on the eve of his departure for the Virgin Islands, did you discuss his expectations with him at all?

Johnson: No, you see, this was something, as I recall, this was an idea of a former colleague of Walter Gordon's in the football world, Judge Barnes, I believe. I'm not sure. He was in Washington. He got in touch with me about Walter's appointment. He said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could pull together some of the graduates of the University of California." So I rounded up those that I knew, and he took over the rest of it. But it was just no more than he [Walter Gordon] was in the receiving line and we all passed by him and wished him bon voyage.

Prince: I see. Did you ever visit him in the Virgin Islands at all?

Johnson: No, I didn't.

Prince: Okay, thank you very much Mr. Johnson.

Transcriber: Pat Raymond
Final Typist: Teresa Allen



Alvin Sweetwyne

Interview with Alvin Sweetwyne

Interview History 123

Interview with Alvin Sweetwyne 125

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Alvin Sweetwyne was suggested to me as a potential subject for an interview about Walter Gordon by a mutual friend, who learned by chance of the connection between the two men.

Mr. Sweetwyne grew up in Berkeley and attended Berkeley schools. When he was 12, upon the death of his aunt, he and his 17-year-old brother, who sent money home from the CCC camp where he was employed, maintained a home for their younger sister with little outside help. It was during this time that he came to the attention of Walter Gordon, who, with other black Berkeley leaders, apparently kept a lookout for promising black youths to groom for later job opportunities. Among other things, Walter Gordon's friendly intervention in his young life resulted in saving Alvin Sweetwyne's left arm, which serves as a daily reminder to him of Walter Gordon's kindness. While he was still in high school, Mr. Sweetwyne got into show business as a night-club entertainer--he tap-danced on skates, an act he developed from early years as a "key boy" at Rollerland in Oakland.

He was dropped from the ranks of "the Chosen" young blacks as the result of a youthful indiscretion. It was necessary for the young men who were being selected by black leaders to have impeccable reputations, since they were to be "firsts" in various jobs, such as membership in the California Highway Patrol. This necessity was understood by Alvin Sweetwyne and he accepted his fall from grace without rancor. He moved to San Francisco and has been associated most of his life with show business, as a performer and as a stage manager. His has been a varied and colorful life, but quite different from what it might have been had he been in a position to accept the opportunities that Walter Gordon and others were developing for young blacks. Mr. Sweetwyne is a robust and cheerful man who expresses no regrets and displays no wistfulness, but he does speculate on how it might have been.

One interview took place on November 15, 1977, in San Francisco at the home of a friend of Mr. Sweetwyne's where he was house-sitting. The presence of a large and initially noisy dog proved to be no real problem to the interview. We reluctantly had to close the windows and shut out the fresh sea air--the house was about two blocks from the beach--in order to lessen the noise from passing buses.

Alvin Sweetwyne is an earthy and matter-of-fact person, but once or twice his eyes filled with tears, not at the memory of youthful hardships or later disappointments, but at the recollected kindness of Walter Gordon. Frequently

Mr. Sweetwyne has had the role of interpreter and peacemaker between hostile black groups and between whites and blacks. He sees this role as one he is qualified for in part because of his association with Walter Gordon; he is implementing attitudes and practicing skills he first learned from him.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: 15 November 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH ALVIN SWEETWYNE

Brower: Mr. Sweetwyne, I would like to ask you, before we talk about Walter Gordon, a little bit about your own life. Were you born in California?

Sweetwyne: No, I wasn't. I was born in New Orleans and I came out here when I was about six months old. My family brought me out here.

Brower: To San Francisco?

Sweetwyne: No, we were in west Oakland first. My dad had lived out here, as a Pullman porter, before he married my mother. That's why he knew and loved the East Bay. We went to west Oakland first and we moved from west Oakland to Berkeley. I guess I was about five years old at the time, so that would be around about 1920 when we first moved to Berkeley. I can set the time pretty well because I started kindergarten at Berkeley at the Lincoln School when it was on Alcatraz Avenue and King Street. I can remember distinctly that they moved the school from there to where Lincoln School is now on King and Prince streets. It's a big building. The original building was a wooden building. It was a firetrap and they moved to a brick building on King and Prince streets.

Brower: Were you still in school at that time?

Sweetwyne: I actually started kindergarten at the old school but our class transferred to the new school while I was still in kindergarten, so I must have started at five and I think you stay in it until you are six. My family only lived a block from there--3107 King Street. I went from Lincoln School to Edison Junior High School, that's down there on Russell Street. The school is still there.

Brower: But a different name now?

Sweetwyne: No, they closed it down because they were afraid of an earthquake. They had a very bad earthquake while I was still going to Lincoln School. I remember it was the first time in my life I had ever been in an earthquake and they took all the students out on the street, and it broke windows in the school, but the school stood. I went from Edison Junior High to Berkeley High and then I guess I was kind of a naughty boy. I went from Berkeley High to continuation school.

I had to work for a living. I had no parents.

Brower: Your father had been a Pullman porter?

Sweetwyne: My father had been a Pullman porter but he left the home when I was five years old and I didn't see him any more until I was about twenty-eight, or somewhere around that age.

Brower: In the meantime your mother had died?

Sweetwyne: My mother died when I was about six. My aunt took care of us, my sister and myself and my brother Earl until we were around about twelve and then she passed on.

Brower: There were three of you then?

Sweetwyne: Yes, at the home. I had two older brothers but they were living elsewhere.

Brower: Were they full brothers?

Sweetwyne: Yes.

Brower: So she died when you were twelve and left the three of you without any--

Sweetwyne: Yes, my sister was younger than myself. She was five years my junior.

Brower: Were you the oldest?

Sweetwyne: No, my brother was older than I was. He was five years my senior.

Brower: So he was seventeen?

Sweetwyne: Yes, about seventeen. Then when my aunt died, when I was about twelve, my brother went to the CCC camps and earned money and I was working at the Rollerland Skating Rink for tips in Oakland. I used to walk there from Berkeley, to Oakland every night, and I'd drop my sister off at my godmother's house at 555 63rd Street in north Oakland and went to the Rollerland Skating Rink, worked until 12:00,

- Sweetwyne: and walked back and walked my sister back home and I'd get her ready for school.
- Brower: So you kids managed by yourselves without any adults?
- Sweetwyne: A group something like the Welfare is now came to investigate the house at one time because we had no water at the house. What I used to do, I used to take the water from the house next door which was vacant (their water was still on) and run a hose from their house to a bathtub in our house. And when these people came to investigate our house the house was so clean and immaculate, my sister was so healthy and everything, that they said, "We can't do any more than they're doing" and they left us alone.
- Brower: That was remarkable.
- Sweetwyne: Yes, it wouldn't have happened in these days.
- Brower: But what a struggle for a bunch of kids!
- Sweetwyne: Yes. Well, my brother was at the CCC camps.
- Brower: Did he send money?
- Sweetwyne: He sent all of his money and he even became a boxer while in the camps to make extra money and he wasn't really a boxer. He just--
- Brower: He just took a beating for the dough?
- Sweetwyne: Right. What finally happened was that my parents had been buying the house and I don't know why we were able to stay. I guess it turned to rent, but it got to the place where we couldn't pay the rent so I moved from there down below Sacramento Street near Ashby. I can't think of the name of the street.
- Brower: Acton?
- Sweetwyne: I think it was Acton. No, my oldest brother moved to Acton. It was between Acton and Sacramento--Stanton Street. I had a little bungalow down there. I think I was paying twelve dollars a month for a bungalow--was it two bedrooms or one bedroom? Two bedrooms.
- Brower: I know we were paying \$35 in north Berkeley, for a house with two bedrooms.
- Sweetwyne: When we were younger, my brother and I used to take a lawn mower and push it all the way up there by the Hotel Claremont. We used to mow people's lawns there for fifteen cents or ten cents, one would be trimming the edge, the other would be doing his thing with the mower and there'd be pocket money for us.

Brower: Did any teachers from Berkeley High take an interest in you?

Sweetwyne: I had one teacher--she might even still be living--who--she had a sister, they were just--I don't know whether it was because they knew my family difficulties or whether they just felt fond of me, but they took a great interest in me. One was Mrs. Storey, who was a music teacher.

Brower: Were you musical?

Sweetwyne: Yes, actually most of my life has been in show business. Her sister, Mrs. Vance who later became Mrs. Siebert, they used to--

Brower: That was at Berkeley High School?

Sweetwyne: No, that was at Lincoln. Then they both went to Edison Junior High School about the same time I did and I think Mr. Blum was the principal then.

We used to use the Edison Junior High School Gymnasium at night time for--they had two all-black teams, one in north Oakland and one in Berkeley and I remember Lionel Wilson [at present the mayor of Oakland. Ed.] very well. He used to be so much smaller than the other fellows, but he was a very good basketball player. He was a sharp shooter. We used to play basketball at nights. Well, I was too young to play but I really enjoyed watching these games. It was a big event amongst the black people at the time.

Brower: Was Edison an all-black school?

Sweetwyne: No. It was a school that was located in a heavily populated black area, but there were more Caucasians that attended the school than there were blacks.

Brower: But this night use was pretty much all black?

Sweetwyne: Yes, it was completely so. Most of the families in those days were large families. At one time there was ten in my family, then kids. When I came along, I think I was probably the seventh child. But the families were all close friends--the kids all grew up together, all the big families grew up together, and we were sort of like groups--we didn't have any places to play much. We played in lots, on corner lots we played stick-in-the-mud and kick-the-can and things like that. We didn't have and couldn't afford all these toys and bikes and cars.

On Sundays there used to be a big function down at San Pablo Park. This is down there below Sacramento Street. It's still there, the park is still there. I drove over there once about four or five years ago and I felt real nostalgic. It's an oval-shaped park.

Sweetwyne: There used to be a social function there on Sundays, and especially on Easter Sundays. Everybody would put on their Sunday or Easter regalia. They'd all go down there and it was great fun. One man had taken his car and he'd made it into a mobile restaurant. He used to cook big roasts and food like that at home and put it in his car, and he'd come down there and sell big thick sandwiches of roast beef, potato salad, and other goodies, and the people would stand around and buy and they'd socialize. That's where you got to meet one another. Actually, the people began to get together--they sort of formed social groups where they began to be very close and there was one man named Mr. Carter who decided he would run for political office in Berkeley and I think he was probably one of the first [black] people to do that. One of the first, Mr. Carter. He ran for public office and he campaigned very hard but some of the black people weren't confident enough in him. He was a very refined, very cultured person. He had two children. One was Mark and the other was Royal Carter. He lived on King Street and Ashby Avenue.

He didn't get near enough votes to get in office. He didn't get the black vote at the time, but it was sort of like a nucleus of the political involvement of the blacks.

There was another man who came into town--Mr. William Montgomery. He was a pharmacist. He started a drug store down there on Sacramento and Ashby Avenue.

Brower: Not the one that Rumford has now?

Sweetwyne: Yes, the same one, but it's been moved. It's across the street now. The only drug store we used to go to before then was Caldecott, who later became mayor of Berkeley.

I used to hang out up there all the time. That was around Grove Street, Grove and Ashby. They had those dinkies running then--we called them the Toonerville Trolley.

Brower: It was a little red train?

Sweetwyne: No, you're talking about the Southern Pacific train. This was a little streetcar. There were two tracks like that. There was one on Dwight Way and there was one on Ashby Avenue. It was a single track and about every four or five blocks it would have a double track where the dinkies would pass each other. We'd call them Toonerville Trolley. We used to hitch rides on the cow-catchers of these trolley cars all the time.

Anyhow, Mr. Montgomery gave me a job working behind the counter and I think he was doing that more to help me than for any other reason.

Brower: I don't see how you had time to get into trouble.

Sweetwyne: Well, the kind of trouble I was meaning wasn't big trouble, it was--

Brower: Just enough to get you bounced out of school?

Sweetwyne: No, it will come up. It's jumping way ahead. But Mr. Montgomery gave me a job in his drug store at the time that he hired Tom Flemings, and Byron Rumford. Rumford was an apprentice then and was still going to school. He sort of looked after me in a way.

Brower: Which one?

Sweetwyne: Mr. Montgomery. He sort of saw to it that I was earning enough money to help myself and he'd make suggestions to me as to how to improve myself. The first job he gave me was circulating posters announcing that he was opening the store. After that was over, I asked him for a job and he gave me a job behind the counter, delivering medicine and things like that because he had delivery service. I did that on a bicycle. He told me, "Now, I want you to work behind the counter where the ice cream is, you serve the ice cream and I want you to have as much ice cream as you want." So that's what I did. I went back there and I'd serve one ice cream cone and I'd eat two, I'd eat two for one. After about two days of that, he had no problem out of me about his ice cream.
[Laughter]

Brower: Because you were full up?

Sweetwyne: Right. I understand now why he did that. But he kind of got things together. He and Walter Gordon and a dentist, Dr. Pittman, he's on Grove Street there somewhere-- See, this tooth of gold in my mouth; he put that in my mouth when I was about twelve years old and he wouldn't charge me. He saw me one day and told me, "You come up and see me." I went up there and he did my dental work free. They were all doing things like this. I know now what they were doing.

Brower: They really were caring for their own people?

Sweetwyne: Right. So what had happened was that all these doctors and lawyers would always get together there and they were all friends. They'd meet in the drug store and have conversations, political and otherwise, and that's how I got to know them and how they got to know of me.

Brower: Because you were working there?

Sweetwyne: Yes. What happened was I think I was going to Berkeley High School--I don't know. I can't get this time thing going. But I had started working in show business. I was a nightclub entertainer. I used to do a tap dance on roller skates and I did comedy. My partner, Jimmy Washington, he was much older than I and much more experienced and I benefited from working in show business with him. We had an engagement down in a place in El Cerrito or Albany. I think it was called the Wagon Wheel.

Brower: Where was that, on San Pablo Avenue?

Sweetwyne: Yes. So on this particular night we went out there, we went out there to do a show and I was a little bit late and I got pulled over to the side for having a noisy muffler or something, I don't know, and I got a citation for it. I actually forgot about it. Probably about two months later the police had a warrant for me; they came and took me to the Berkeley Police Station. I had been working--I had just started working on the WPA then, I guess. Yes. They gave me breakfast there, and then they took me to Albany where I got the ticket. They had just had court that day, and I wasn't given a hearing. I think they had court once a week at that time. They said, "What will we do with him? We can't turn him loose." So they took me back to Oakland around by the lake there and put me in the county jail there. They kept me there until the next Tuesday or whenever it was because I had no money. Then they took me back to the Albany jail and the judge there told me, "for time served" or something I could go, and disposed of the case.

The Berkeley Daily Gazette got the story and they found out that I had been working on the WPA and that my job there that I had been assigned to do at the WPA was to help the firemen in Albany build that jail. A fireman and a policeman were the ones that I worked for. One was a contractor and the other was a brick-layer and when they built that two-cell jail I was the only laborer on the job. When they finished it, I was probably one of the first persons they put in it.

Brower: That's better than another story I heard. The man who built the electric chair at San Quentin died in it.

Sweetwyne: Oh, wow! Then what happened was that the Berkeley Daily Gazette got this information and they printed it in the paper, about Al Sweetwyne who built the jail, as a laborer for the WPA and was locked in it himself, and then they put in quotation marks, "Ah didn't think when Ah was building this yar jail, that Ah'd be locked up in yere." [imitates supposed black accent].

So the people in Berkeley, all these doctors and lawyers, knew me and knew I didn't talk that way. They put in a mass cancellation of the Gazette. This was the first sort of a grouping thing that they did, a community thing.

Sweetwyne: Then another incident came up. The Berkeley High School had built two new swimming pools, and when they opened them up, they didn't allow black people in the pool.

Brower: You're talking about summer use now, aren't you?

Sweetwyne: Night use. It was during the night.

White adults used it at night time and they didn't want any blacks in there. The black people then demanded that they be allowed to use the pool, so what the whites decided to do was to let the blacks have it one night each week, which was on Wednesday night. That was the only night that black people could use the pool. Up until and including Tuesday night the pool was kept immaculately clean, but just before the pool would be closed at the end of the swim session on Tuesday night, the whites would expectorate and urinate in the pool. They would also float debris in the pool, such as toilet paper, cigarette butts, matchsticks, etc.

Wednesdays, when the black people would have the use of it, they'd come in and find the pool filthy. So the blacks banded together and complained about it. (Every Thursday the pool was cleaned.) The blacks then decided to picket (for what I believe was the first time in Berkeley). They got signs and pamphlets and picketed the pool. They said, "Either we use the pool any time or we close it down," and that mass grouping got some effect. Walter Gordon, I know, was behind this, plus many other people. I know he had a lot to do with the success of this movement.

There was another incident that was similar to that. This was the time that he actually helped me personally. I had bought myself a Model-T Ford for five dollars and then I got another one for three dollars. My friends helped me push it home and I took them all apart and I think about this time, I was much younger then, I think I was probably about fourteen or fifteen or something like that. At that time if you got a driver's license it was for a lifetime. They have called them all back in since.

Brower: So you cannibalized one of them. You took parts of one to make one good car?

Sweetwyne: Yes. Well, what I did, I did that to get the first one running and then I took the other parts and made the other one work, so I had two cars, two cars for eight dollars. So what I used to do, I had a rumble seat on one Model-T Ford. The other one had a turtle back, but it didn't have any running board. About a month ago I ran into one of my playmates, Archie Williams. I don't know whether you remember him or not. He set the world record in the

Sweetwyne: Olympics back in--well, I haven't seen Archie since we were young kids together. We were kids together, we were playmates, and he's the one that started me to making these little--we called them baby ROGs--little balsa wood airplanes that you'd run by rubber bands and you'd wind them up with your fingers. He started me into that but I couldn't afford to keep buying the balsa wood, so I had to drop out. But he stayed with it and he later got a job at the Oakland Airport, sweeping up in the hangars, and they'd pay him off by taking him up in flights. He rode in the planes with people like Smith and Earhart and other famous people. They were all around then. They'd take him up in flights often enough that when the war in '41 broke out, he was so well up on aviation that he went to Tuskegee and became a military flight officer.

But I hadn't seen Archie since we were about twelve years old when he used to make me mad and I used to chase him. I think that's the reason why he could run so fast.

Brower: Getting away from Al Sweetwyne!

Sweetwyne: [Laughter] But I didn't see Archie since the time we were kids and I'd heard from different people that we knew about how and what he was doing. I live in San Rafael and my daughter was upset with the Safeway stores because they wouldn't cash her check even though she had enough funds and identification. So she stopped patronizing them and she said, "I'm going to find a new place." She went all the way to San Anselmo to a store there, a Callo store. She said, "Daddy, I want you to ride with me." I said, "Okay." We don't see one another very much. She's my youngest child and I just love that little girl. I love them all, but she's the last one. I said, "Okay, I'll ride down with you."

So as we got out of the car, I started to go to the store and I looked at this fellow coming out and he looked at me and he says, "Sweetwyne?" And I said, "Archie?" He said, "Yes." And we grabbed one another and hugged and I told my daughter who he was. I hadn't seen Archie since I was twelve years old. I don't remember anyone's name ever, but I knew his right off. Then we started to talk about different things and he said, "You must come and visit," which I will do. He told me to come by. He lives in San Anselmo.

But Archie was telling me about the time when all the kids used to love to come around because I could fix cars. I was a child genius about mechanics. No one ever taught me. I just figured cars out.

Brower: I will say a Model-T was an easy car to repair.

- Sweetwyne: Yes, well, that's what I did, took it apart and then I figured how to make it work and I put it back together and that way I could drive it. So what I did, all the kids used to come by and visit me and we'd go for a ride and we'd all chip in and buy gas. I don't know how much gas was then, probably about eight cents a gallon or something. This particular day—I used to love to get one of these twenty-five cent Sunday streetcar passes; you could ride all day long. I used to get that pass and I'd go over to Idora Park and I'd go to Alameda—that was my favorite spot, Neptune Beach. I used to go to Neptune Beach on Sundays and spend my entire day there.
- Brower: It's interesting. There were no racial problems at Neptune Beach and Idora Park?
- Sweetwyne: No, no. I also used to walk down from Berkeley to the nickel ferry in Oakland.
- Brower: The auto ferry?
- Sweetwyne: Yes, the auto ferry in Oakland, at the mole. I'd catch the auto ferry for five cents; I'd ride over to San Francisco to the Ferry Building and then I'd walk from the Ferry Building out to the zoo or to Golden Gate Park and that's how I'd spend my Sundays. I'd take a sandwich with me and I'd walk back.
- Brower: You didn't have enough money to ride the Model-T?
- Sweetwyne: No, not unless the kids did. So this particular day they all put money in and we got this Model-T Ford of mine and we started off to Neptune Beach and they were hanging on--someone was sitting in the rumble seat and a couple of them were hanging on the hood and some were on the running board. I used to go across the bridge.
- Brower: To get to Alameda?
- Sweetwyne: Yes, they only had a bridge then.
- Brower: The 12th Street bridge?
- Sweetwyne: I guess that's what it was. There were two bridges. One was closer down to this end, whichever one that was. I forget what it was. Probably was 12th Street.

When I got to the bridge it was closed off so I was kind of frustrated. So I kept going up the street there and I saw this opening there so I drove into this opening. [Laughter] It was the tube.

Brower: They were building the tube?

Sweetwyne: The tube had just been built and this was just the day of the opening and there was a ribbon across and they had all the high mucky-mucks up there. I had come up some back way, trying to find how to get closest and so I drove through this tube with all these kids. [Laughter] The workmen had been going back and forth working and everything else but this was supposed to be the big opening of the thing and we drove right over to Neptune Beach. I found out afterwards that they had a big ribbon-cutting after we had gone through--ribbon-cutting and all these people, all these mucky-mucks drove through. So I was always kidded by my friends that knew about this that we were the--

Brower: That you christened the Posey Tube?

Sweetwyne: We christened the Posey Tube! [Laughter]

Brower: That was when you had your accident?

Sweetwyne: No, no. When I had the accident I was a little older. I was about sixteen when I had the accident. What had happened was I was living on Stanton Street in Berkeley and right next to my house was a lot. There were a lot of lots in those times. They've all been built on now. But there was a lot next to where I lived, and I had a Chevrolet coupe. The door handles in those days were shaped like a "T." The handle would be straight and the T part would be like [gestures with his hands]. I had two little screws that held this door and this was on the driver's side and every time I would go to open the door, the screws were stripped, and the handle would come off in my hand.

I was going to drive to Oakland to do some shopping, I tried to open my car door with this handle and the handle came off in my hand. It upset me so that I took the handle and I threw it over into the lot next to my house, and then I realized that I couldn't get into the car without the handle because the window was up. So I went back and I looked all around the lot and I finally found this door handle. I stuck it back in place and opened the door. I forgot about it and I got in the car and I drove off down to Oakland. I got to Broadway and Washington streets when a woman drove her car through an intersection and struck my car and stood it up on two wheels. The car was just slowly tipping over but still going forward as it was slowly tipping over. My reaction to this ground coming up to me, was to put my hand out. It was an automatic reaction--you put your hand out to keep from falling or whatever. It's just automatic when something's coming at you--

Brower: This is through the open window?

Sweetwyne: Yes, the window was down on the driver's side. I automatically put my hand out because the ground was coming up to me. The car was slowly tipping over and going forward. When the car finally fell on its side, it pinned my arm. That little T-handle was just still in there and it projected about that far [gesturing] from the body of the car. I guess the car must have fallen over so lightly and cars were made so solid in those days that that handle just slid along and if it hadn't been for that handle, the fact that my arm was outside the car, the car would have fallen on my arm and would have torn it right off.

Brower: But that silly little handle on the outside kept it up that much even though it wasn't even attached?

Sweetwyne: The handle, yes, right. But the break in my arm was what is called a compound fracture. The bone was sticking out of the sleeve of my jacket. They came with an ambulance and they took me off to Highland Hospital. Highland Hospital was quite new then. A Dr. Black, I think he was a young man who was head of the hospital at the time--I understand that since then he died.

Brower: I remember him from the Rumford interview; he wouldn't hire blacks.

Sweetwyne: Right, right. This is what happened to me, they took me to the hospital. Then they realized that I had no parents to sign for it, so they told me, "What's going to happen if we don't operate on your arm is that blood poisoning is going to set in and you're going to die. You don't want to die do you?" I was sixteen years old. No, I didn't want to die. "Well, then we're going to have to amputate this arm. Otherwise, this is going to happen. So you'll have to sign these papers." So I signed them.

Then they just set up a time for the operation and I don't know how it happened, but somehow or other like I told you, the black political fathers had gotten a unity where they were--actually what they were doing, they were grooming certain young blacks and I didn't realize at the time that I was one of the chosen ones, because they were beginning to create opportunities for the young blacks. I use the word "young blacks" but then there was no such thing as "young blacks"--they were "colored."

Somehow he heard about this.

Brower: You mean Walter Gordon heard about it?

Sweetwyne: Walter Gordon heard about it. He got hold of my family doctor, who was Dr. O. Roy Bush. He was my family doctor and I don't know whether he brought me into this world, but he was quite a character. He was a very learned doctor. He was a pharmacist. He was a surgeon and whenever they had operations in the area he was so advanced that they always would like to have him be present.

Brower: Was he a black man?

Sweetwyne: He was a black man. He was a heavy drinking man. We used to always kid about the fact that it was difficult for him to arrange to have a bath because he always kept his bathtub filled with homemade gin. [Laughter]

Brower: That was during Prohibition?

Sweetwyne: I guess so. But he was always a man that had a very steady surgeon's hand. Like I say, everybody was interested in my family and interested in me; I didn't realize at that time how much. They both came out to visit me in the hospital and they asked me how I felt about having the operation and I said, "Well, if it's got to happen, it's got to happen." They said, "Well, maybe it doesn't have to happen. Let's look into this." So they went and they got hold of this Dr. Black and Dr. Bush demanded to see the X rays. Then they got their heads together and Walter Gordon told them, "Look," he said, "Now if you amputate this boy's arm and we don't feel it's necessary, you're going to be liable to a suit, so you'd better do something and try to save it."

I don't know what the involvement was but Dr. Bush and Gordon both were the ones who pressured the doctor into trying something else. They put my arm in traction for about a month, very painful, but they were able to get that bone back in its proper position. I think that the bone was sticking out so far they thought they couldn't ever get it back in place. They kept putting additional traction weights on my arm and finally they got this bone back in place. They set it some kind of way and I don't know whether they put a screw in it. About that time it was almost unheard of but whatever it was it was something that was fairly new that they were doing to my arm.

Later I saw an X ray of it and right where that branched together was a great big blob, a great big ball of bone. It's the strongest part of my arm now. But if it hadn't been for Walter Gordon--

Brower: You'd be minus an arm!

Sweetwyne: I wouldn't have known the difference.

Brower: It's a terribly traumatic thing for a kid.

Sweetwyne: Yes, he told me this too. He said, "You don't know what you're signing." He told them, "This signature means nothing." They said, "Well, he's already signed." He said, "It means nothing; he's under age."

Sweetwyne: That man is the reason I've got two arms today. I mean I just love that man--well--I was about sixteen then and I don't know whether he was a lawyer at that time or not. I think that was about the transition time for him.

Brower: That would have been '31. Yes, he was practicing law. He had just left the police department.

Sweetwyne: This other incident that came up--they had the Vitaphone Theater on Broadway and I had gone there--I guess I had gone to see Al Jolson. I think that is what I had gone down to see. Yes, I believe that is what I had gone to see. I had driven down in my little Model-T Ford this one evening. I had been working at the Rollerland Skating Rink as a key boy there for tips and this was my big splurge.

Brower: What was a key boy?

Sweetwyne: You put skates on people. That's where I learned to become a fancy skater and then when I worked in show business I used to tap dance on roller skates. I had gone to this theater that evening and on my way back from the theater I stopped, I guess at 20th or 22nd Street and San Pablo, and there was a chain of restaurants, one of the first quick-serve restaurants, called the White Log Taverns. They were serving hamburgers, I think, for five cents or three cents or something, five cents I guess it was, and milkshakes were at little cost also.

Brower: There was one out on Bancroft in Berkeley too.

Sweetwyne: So anyhow I stopped at this place--it must have been around 11 p.m. when I left the theater--and I parked my car across the street and I went over there and there was a long line of people. I got in this line and the line got a little bit shorter--it didn't get shorter, that is I got further to the front. When I finally got to the front--I'd been in line for quite a while--the man [behind the counter] started asking people on each side of me and behind me what they wanted and I waited and waited and waited and waited. So finally, I said, "Look, I've been ahead of quite a few of these people that you've waited on." He said, "Well, what do you want?"

I said, "I'd like two hamburgers to go." He said, "Okay." So he made me two hamburgers and I paid for them and I put them in a bag. I went across the street and I got in my car and I started the car up and it was cold so I decided to eat one of these hamburgers. When I bit into the hamburger, it was salty, salty; I kept trying to eat it and it was just so salty and I said, well, I thought he had made a mistake so I didn't finish eating it. I got the other one out and I opened it up and it was hot with pepper. I mean it was hot.

Sweetwyne: So I thought about this and I said, "Well, maybe he just made a mistake. Maybe he overseasoned it." So I went back and got in line again and waited and I got back up there. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want two more hamburgers. Those others, I couldn't eat them." He said, "Look, we don't serve black people." I can't quote him but it amounted to that. I said, "You what?" He said, "I won't serve you. You won't get any service in here." I said, "I have money to pay for it." He said, "We don't serve black people in here." I said, "Oh." I went back outside and I thought about it and I was naturally quite disturbed about it.

I looked up Walter Gordon's number in the phone book. It was about 11:30 at night and I called and he answered the phone and I said, "I'm sorry if I woke you up." He said, "No, it's all right. What's the problem?" I told him what had happened and he said, "I'll be right there. Don't you move and don't you do anything with those hamburgers, just keep them. Do you still have them?" I said, "Yes, I couldn't eat them." He said, "Hang on to them."

So he jumped up and got dressed and he was down there from Berkeley in a flash. He said, "Come with me." He was a big man. So I walked in there and they had this long line and he just walked right past the line and he got to the front. He said, "Young man, I want to talk to you." The man said, "I'm busy." He said, "No, I want to talk to you. We've got a problem here. I want you to fix this young man two more hamburgers and don't be putting all that salt and pepper on it." The fellow said, "Wait, let me tell you something. You see that sign up there?" The sign said something about "we don't solicit colored trade" or "we have the right to refuse" or "we don't patronize blacks," or something like that. Walt got a little livid and said, "Is this your place?" He said, "No." He says, "Who's the boss?" He said, "He's at home asleep."

Walter Gordon reached over into his wallet and he was a lawyer now. He took his wallet and he threw open his wallet and he had this honorary gold badge and he showed the fellow. He said, "See that?" He got that sign and he took it off the wall and he broke it--bang! He said, "Now, let me tell you something, young man. You fix this fellow two hamburgers and you fix them right now and they better be right." "Yes sir, yes sir." He said, "Where's your boss?" He said, "He's at home." He said, "Do you have his phone number?" "I don't have his phone number." He said, "I'll tell you what you do. This young man, his name is Al Sweetwyne. Tomorrow morning I'm going around to all the White Log Taverns, all of them, and if I see any of these signs that I just took off that wall hanging up in any of them, this young man here is going to own this chain." "Yes, sir." He said, "He'll be your boss. You'll be working for him. Here's my card and you tell

Sweetwyne: your boss what I said. I'm going to check it tomorrow morning." "Yes sir, yes sir. Here's your hamburgers. Taste them, are they all right?" I said, "Okay" and we went on out.

The next day those signs were down. That man has done so much.

[End tape 1, side 1; Begin tape 1, side 2]

Brower: Could you tell me a little bit more about your show-business experiences?

Sweetwyne: Back in the early thirties, we were on the WPA and then the WPA became the federal theaters. The more professional people had chosen to stay with the federal theaters and the others dropped out. So my partner and I and several other entertainers made our livings as entertainers doing our act with this federal theater bit. At the same time, we'd need to augment our money. We'd go to different nightclubs. There would be white-owned nightclubs. In those times there were only a few black clubs; they always hired black entertainers. But it was very difficult to get work in a white nightclub. We didn't have any contracts then, so you only worked as long as you were able to please the audience and when you weren't able to then you were out of a job--no notice or anything.

My partner and I would go in and we'd do an audition in the afternoon for the boss and we'd always be good enough that he'd tell us to come back at night. He wouldn't hire us. We went back as a trial for the job.

Brower: He waited to see what the audience response would be?

Sweetwyne: Yes, that's what it was and because he had other acts and he only had a certain number of acts he was going to have anyhow and this was the survival of the fittest. It was "dog-eat-dog" in those days. You only worked for as good as you were, for that long. So, anyhow, we had so much material and had so much variety, and it was all original, that there was no way to duplicate what we did. So we never were challenged. We'd always do our number first, we'd open the show and we'd get the musicians, if they couldn't read music we'd tell them to play something they knew and we'd give them a certain tempo and we'd dance to that and we had so much novelty. I did tap dancing on roller skates and a pantomime and my partner was a comedian and I did straight for him. We did original gags and his wife would do a tap dance with a jump rope and he did a stair dance. Then the two of us would do a little flash dance and we had so much material and so many gags.

Brower: What was the flash dance?

Sweetwyne: A flash dance is like when you do dancing on your knees or on your hands and back flips, all to the time of music. We'd do what they call challenges. He'd do a step, and there'd be some sensational action there and I'd do a step and people would applaud and it would be his turn. It was what we called a challenge.

Brower: Each of you was trying to top the other?

Sweetwyne: Yes, but it was always a routine. It wasn't something that was set; we were just doing it at random. Our act was always so strong that they'd hire us. We knew that we'd get hired, but by hiring us they'd have to eliminate another act and so naturally the act that would be in front of us, due to the fact that he would no longer have an act because they'd have to put us behind because he couldn't follow our act. He'd put him in front of us and he would tell our gags and he would try to mimic our act in such a way to kill it for us when we came up. But we had so much material and we expected this. We would just use numbers, we had code numbers. We'd say, "Do number three and move to number twelve and do the Bilbo act, and do the elephant gag and do this," and I'd say, "Okay" and then we'd go out and our act would be a completely different one. So we'd go out and do this particular show and it would be so strong that the person behind us couldn't follow us, and they'd move us toward the back. And after about two days there we'd be the closing act because our act was that strong and that novel.

Brower: Were most of the other entertainers white or black?

Sweetwyne: They would almost always be white. But the way we got away with getting the job was that my partner and I used black-face make up. We'd use the make up on our face and we'd use it on the back of our hands and the portion of our arms that showed. But we wouldn't do it on the front part of our hands, because the contrast of the very blackness of the make up would make our hands seem like they were white in the spotlight so the people would never know that we weren't white. We weren't passing we were just working. [Chuckles] After a bit the master of ceremonies got to know us and it wouldn't matter at all to him after that. It was no problem. We started getting jobs wherever we wanted to.

But traveling around in show business like this was very difficult. In those days, the people that are big names today, those were the ones that were hungry with us in those days. We'd have pheasant one day and feathers the next.

Brower: Where did you get your costumes?

Sweetwyne: We used to go to the Goodwill. The only thing we had to have made, we'd buy patent leather shoes at one of these bargain places for about two dollars, and we'd have our pants made to order by a place called--I can't think of the name of this place.

Brower: Was it a tailoring shop in Oakland?

Sweetwyne: There was a tailoring shop in Oakland--Levi's. They started a little store over there on San Pablo and Twentieth and they used to make pants to order, any size, that's when the bell bottoms was out. They'd have these little pieces where they'd put different colors in it and everything. We'd go there and we'd take them material and they'd sew these pants the way we designed them. We'd have the pants waist high and they'd have pinch bottoms on them. But we'd go to the Goodwill and we'd buy our coats. We'd buy these swallow-tailed coats, and there was many of them in those days and we'd get old white gloves that they used to use in funeral parlors and stuff. In those days, there were an awful lot of crush top hats and we'd buy these and that was our outfit, plus our black-face make-up.

Brower: During those years when you were an entertainer, were you ever in touch with Walter Gordon?

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Sweetwyne: During the show business bit, they started talking about this world's fair coming up and they started building this world's fair on Treasure Island [the Golden Gate International Exposition, opened February 1939. Ed.]. They started building the bridge out here and so many people said they'd never cross that bridge because it was going to crash.

So what the black businessmen did, they got together and they said, "Well, we want representation." Now, I think at this time Walter Gordon was connected with the Adult Authority. He had some influence in Sacramento at the time. I don't remember the name of the man that was governor--was Olsen governor then at about that time? [Culbert L. Olson was elected governor in 1938. Ed.]

Brower: Walter Gordon was appointed by Warren. He was a Warren man.

Sweetwyne: It seems like Olson comes to my mind--I know [George] Creel came in about that time but Creel wasn't governor. Whoever was governor at the time was pressured; the black businessmen put the pressure on him: "All right, you've got people coming here from all over the world and they're going to come here and what are they going to see?"

Sweetwyne: They're going to see white policemen, they're going to see white ticket takers, they're going to see white bus drivers--and this is supposed to be America where there's equal rights. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, what do you want us to do?" "Well, we've got some young men that have got the ability to be somebody but they need an opportunity." They said, "You get some qualified young men, young men that can qualify for this and we'll work it out some way." So what they did, as I said, there were some chosen ones and I had been one of the chosen ones and I didn't even know this. But being a young man who didn't have any guidance, adult guidance, I was susceptible to a need for companionship and I--I don't know how to say this--but I got involved with a young lady and we conceived a child and because of this happening and the fact that we didn't get married, I sort of had to, I sort of lost--

Brower: You lost your place in the eyes of these men?

Sweetwyne: Right.

Brower: That was being stuffy, wasn't it?

Sweetwyne: Well, no, they had to be. This was something new coming up. They had to be an untouchable. They had to be an untouchable. I was trying to think of the names of some of the people--

Brower: They had to be better than any white had to be.

Sweetwyne: Right. See, they had to be someone that they couldn't point a finger at because that was the thing they wanted to make it work. So the expression is that "they dropped me like a hot potato." But the other young men about my time, they were chosen for the highway patrol and, oh, I can't think of all the other jobs, but they had many jobs that were before the public at the world's fair and this was the first black that the highway patrol put on and Walter Gordon was instrumental in having this happen.

Brower: Were you bitter about this?

Sweetwyne: No, this was my own doing.

Brower: I suppose it was a situation where they couldn't afford to have any criticism.

Sweetwyne: That's right. That's what it was. That's what it was. It was the first that they were doing and they had to do it in such a way that it wouldn't boomerang. I'm trying to think of some of the names of the fellows that went through this and one of them is probably--they sent one up to Sacramento with the highway patrol

Sweetwyne: and he became a very high officer there. I'm trying to think of his name--Edward Aubert. But I was supposed to be in that group.

Brower: It's funny that I don't remember that in the world's fair, but I do remember black girl ticket takers, I think.

Sweetwyne: Yes, but there were black highway patrolmen and that was their first jobs and I think there were probably three. You could easily find out their names. It might come back to me sometime, but I just don't remember. I guess if it hadn't been for that particular incident, I would probably be in Sacramento, or Washington, or some place, because all the people that came up about my time that I was associated with, they've all gone on politically.

Brower: Are you sorry about losing out on that?

Sweetwyne: Oh, sometimes I wonder, I'm just curious about what I could have done. I always had that ability to--when I was going to high school, my instructors used to always say that I should become a lawyer because I had the ability to have groups around me and to speak in such a manner as to be the center of attention at all times. So I always feel that I missed out on a certain calling that would have been something that I would have liked to have done. That's one of my few regrets in life.

Brower: But it looks to me as if you'd had a pretty happy kind of life, and maybe with a lot less strain than there would have been.

Sweetwyne: Oh, it's been great. I've had to overcome a lot of incidents in my own way and I gained this ability through this early association--like I had to break down racial tensions in many jobs that I've had. I was stage manager of the "Run Little Children" show and of the swing "Mikado" show. I was the first black stage manager. I was stage manager there and I was the first black stage manager in northern California. I was the stage manager at the old Alcazar Theater and I was at the Geary and the Curran and, as I said, at the Federal Theater on Treasure Island.

It was this upbringing and this backing that I had that made me feel this way about things. Many times when I was with Yellow Cab I had to handle situations like that. I subconsciously attribute the association with dedicated men like Walter Gordon to having me have this feeling of making things better for people that are minorities.

Brower: Also, just from the example of that business with the White Log Tavern you knew that you didn't have to take so much.

Sweetwyne: Right, right. He made me feel like I wasn't alone in this world. Now, that really impressed my feeling about many things.

Brower: It was still awfully rough.

Sweetwyne: Well, it's still happening, but this happened on my son. I tried to get him to take an examination with me and he balked, didn't want to do it, so I went and took the examination and he found out the next day that I passed very high and he found what it was, it was for operating engineer. He said, "Well, that's what I want to do. I want to run these tractors." I said, "You've got to take the examination." So he went and took the examination and because of the fact that he was a black, he was put in a special category where he can get the job a lot faster than he'd--it's a reverse situation than it was. And I tried to make him realize that things are so much better now, so much better.

Brower: Oddly, that was something that Walter Gordon didn't approve of. He felt that it should be right across the board, that everybody should be treated the same. But I think that most of us feel that there is so much backlog to be made up for, of injustice, that we've got to start bending the other way.

Sweetwyne: Well, this was what they were doing. This was what Walter Gordon and, as I said the only names that I can remember now because I was quite young, was Walter Gordon, Dr. Bush, Dr. Pittman, and there were several others.

Brower: Mr. Montgomery?

Sweetwyne: Montgomery, yes. They were all, they'd all said, "We're going to make things better for our young people. They're not going to have to come up and have to fight this thing as hard as we did to get where we are." They have made it happen. All the young fellows that grew up around Berkeley, like Congressman Dellums. I used to teach him to play basketball.

Brower: Did you know his uncle at all, C.L. Dellums who was the Pullman porter union head?

Sweetwyne: Yes, my brother knew him because my brother was--we were both cooks on the Southern Pacific and my brother was a chef. So we all had associations that way.

No, I could sit up here and drop names like mad of people in Berkeley. We all grew up together. Like I said, some of them went one way and some went the other.

- Brower: Do you think that the success of Berkeley blacks was unusual? Would you say the same thing for Oakland or San Francisco or do you think it was a particular group?
- Sweetwyne: There was a certain pride that the blacks in the area had, not just Berkeley, Oakland. There was family pride that made the kids want to be something. They all went to school and they went to college which was very difficult in those days.
- Brower: Do you think that altered with the influx during the war of a different group of blacks from the South?
- Sweetwyne: There's a difference. I see this. I see this because now as I migrated through the areas--I was first in Oakland and then I went to Berkeley and spent my formative years in Berkeley. I left Berkeley when I was about eighteen when I came to San Francisco. I stayed in San Francisco until I was about--I was in San Francisco a good many years. Then I moved to Marin County. Since I've been in Marin County the last four years I've been closely associated with the blacks that are in Marin City and I see their attitudes. Their background is so different from my Berkeley upbringing, that there is a certain amount of--
- Brower: Friction between the two groups?
- Sweetwyne: Well, there's friction and there's also a resentment and they're pulling against one another. There's no unity of helping. There's a group there, an older group there, trying to build up that particular section where they live and there's a younger group--not just a younger group, but a different group--that have selfish motivations and they're out for doing their own thing, and it's a very political situation over there which I think I will probably be involved in pretty much myself pretty soon, because I'm closely associated with the people who are involved with it and see a certain unfairness there that I feel can be rectified.
- Brower: You're sort of a private troubleshooter, aren't you?
- Sweetwyne: I've always done it, I've always done it. It's worked out for the better, always.
- Brower: It takes a lot of understanding, I think, of people who are different. I understand that Walter Gordon actually sought out people from the South to try and understand better what their point of view was. Actually, he had come to California as a very little boy and he had lived in a community that was mostly white as he grew up and he didn't have many common points of reference with this new group.
- Sweetwyne: Right. Well, a good portion of my life has been the same way. My children are from an interracial marriage. My wife was English and my children were brought up to be citizens--not black, not white, but

Sweetwyne: good citizens. Their associations are on both sides and there's no thought that way. Now, my sister was different. My sister was very racist.

Brower: She didn't like white people?

Sweetwyne: No, she didn't. That came up because I raised her until she was about sixteen, but when she was about sixteen I finally located my father and I thought she should be with him. I took her up there to live with him and in the short time that she lived with him, she changed and from that point she moved to San Francisco. She moved into the Fillmore area and it got to the place where when she and I would have discussions it would be difficult because of her outlook. I mean she'd use expressions like--

Brower: Honkie?

Sweetwyne: She'd use other words. Honkie wasn't being used at that time, but she'd use other words like that.

Brower: Ofay?

Sweetwyne: Yes.

Brower: Well, you can certainly understand why black people are racist. It's easier to understand why they are than why we are.

Sweetwyne: I think schooling has so much to do with it. The fact that the Berkeley schools at that time were integrated--

Brower: They are now.

Sweetwyne: They were integrated pretty much then because the blacks were in a minority then.

Brower: Of course, high school was integrated because the blacks insisted on having only one high school which was pretty smart because they would otherwise have gotten another that was inferior, I think.

Sweetwyne: I never knew that they at any time ever thought of having a separate high school.

Brower: I think it was proposed many times and the opposition of--well, that's what I've always understood--the black community to it kept it from happening and I can certainly see why they felt that way because there were two classes of junior high schools really, one was college preparatory and one wasn't and they didn't want that to happen at high school level.

Sweetwyne: We used to have several junior highs. They had Edison, they had Garfield--

Brower: And Willard and I guess later they had what's now West Campus. Before it was West Campus it was Burbank.

What about your brothers? Are there more like you in their attitudes?

Sweetwyne: I've lost them all now. There was a difference in our families too. In fact, I think the fact that I grew up away from them, my environment being different from theirs, I think my attitude was considerably different. I know my oldest brother, he was very much like my sister. I had another brother that moved down to Los Angeles and he had friends on both sides.

Brower: And your children have maintained that? They have been able to make friends with both races?

Sweetwyne: Yes, they don't think black or white, they think good and bad.

Brower: So your contact with Walter Gordon didn't endure throughout his life?

Sweetwyne: No, but his presence was there. It was always somewhere where--I benefited in so many ways from the fact that he was who he was. After all, every time I take this arm and look at it I think of Walter Gordon.

Brower: Then, of course, he was out of the area for about eleven years when he was in the Virgin Islands.

Sweetwyne: About that time I was over here because when he went to the Virgin Islands that must have been around the forties.

Brower: Later than that actually--1955.

Sweetwyne: Well, when I moved over here [to San Francisco] I was nineteen; I would be sixteen about 1931. Then there was nobody but just us Italians over there in North Beach. [Laughter]

Transcriber: Michelle Stafford
Final Typist: Teresa Allen



Harry Kingman
University of California, Berkeley
Frosh Baseball Coach, 1935

Interview with Harry F. Kingman

Interview History and Conduct of the Interview	149
Football	150
Berkeley Police Force	151
NAACP and Local Racial Issues	152
Governor, Virgin Islands, and Federal Judge	153
Elizabeth Gordon	154

INTERVIEW HISTORY

For more than fifty years Harry Kingman and his wife Ruth have been defenders of civil liberties and advocates of fair play in the Berkeley community and the nation. They have also been active in the cooperative movement, a service that received recognition in October 1977 with the dedication of a new cooperative residence hall at the University of California named in Harry Kingman's honor.

Mr. Kingman's friendship with Walter Gordon began in 1916 when, after two seasons as a pitcher with the New York Yankees, he joined the staff of Stiles Hall and Walter Gordon was an undergraduate. They were both members of the U.C. coaching staff, which Walter Gordon joined on his graduation in 1918. The two men worked together on problems of minority rights in Berkeley and stayed in touch through the years. When Walter Gordon was governor and, later, district judge in the Virgin Islands the Gordons and the Kingmans enjoyed occasional visits in Washington, where Ruth and Harry Kingman had established the People's Lobby. In January of 1944 Ruth Kingman was matron of honor to Mrs. Gordon at the launching of the S.S. "John Hope," and when Walter Gordon received the Wheeler Award in 1955 as Berkeley's "most distinguished citizen" it was Harry Kingman who made the presentation. It was because of the many and long-term associations between the two couples that the Kingmans were asked to contribute their memories to this volume.

Conduct of the Interview

One interview was taped, on March 31, 1976, at the Kingman's North Berkeley home, in their pleasant living room, which is decorated with mementoes of long and busy lives--framed photographs of notable friends, family photographs, and paintings by Ruth Kingman. The initial interview included a brief but charming contribution from Ruth Kingman; it dealt chiefly with Elizabeth Gordon and included a comment on her extraordinary sense of appropriate and becoming colors. Mrs. Kingman's remarks were subsequently dropped from the transcript at her request and to the interviewer's regret. Mr. Kingman's transcript was drastically revised by him, but the final version presented here contains substantially the same material as did the original, although in a somewhat altered and briefer form.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: March 31, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH HARRY L. KINGMAN

Football

Brower: Mr. Kingman, can you tell me what your earliest recollections of Walter Gordon are?

Kingman: Yes. Our friendship began in August 1916 when I joined the staff of Stiles Hall, the University YMCA. Walt was a star on the varsity football team. On Walter's graduation in 1918 Cal's football coach, Andy Smith, signed him on as a member of the coaching staff. Andy Smith had been told that I had played pro baseball and was interested and experienced in athletics. He dropped in at Stiles to ask me if I would assist Walt Gordon with his assignment as chief scout of games played by opponents on the Cal schedule. Also, would I help coach the second varsity team, then called "the Goofs."

If, for example, Cal's coming scheduled opponent was USC, Gordon would travel, on the previous Saturday, to watch the USC game, then feed me the material to make charts of what happened, for Andy's study. Then, during the week's practice prior to the coming UC-USC game, the Goofs would use the USC plays in scrimmage against the Cal varsity.

I accepted the nonsalaried job, which not only brought me in touch with many students, but was also the beginning of a more than half-century friendship with Walt Gordon.

Brower: I believe you said that as an undergraduate, Walter Gordon had been a star player on the UC football team.

Kingman: That's right. Walt was picked All American by the famous Walter Camp--he was one of the earliest West Coast players to receive that honor--certainly one of the first black players, nationwide, to make All American. Walt was also the best heavyweight collegiate boxer on the West Coast.

*See interview with Harry L. Kingman, Citizenship in a Democracy, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1973.

Brower: Do you recall anything specific from those football coaching days?

Kingman: Yes. One thing I remember very well concerned the coaches' dressing room in the Cal gymnasium. It was a good-sized room, with numerous lockers in it. All of us had lockers there except Walt, who dressed in a different room by himself.

That bothered me, and I knew that it bothered him, so I began discussing the matter among the other coaches. At that time, as I remember it, the head coach was Stub Allison, and I remember talking with Stub about it and saying that I was really concerned about the situation. Stub apparently hadn't thought about it, but he agreed very quickly that "Oh, sure, let's bring Walt in with the rest of us." And it was done.

Brower: How did Walter Gordon respond to prejudice? Was he patient about it? Was he hurt? Was he angry?

Kingman: Well, Walt was a sensitive guy, and he didn't take it lying down, but he wasn't belligerent. He just went to work on it, one way or another; mostly it would be for other people he was concerned. He was such a great guy--a famous guy--he didn't have much of a personal problem after he came to be known.

Berkeley Police Force

Brower: Do you recall his joining the Berkeley Police Department?

Kingman: Yes. One of the things I remember well in my relations with Walt was when he wanted to become a member of the Berkeley force and had put in his application. At that time the chief of police was the wonderful August Vollmer.

Walt told me later that the way the thing went was that when it got around in the department that Vollmer was going to appoint Walter Gordon to the force, most of the members were opposed. Several members of the force went into Vollmer's office to tell the chief that they didn't want to have a black member, and threatened to quit if Gordon was appointed. Vollmer appealed to them not to take that position and talked about what a great fellow Walt was, and so on. But they were adamant, and said, "Chief, we won't take it!"

So Vollmer said, "Well, gentlemen, I'm awfully sorry that you feel that way. And, as you go out, you'll notice there's a table by the door; just leave your badges on the table." The men were badly shaken and startled, and turned around and walked back to Vollmer and said, "Aw, Chief, NO! You're not going to do that, are you?" Vollmer said, "That's it."

Kingman: And it worked out fine. None of the badges was left on the table, and it wasn't very long before those guys were friends of Walt's, who remained a member of the Berkeley Police Force during his years as a student at Boalt Hall, until he received his law degree.

Chief Vollmer was a wonderful person. I tried to get a Hollywood movie producer friend of mine to record his achievements, but the effort mired down in red tape.

NAACP and Local Racial Issues

Brower: Did you and Mr. Gordon work together after he started to practice law?

Kingman: Yes. We were both members of NAACP and were interested in many of the problems that came up here in Berkeley. Walt was president of the Alameda County chapter and I was a member of the board of directors. Later, I became a life member of the National NAACP and worked closely with their national staff during thirteen years as a civil rights lobbyist in Washington. It's been a tremendously valuable organization.

Brower: Do you recall anything about Walter Gordon's role in it?

Kingman: He was the effective president of chapters in this area, and because of our close friendship he used to ask me to help him on certain civil rights problems.

Another racial problem in Berkeley, for example, involved the Berkeley High school swimming pool. As I remember it, summer vacation-time use of the pool was not limited to Berkeley High School students. The pool was operated and supervised by the city and admission was subject to payment of a small fee. Only blacks were excluded, a restriction that seems unbelievable today. So Walt and I decided that we ought to try to do something about the situation. We put it up to the supervising authorities, asking them to make a simple experiment.

As maintenance of the pool depended (partly, at least) upon the fees paid, it was felt that attendance had to be kept up in order to justify vacation-time use. Fears were expressed that if the pool were opened to blacks, attendance would drop off, and income with it.

Walt and I proposed that they be admitted for a specific period, to see if there was any drop in attendance. Weather variance was kept track of, too, to see if that was a factor. After a few

Kingman: weeks, the officials said, "Well, apparently it hasn't made any difference," and they did agree to open the pool, "regardless." And it was okay.

Brower: Do you recall other similar incidents where you and Walter Gordon worked together?

Kingman: Another thing comes to mind. A black dentist and his family moved into a house a couple of hundred yards from our home here in North Berkeley. When it was learned that they had bought the house, some of their neighbors were greatly disturbed. There was much high feeling--some rocks were thrown--more violence threatened. So Walt and I got several people from the neighborhood together to discuss the situation and to meet their new neighbor. They agreed that the violence was most unfortunate; some agreed to talk with other neighbors to try to work something out. That was done, and the family stayed in their home for many years, made many friends in the neighborhood, with no further harassment.

Still another example: I remember one afternoon many years ago that Walt phoned to tell me that there was a meeting scheduled that evening in West Berkeley for the purpose of covenanting West Berkeley from ownership or occupancy of homes or lots by nonwhites. Would I come down and help him oppose the move? As I remember, it was a well-attended and emotional debate in which Walt and I participated and, as I recall it, the defeat of the covenant plan was a narrow one.

Governor, Virgin Islands, and Federal Judge

Brower: You had some contact with Mr. Gordon when he was governor of the Virgin Islands?

Kingman: Yes. All through the years I'd been seeing Walt pretty frequently. My wife and I were civil rights lobbyists in Washington at the same time that Walt was governor of the Virgin Islands. We would occasionally meet when the Gordons came up to the capital on government business. We'd keep in touch. As I remember it, there was a very difficult political situation in the Virgin Islands, and Walt was faced with some problems.

I remember that when he retired, he phoned me and said that some of the people down there who didn't like him were trying to stop him from getting retirement benefits from the government. He asked me to talk with Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, to make sure that Walt would come out all right.

Kingman: So I went over to the court to talk with my long-time friend, Earl Warren. He was not in, but in his absence I talked with Warren Olney, who was the chief justice's chief administrator, in charge of the operation of all federal courts. (Walt had by then been made federal judge in the Islands). Warren Olney told me, "You tell Walt that I'll get in touch with Earl Warren right away; tell him not to worry, that he's going to come out all right." And he did.

Elizabeth Gordon

Brower: Do you know Mrs. Gordon?

Kingman: Oh, sure! And when you write up Walt Gordon you ought to say quite a bit about his wife. She's great!

Brower: She's an extraordinarily beautiful woman.

Kingman: Right you are! I was asked to chair the meeting when Walt Gordon was presented with the Wheeler Award as Berkeley's "Most Successful Citizen." Previous to that, I had suggested to the committee members who made the choice that they make it a two-person award, for both Walt and Sis. They didn't do it but Sis was at the meeting, of course, and as chairman, in my opening remarks I mentioned the fact that I had thought it should be a double award because "Sis Gordon is really somebody!" She was sitting at Walt's right and I said, "Please, all of you, take a good look at her!" There was prolonged applause.

Brower: Do you recall your last meeting with Walter Gordon?

Kingman: The last time I saw Walt was at a Big C dinner at the Claremont Country Club not long before he died. Since he was blind, he was being led in by old team-mates. When I spoke to him he threw his arms around me, and we hugged and kissed each other, at the end of a sixty-year friendship. I loved Walt.

Transcriber: Michelle Stafford
Final Typist: Teresa Allen



Frances Albrier
September 17, 1960

Interview with Frances Albrier

Interview History	155
Early Days in the NAACP	156
Alleged Communist Infiltration of Black Neighborhoods	160
Unembittered Attitudes toward Prejudice	161
Getting Black Teachers in the Berkeley Schools	162
Walter Gordon's View of Party Politics	164
Walter Gordon as Listener and Advisor	166
Changes in the Berkeley Population	167

INTERVIEW HISTORY

For half a century Mrs. Frances Albrier has been concerned with minority issues in the Bay Area. She is an activist in the best sense of that term. As a member of the then Alameda County NAACP she worked closely with its chairman, Walter Gordon, at a time when discrimination was so prevalent and so firmly established that in retrospect no one battle stands out as preeminent. An important achievement of Mrs. Albrier, working through the Women's Welfare League was to persuade the Berkeley Board of Education to alter its established policy and remove racial bars in the hiring of teachers. She was the first woman to run for a seat on the Berkeley City Council. Her association with Walter Gordon in a relationship of mutual trust and advice, continued throughout many years.

A single interview took place, on September 23, 1977, a warm early fall day, in Mrs. Albrier's pleasant, spick-and-span home in Berkeley, in a sunny enclosed front porch among flourishing ferns and potted plants. Mrs. Albrier was as neat as her house, with an air of complete serenity and a voice whose gentleness belied the strength of its owner. The years of battle against appalling injustice have left her unscarred by hate or bitterness. Instead one feels oneself in the presence of a loving woman, who has earned the dignity and tranquillity that invest her.

After our interview I looked over the scrapbook her daughter has kept. It records and illustrates the accomplishments of a long life--from the pretty woman in neat uniform who in World War II started a forerunner of the USO for lonely Negro soldiers and who fought discrimination against women and blacks in the wartime shipyards, to the mature woman who was a guest at President Jimmy Carter's inauguration last year.

Apart from her association with Walter Gordon, Mrs. Albrier's presence in this volume is important because she exemplifies the patient, tenacious black activist of her generation and Walter Gordon's.

Mrs. Albrier read the transcript of her interview and returned it to the Regional Oral History Office without making any changes.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: September 24, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCES ALBRIER

Early Days in the NAACP

Brower: I'd like to ask you how long you've known Walter Gordon. When did you meet him?

Albrier: I met him a few times when he was renting a room from my father and that must have been in the early thirties. I can't remember just the date.

Brower: If it was when he was in college, it was even earlier than that. He graduated from college in 1918.

Albrier: The first time I met him must have been about 1916 because my grandmother passed and I just came out here to live with my father. I had lived with my grandmother.

Brower: So when your grandmother died you came out here?

Albrier: That was in 1915. It was the next year that my father rented rooms to these young men students and one of them was Walter Gordon.

Brower: What was your father's name?

Albrier: Lewis L. Redgrey--two colors. It's an Indian name.

Brower: Then you're part Indian?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Where was your home before you came here to California? Where did you live with your grandmother?

*See interview with Frances Mary Albrier, Determined Advocate for Racial Equality, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

Albrier: I lived with my grandmother in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Brower: You probably don't remember Walter Gordon very much from that early Berkeley period, do you?

Albrier: No, not much. My sister would, but I wouldn't because I wasn't home very much.

Brower: Were you in contact with him when he was president of the NAACP, the local chapter?

Albrier: Yes, very much. I was a member of the local chapter and we discussed issues together, and during Walter Gordon's term in the NAACP was when the Negro was fighting discrimination in all its forms in every place in every direction.

Brower: Do you remember what some of the big battles were, what they centered around, what particular issues—for instance, discrimination in hospitals or police brutality?

Albrier: I remember one of the things that Walter Gordon was very much incensed about and wished he could do more and that was helping when Walter White was the president of the national NAACP, the fight was going on against lynching. At that time we had had some terrible lynchings in the South and Walter White, who was very fair complexioned and looked like a white man, went down and got in with the groups and the crowds and learned a great deal about discrimination and lynchings.

Brower: You mean for the moment he was passing for white?

Albrier: He was white because he looked so white.

Brower: So they told him things they wouldn't otherwise have told him?

Albrier: Yes. He got into meetings where it was discussed and he came back and he gave his findings to the NAACP. Walter Gordon was the president out here in the West. It was then the Alameda County chapter. The NAACP had not organized the cities at that time; it organized in counties. There wasn't very many black people in the West anyway and so the counties were better for organizational work.

Brower: How did Walter White's finding filter down--did he come out here and address the local chapter or did he send a report on this?

Albrier: He had a report for it. He came West several times though to address the chapter and he always gave them a report and usually a condensed report was always given at the national convention.

Brower: Did you attend those national conventions?

Albrier: No, not at that time.

Brower: I wonder if Walter Gordon did?

Albrier: Several times he attended the national convention.

Brower: Did you feel that he worked hard for Negro rights at that time?
Did you feel he was a good fighter?

Albrier: Yes, he was always a good fighter and always for civil rights. Yet he was of a gentle nature. He wasn't of the type that liked to tear up a fight and create riots. He believed that it should be done by the law and taken care of through civil rights, taken care of by the law of the land, the laws of the state and the counties and the cities, and he took a great deal. For instance, when he became police officer in the Berkeley Police Department he was not to arrest any white persons; only black persons.* That went against his grain, but he was pioneering for those positions and jobs for his black brother that was coming after him. He took a great deal of humiliation during his school days and during the days he played football and in the community, building up and pioneering for others to come along in his pathway and that it would be better for them.

Brower: He thought a more militant approach wouldn't work?

Albrier: At that time, he felt that being too militant wouldn't work, that we'd have to fight it with humiliation and care and being concerned, but not through violence.

Brower: Do you remember any battles won during that period? Any times when you persuaded somebody to employ blacks or end discrimination in hospitals, anything of that sort?

Albrier: There wasn't much that could be done in those days, only except when it became a law that if a person discriminated against you in a restaurant or place and humiliated you, you could sue them and get \$100. At that time \$100 was quite a bit of money to everybody then and Walter Gordon encouraged the people to do that.

Brower: He encouraged them to take it to court?

Albrier: To take it to court. He often said that many of our battles would have to be won through the courts. I guess being an attorney he saw that and realized that it would have to come through the courts.

*See the interview with General William Dean (pp. 85-100) for a fuller account of Walter Gordon as a police officer. [Ed.]

Brower: You say that you and he talked over the various issues. Would you tell me a little bit more about that? Do you mean that you and he sat down and decided what was the most important battle for that next period for the NAACP chapter?

Albrier: One of the things that was the issue that I took on and discussed with Walter Gordon was black teachers in schools of Berkeley since we both lived in Berkeley and paid taxes in Berkeley.

I became aware through my children and other children, black children, that there were no black teachers in Berkeley schools--not even a janitor or clerk and nobody in the recreation department. We formed a women's group at that time, the Women's Welfare Club and we did a little surveying. We found out that in south Berkeley we had about 5,000 or more black homeowners and we felt that we should do something about it.

We called Walter Gordon, as well as the board of education. They contacted Walter Gordon and they felt that we were going to make an issue of it. Walter Gordon stayed clear of it. At first he said he didn't think it should be brought to the board. We were meeting before the board and after we found out that there were no teachers and we had gotten some of our girls who were teachers and had teacher certificates to file, then we approached the board. The board themselves contacted Walter Gordon. In fact, he was consulted when it came to issues between the two races in Berkeley and we contacted him and he said, "Don't put up too much of a fight and make an awful issue. You'll be sorry and you won't be able to get the results that you want." He did not think that we should meet with the board at first.

Then later in our meeting, he came to the meeting and said that he felt we should take our issues to the board and explain to the board why. But he didn't appear with us.

Brower: He did not?

Albrier: No.

Brower: That's a little strange isn't it?

Albrier: He just agreed. He said that he did not want his influence to be taken in the wrong way on either side, but if we wanted to go to court he would be very glad to help us. But it so happened that we didn't have to go to any courts.

Brower: Were there any particular black teachers you can think of from that time? What about Ida Jackson? Was she one of the teachers of that period?

Albrier: No. One of the teachers at that time was Ruth Acty who had filed and Mary Labuzon. They were the two main teachers that the board considered that had filed. Walter Gordon agreed with both of those teachers. He thought they were well qualified if they were accepted.

Alleged Communist Infiltration of Black Neighborhoods

Brower: Do you know anything about a proposal for a Negro woman principal in an Oakland school that came up later?

Albrier: Yes. Ida Jackson had several times been proposed to be a principal.

Brower: Do you know why Walter Gordon opposed that appointment?

Albrier: I think he said it would cause a great deal of misunderstanding because there were groups who were so violently opposed to a black principal in the schools at that time and then there was a filtration of Communistic ideas. They were getting in the black neighborhoods and creating a lot of violence and fights and riots and Walter Gordon was not for that at all. He hated to see his people used that way because he knew that the fight for civil rights for his people could not be won that way. It would have to be won through the best possible way, the best attitudes, with friendship and kindness and love of all citizens and through the courts. [Break in tape]

Brower: You were talking about the Communist infiltration into Negro neighborhoods and I wonder if you could say a little more about that.

Albrier: At that time, the Communists were beginning to infiltrate in the Negro neighborhoods and appeal to their problems of discrimination in the community and in labor and all phases and walks of life. They believed that if you didn't win what you wanted to you should go out and fight and you should tear down the stores, you should raid the stores, you should rob the stores, and you should put up a fight against this type of discrimination and let it be felt that you are citizens who are just not going to take any more.

That began to appeal to a great many of the young black people and the younger students at that time and even the older people in the neighborhood because at that time it was the Depression, the Great Depression was coming on. People were unemployed and not even women were employed, black women, who were able to be cooks and nurses and housemaids all of their life, they were denied that type of employment, especially if it paid anything.

Albrier: There was a lot of bitterness and unrest among the people, and that type of bitterness and unrest, Walter Gordon knew it should not be entertained or nurtured because he was a man who did not believe in violence or war. He didn't believe we would get any results out of it that was lasting. I think he received a great many of his thoughts and ideas from Walter White who had had experience throughout the nation on these subjects.

Unembittered Attitudes toward Prejudice

Brower: What was your own feeling at that time as a young woman? Did you feel very bitter or did you share Walter Gordon's view of how it should be done?

Albrier: I was reared in the South. My grandmother lived in Tuskegee, the most famous city in the South--the city of Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and I knew them quite well and went to that school. We were taught not to be bitter and we were taught to have faith in God and faith in people and that we had friends among the white race as well as we had friends in our own race and that those friends in the white race all through history had helped us. My grandmother was deeply religious and she instilled in me not to be bitter about these things--to work against them but never let bitterness enter into my being because bitterness and hatred would destroy you. Those teachings were instilled in the students and we younger people in those days especially in the black schools.

I think that Walter Gordon received that type of training through his parents also. He spoke of his parents and his father teaching him and talking to him about not having hatred and bitterness.

Brower: Who else was associated with you in those early NAACP days? Was that the time of Mrs. Tarea Pittman or did she come later?

Albrier: She came later. There was attorney Drake and Mr. E.E. Daly who published the California Voice.

Brower: They were both black people?

Albrier: Yes, who associated with the NAACP at that time. They didn't have a large membership group although it was very active. Many of the people subscribed and became members, but they were not active.

Brower: C.L. Dellums followed Walter Gordon as chairman?

Albrier: C.L. Dellums came in before he went out of the chair. C.L. Dellums and then Mrs. Pittman followed him.

Brower: But you were right in there in that very early time?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Do you remember any specific battle that you all worked together on and you felt you sort of won at that time? Or was it just steady work on all these different problems?

Albrier: Just steady work on all. Discrimination was so prevalent there wasn't any certain field that you could just take because you met it every day. But Walter Gordon was, more by him attending the university and being an attorney, he acted more as a consultant. When cases came up in any phase--in housing discrimination, in labor--he appeared in front of the groups on those issues for the Negro people of Berkeley. He was a very convincing speaker. The people in the Bay Area looked to him to do that and expected him to do that for them.

Getting Black Teachers in the Berkeley Schools

Brower: In the educational problem that you were talking about where you went to the board of education and requested some black teachers, how did that turn out at the time? Did you succeed in getting any?

Albrier: At first, Walter Gordon told Dr. [Louise] Hector, president of the board of education. When we first started talking about it and an inkling of our ideas came into the papers, he felt that we should not meet with the board of education, that we should do more study and see what they would do, to see if they [the black teachers] would be appointed. But that was one time that we didn't agree with him and so he okayed for us to go on and meet with the board and he told the board chairman, Dr. Hector, that he agreed with us but he was not meeting with us. But he agreed that we should talk to the board about our problem.

Brower: His own children must have been in school at that time.

Albrier: Yes, they were. At that time, there was a diverse opinion because there were black people themselves who did not care to have black teachers. They, who had lived in California, felt that black teachers were not competent enough to teach in the Berkeley schools at that time and I think some of them talked to Walter Gordon, took and gave him their views. However, we got the appointments after three months of sitting with the board of education and talking with them to bring the problem out in the open.

Brower: You mean at public board meetings?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: How did that go?

Albrier: Before that happened, we had our teachers apply and then we told the board and gave the names of the teachers who had applied and the board instructed the superintendent of the schools--we elected the superintendent, too, at that time.

Brower: Your votes, you mean, had been the ones to elect the superintendent?

Albrier: The people of the city of Berkeley elected the superintendent at that time. We asked the board to ask the superintendent if he had given any consideration to those Negro girls who had applications because it had come out in the papers that he was recommending eighteen more teachers in the Berkeley schools. So they asked him if any of them were those Negro girls who had applied and his answer was that he had not been instructed to recommend any teachers to teach in the Berkeley schools other than Caucasians.

So then Dr. Hector said that now we must have a policy of recommending teachers in the schools. So she set the next two meetings to work on the policy and to give out a policy. At the meeting when the policy was to be given out, the school board room was packed with people from all over who wanted to hear that policy. This policy was agreed upon by Walter Gordon.

Brower: In advance of its presentation to the public?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Was it acceptable to your group?

Albrier: Yes. The policy was very far reaching. Dr. Hector said, "Tonight we will hand down a policy for now and for the future on the recommendation for teachers to teach in the Berkeley schools. We'll hereby follow the Constitution, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution of the United States, and teachers shall be recommended to teach in Berkeley schools on merit regardless of race, color, or creed."

Brower: But in fact that policy was rather slow in being enforced wasn't it?

Albrier: It was five years before we got the first teacher due to the fact that the Communist elements had come in and the board wrote me a letter and said that we had done a good job in opening their eyes

Albrier: to the things that they should do, but they did not want our committee to be used by the Communistic elements that were prevailing then.

Brower: Do you think that was an honest response?

Albrier: I think it was because it was a very good board and it took five years to get the first teacher. The superintendent had to arrange the school to receive that first teacher because he said he could not put a teacher in there with a hostile faculty. He wanted to put a teacher in there with a faculty that would receive her and that would help her and he did. He removed teachers out of the school and he removed the principal and he built up a faculty to receive the first teacher. The first teacher was Ruth Acty. Walter Gordon approved of her also.

Brower: You mentioned two names originally, of the first two qualified teachers. What happened to the other one? Do you know?

Albrier: After the five years when Miss Acty went on, Miss Labuzon was teaching in San Francisco then.

Brower: Those black teachers then were pretty much in black schools, I gather. Where was she teaching?

Albrier: She was teaching at Longfellow. That was in a black neighborhood but it wasn't an all-black neighborhood at that time. It was a mixed neighborhood. We had Chinese, Japanese, Italians, blacks, all of them were down here at that time.

Brower: One of my daughter's best teachers at Hillside School was a black teacher, Mrs. Favors. I guess that was probably at least thirty years after the time we're talking about.

Walter Gordon's View of Party Politics

Albrier: At that time we discussed a great deal--Walter Gordon and I discussed a great deal--politics, because Walter Gordon was a Republican and during the thirties the black people that were Republican were reregistering Democrat because they all liked President Franklin Roosevelt. I think some of them must have said something to Walter Gordon about it and so one day he said, "Do you think that I should change my registration to Democrat too with all the rest of you?" I said, "No, unless you want to." He said, "I don't want to. I don't agree with everybody, every black person registered Democrat." I asked him why and he said,

Albrier: "We need to have blacks in all parties. We need blacks in the Republican party as well as the Democratic party and then they should work in each party to eliminate discrimination."

Brower: You ran for the city council, did you not, in Berkeley?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Do you remember what year that was?

Albrier: That was in '39.

Brower: Was Walter Gordon of any assistance to you? Did he involve himself in local politics?

Albrier: I don't know whether he was involved in local politics so much then. I'm not sure. I don't think he was.

Brower: I wondered if he gave you any assistance at that time.

Albrier: When I ran?

Brower: When you ran.

Albrier: No. I don't recall him giving me any assistance. I mean I didn't talk to him very much. He wasn't on the committee. I think he just sat back to see how it would come out.

Brower: Where did your support come from?

Albrier: Because it was so unusual at that time, especially a woman. Women weren't very active in politics and they weren't active in running for anything. But I ran because we had formed this organization about teachers in the schools and I knew that if I ran for city council that I would be invited to speak in front of clubs up in the hills and all over and I would be able to give a message to them that we were taxed without representation and that we didn't even have a janitor in the schools and that we had no kind of representation in the education department of the city of Berkeley for black citizens.

Brower: You entered this race then really as a vehicle for expressing yourself to different groups more than with any real hope of winning?

Albrier: No, I didn't expect to win but I wanted to get that message over with them. It was a good way to do it. Besides, I began to think too that women should be active in the city government because so many of them did not know the issues that were coming up at that time.

- Brower: I wonder who the first woman was on the city council? I guess Bernice May was not the first one.
- Albrier: She was the first one I remember that made it. Several of them ran. Because the lady belonged to the League of Women Voters--what was her name--who ran after I did. But she didn't make it.
- Brower: Did you have contact with Walter Gordon throughout his life, besides just those early years? Did you know him when he came back from the Virgin Islands? Did you see him at that time at all?
- Albrier: No, I saw him and talked to him for a few minutes, but I didn't have any other contact with him.
- Brower: He was on the Housing Authority Board and I wondered if you had taken any active part in the issue of Ocean View?
- Albrier: No.

Walter Gordon as Listener and Advisor

- Brower: Do you have any other specific recollections of Walter Gordon that you would like to record?
- Albrier: No, I don't believe I do.
- Brower: Do you remember how he impressed you when you knew him early? He apparently seemed a very large man, larger than I guess he really was.
- Albrier: Yes, he was stout. Yes, I think so. Jolly and good natured and a person you chat with about anything and he would pay attention to you.
- Brower: It must have been very useful to have someone who was an attorney to advise on legal matters when you were fighting things in court or at least making a threat of fighting in court. That advice must have been very helpful.
- Albrier: Yes, Walter Gordon had a way of listening. You didn't see him as an attorney and when you talked to him or discussed anything with him he saw through real eyes instead of an attorney's or a specialist's eyes. He saw what you were trying to say to him or explain anything to him through your eyes, which made him a great friend of many people and he was a person that people were not afraid of. So many attorneys, professional people, have an awe--people are shy in talking with them or they're afraid to bring out their thoughts and

Albrier: their ideas and open up their feelings, too. Walter Gordon wasn't that type of a man. He gave of himself and he opened up his heart and his mind and he listened to people and he shared with them whatever they wanted to say. He shared with them their problems, he shared with them their griefs, and he shared with them when they were happy which is a feature a great many people do not have.

Brower: Were you acquainted with Mrs. Gordon?

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Did you work with her in any way? Was she involved in these things too? I know she worked for the YWCA.

Albrier: Yes, she worked mostly for the YWCA. She was not active in the NAACP.

Brower: There was an Asilomar conference wasn't there? Was there an NAACP conference in 1947?

Albrier: Yes, they have a conference at Asilomar every year.

Brower: The NAACP has?

Albrier: Yes, a regional conference.

Brower: You have attended those conferences?

Albrier: Yes. But they didn't have so many regional conferences in Walter Gordon's presidency. That developed later.

Brower: With larger membership, I imagine.

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: There must have been so many problems that needed attention from so many different places. I can imagine that it was almost overwhelming, that you just didn't know where to begin.

Albrier: Yes, it was.

Changes in the Berkeley Population

Brower: Of course, the composition of the population changed a great deal after the war and that must have taken some adjusting between those of you who had been here a long time and the newcomers. Was there hostility between those two groups?

- Albrier: No, I wouldn't say it was hostility between the two groups, but it wasn't an understanding. Both agreed and knew that we had to come together and have an understanding and had to have education because a great many of the citizens who lived out here and who were born out here did not understand the southern citizens that came out here at the time, which gave them different viewpoints and ideas.
- Brower: Do you recall whether Walter Gordon had any role at that time in, I suppose you could say, educating the newcomers or serving to make one group understand the other better? I was trying to think what he was doing at that time.
- Albrier: Walter Gordon had problems in trying to understand the other groups themselves. I think he went South several times and he surrounded himself with a great many university friends from Southern universities so that he could understand and get the picture of what they were saying and their ideas about the problems of the day.
- Brower: Yes, because his own background really had not--he had come as a child to Southern California and his background wouldn't have fitted him for understanding, especially if he hadn't made an effort to do that.
- Albrier: Yes.
- Brower: Did you have any contact at all with him when he was on the police force? Do you remember him during that period?
- Albrier: No, not personally. I'd see him and know he was on the police force.
- Brower: How did that make people feel? Was it an encouraging thing to have one of your own people in that kind of a job?
- Albrier: Yes, we felt that he was pioneering in that field and we were very proud of him to have a position as a policeman at the time and we felt that he was beginning to open the doors that we had been fighting for and working for. That was one of the positions that we wanted to see open, was a black policeman on the force.
- Brower: In fact did it have that effect? Were there more black policemen right after that or did it take a pretty long time?
- Albrier: No, it took a long time, gradually one by one.
- Brower: What about the firemen? Was that the same situation?
- Albrier: They came on years later.
- Brower: There were black policemen before there were black firemen?

Albrier: Yes. There was a great many years before they had a black policeman in Oakland. As I say, it was a test between the two communities, I think.

Brower: A sort of rivalry?

Albrier: Yes, of how they would take it and how they would treat a black policeman.

Brower: It's sort of an interesting thing that we now have a black police chief in Berkeley and I see that as the end of something Walter Gordon started.

Albrier: Yes.

Brower: Do your notes suggest other things to you that we haven't covered?

Albrier: No, I think I've covered all I've made on my notes.

Brower: I'm terribly tempted to ask you about a lot of other things but I know I must save that for somebody else to do on your own oral history. I don't really dare ask you any more unless there is any other little story you have about Walter Gordon or a memory of him.

Albrier: No, I can't think of anything else.

Brower: Thank you very much. It was a very, very nice account and I'm very grateful.

Albrier: Thank you.

Transcriber: Michelle Stafford

Final Typist: Justin O'Donnell



William Byron Rumford
June, 1966

Interview with W. Byron Rumford, Sr.

Interview History	170
Walter Gordon and Alpha Phi Alpha	171
Walter Gordon and the NAACP	173
Conditions in the Bay Area for Blacks	174
Comparison of Conditions in Two Periods	177
Walter Gordon's Later Years	179
Blacks and Politics	180
Walter Gordon and Earl Warren	188
Byron Rumford: Background	189

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Walter Gordon and W. Byron Rumford, Sr., first became acquainted through Alpha Phi Alpha, the first black fraternity in the country and one which counts many notable men among its membership. They worked together in the early days of the Alameda County chapter of the NAACP and remained in touch throughout Walter Gordon's residence in Berkeley. They were members of opposing political parties, but their political differences in no way affected their relationship.

William Byron Rumford, Sr., was graduated from the University of California College of Pharmacy in 1931; he received an A.B. in Political Science from the University of California Berkeley in 1949 and an M.S. in Public Administration in 1959, at the age of fifty. In the early forties he bought the pharmacy in which he had worked as a student and it became his office and campaign headquarters thereafter. He entered politics in 1948, serving in the California assembly from then until 1966. In the assembly he was a leader in securing legislation to set air-quality standards and to establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission. He introduced and led passage of the bill (the Rumford Act) prohibiting racial discrimination in the selling and renting of living accommodations in California. On his retirement from the assembly he went to Washington to work on the Fair Trade Commission as assistant to the director, Bureau of Consumer Protection. His son, William Byron Rumford, Jr., also entered public service and is currently a member of the Berkeley City Council.

The interview took place on December 16, 1976, a very cold winter morning, in Mr. Rumford's warm and pleasant house, where Christmas preparations were in evidence. Mrs. Rumford was intermittently present and brought us very welcome hot coffee and cookies. Mr. Rumford chose his house rather than his office as the location for the interview because it was freer from interruptions. The interview was terminated a bit sooner than either of us would have preferred in order that Mr. Rumford could open his pharmacy in time. He is a vigorous and genial man and, at 69, clearly lives a full and busy life.

On reviewing the transcript Mr. Rumford made virtually no changes.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: December 16, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH W. BYRON RUMFORD, SR.

Walter Gordon and Alpha Phi Alpha

Brower: Mr. Rumford, did you always live in this area?

Rumford: No. My home was in Arizona. I came up here from Phoenix after graduating from high school to attend the University of California in 1927.

Brower: So you were in college almost ten years after Walter Gordon.

Rumford: Yes. Did Walter finish in 1922?

Brower: He was the class of '18 and then he got his law degree in '22.

Rumford: I think that's correct.

Brower: How did you first meet him?

Rumford: Everybody knew Walter Gordon around here. He was a Berkeley policeman for one thing, and going to law school at the same time, I believe.

Brower: He was, and also coaching.

Rumford: Coaching at the University of California. Mainly I would say our association developed through the fraternity.

Brower: I wondered about that.

*See interview with W. Byron Rumford, Sr., W. Byron Rumford: Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1973.

Rumford: I was a pledge to the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Chapter which was established at Berkeley, I think, around 1922, mostly of blacks. We've had some Caucasians, but mostly blacks. It was through that association that we became closer friends.

I spent one year up at the Sacramento Junior College. When I transferred down here I went to Pharmacy School in 1928 in San Francisco.

Brower: Was that still the Affiliated Colleges?

Rumford: Right, it was. Soon thereafter it became part of the University of California.

Brower: I understand that Walter Gordon was very much interested in that fraternity and got particularly involved in the initiations, which he dearly loved. Do you remember that?

Rumford: The initiation is just part of it, of course, but Walter was an early enthusiast of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity here in the West. I think ours was probably the first chapter in the West. He was one of the officials. I don't know exactly what his status was with reference to the fraternity--that is, whether he was an officer or not.

The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity is widely known. It is probably the largest black fraternity in the United States. Its membership included [W.E.B.] Du Bois, and now includes men like Justice Thurgood Marshall and Eddie Brooke and people like that.

Brower: It must be the--

Rumford: We think it is. [Laughter] However there are many other groups now that would think otherwise.

Brower: Was that the first such fraternity in the country, do you think?

Rumford: Yes, it was the first black fraternity.

Brower: And there is still a chapter here in Berkeley?

Rumford: Yes there is, very active. There is one in San Jose, I think, and an affiliate down at Stanford, and of course we have several in Los Angeles. We have also a graduate chapter here now.

Brower: Can you remember at all what your first impression of Walter Gordon was?

Rumford: Walter was a very large man, to begin with, and he carried with him a semblance of authority. He was the type of fellow that would dominate a scene if you just let him go, in other words he was that type of person. He wasn't a weak personality at all, let's put it that way.

Brower: Was he arrogant?

Rumford: No. He wasn't arrogant. Some people might have thought so, but Walter wasn't arrogant.

Brower: He was just awfully sure of himself?

Rumford: Yes.

Brower: I wonder how he got that confidence?

Rumford: In our group there were quite a number of, let's say, steadfast personalities. There was Leonard Richardson, who was a lawyer who graduated from Hastings; he was a member of the fraternity. There was Eldridge Ross, who was a pharmacist, Dr. Rickman, and George Johnson, both he and his brother.

George is a character you might want to do something on.

Brower: We have.

Rumford: In Honolulu?

Brower: He's in Honolulu and we just happened to have a young woman there who went to see him. It was very useful because he was in Walter Gordon's early law practice and that was a period we didn't know much about.

Rumford: Yes, he's one of the early undergraduates. And then there's a fellow who went to law school, not undergraduate school, down in Los Angeles. He's been very successful down there.

Walter Gordon and the NAACP

Brower: Was your association with Walter Gordon mostly in those early days? Did you lose touch over the years or did you stay in touch?

Rumford: No, I stayed in touch with Walter until he left here.

Brower: Was it a social relationship? Were you one of the bridge-playing friends?

Rumford: Well, I'm a bridge player. [Laughter] No, it was more than that. I was associated with Walter Gordon as a working member of the NAACP for years.

Brower: That's something I'd like to ask you about. How do you feel about Walter Gordon's performance in the NAACP?

Rumford: Walter was a tough man. He was a football player and his character expressed that. Wherever there was an injustice Walter took out after it, as I found him.

Brower: You didn't feel that he was too soft in his dealings with white people?

Rumford: No, I didn't feel that he was too soft at all. He had friends out here in Berkeley and I imagine that if he could work something out he generally did. A lot of people felt that Walt maybe, in some instances, was too soft, but I never did find it that way.

He was the head of the NAACP for ten or twelve years. Have you talked to C.L. Dellums? Dellums worked with him.

Brower: Just a little bit on the phone. He didn't want to talk more; he already had been interviewed in another connection. I got some remarks from him that I found quite interesting. He said, "The trouble with Walter was he believed what white people told him." According to Dellums Walter Gordon's wasn't the typical black experience. So he tended to think that when the Oakland city manager said, "Yes, we will indeed integrate Sweet's Ballroom," or something, that they would. But he found out they didn't and I gather he pursued those things pretty toughly thereafter.

Conditions in the Bay Area for Blacks

Rumford: I'll tell you, it wasn't easy at that time.

Brower: That's what we forget nowadays.

Rumford: That's right. Everybody's taking advantage of what happened.

Let me tell you this. When we look back to the early days--when I came into this community, you couldn't swim in the swimming pools here, you had no [black] school teachers here, you couldn't play on the playgrounds here. We attempted to play tennis down at Mosswood Park and they ran us off of there. There were signs up during the war, "Negro trade not solicited."

Brower: World War II?

Rumford: That's right, World War II.

Rumford: Now, people say Walt was soft and all that, but how in the world did they accomplish all these things? Walt didn't do it by himself. We broke down the bus-driving situation here. They were breaking down the store clerks in Oakland. You couldn't even get a job in the post office. Here was a whole horde of things. Besides the fact that they didn't want you to play football at the University of California and you had to contend with that. Clint Evans wouldn't let you play on the baseball team.

Now that's the kind of setting you want to place Walt Gordon in, not in a setting where all these things have been accomplished and you begin to look at something else, where you begin to say, "Well now, what about moving me up as secretary?" They wouldn't give a black girl a secretarial job. In fact, Walt was the cause of Earl Warren getting his first black secretary.

You can't discount these things. When they say, "He didn't do it," or "He was a white man's Negro," or that, you have to look at the setting at the time.

Brower: At history.

Rumford: That's right. These things are facts. We had no school teachers. Surely Walt, as president of the NAACP, had something to do with all of these things or he wouldn't have been there.

I knew him when I was working as chairman of the education committee promoting educational programs. We had speakers from all over--Max Radin, Barbara Armstrong, Dean Pickens, and Walter White all spoke to our association. All these people I promoted as the director of education and put on the programs.

We look around today and, sure, there're things going on today that didn't go on then, as far as blacks are concerned. They didn't get into law school. (They got a few into law school. What I'm saying is they didn't open up the doors to those that had not received a good education, and on that basis now they let them in. They compromise, or compensate, or whatever you want to call it.) But I think when you look around and see what we had to work with--we had no jobs. The only source of employment was the Southern Pacific and a few little shops. I think Smoke Francis did his Ph.D. thesis on Negro business. Smoke Francis played football at Cal, you know.

Brower: It's pretty significant that Smoke Francis, who was trained as an economist, couldn't find anything to do except raise dogs in west Berkeley.

Rumford: Yes. Smoke Francis went down to Dillard [University] or somewhere in New Orleans and taught for a while. He came back out here, but he was ill. I don't want to say it as a matter of record, because I don't know, but he became ill--probably through his experiences.

Brower: His frustrations. A Ph.D. with nowhere to go.

Rumford: He was terribly frustrated.

I could tell you myself. I have taken any number of civil service examinations and they would flunk me in the oral consistently. Five or six examinations: Food and Drug; Inspector in V.D. Control; Board of Pharmacy Inspector. They just rolled me out of all of those, except when I appealed.

Brower: Did you always have to indicate race on your forms?

Rumford: Not always. Later they took it off. I don't know exactly what the dates are. But it didn't make any difference because you had to go up for an oral. The minute you walked in it was a joke.

These are the things the young people don't know--what we had to go through in order to survive.

I spoke to a group of railway workers. They were the elite in those times. You either worked for the Southern Pacific or you worked for the Santa Fe or you worked for the Union Pacific. You worked as a redcap, which is a good job. You worked as a trained waiter or you worked as a Pullman porter.

Brower: You remember, all the garbage men were Italian at that time.

Rumford: Sure. We had no city jobs.

There was one city job. They put a black woman up there. Harry Cobden, who used to be city engineer, had nerve enough to put the first woman up to city hall. She was a typist. I think everybody wanted to throw him out. She was a real black woman, she wasn't light skinned or anything of that nature. She was black. She lived out here in Berkeley and Harry Cobden said he didn't care what color she was as long as she could do the work.

Harry Cobden is living up in Sacramento now. He was an attorney and an engineer, graduated from California, and probably one of the finest men. He comes down here once in a while. He's the attorney, or at least he was a consultant, for Kings, Chan King, down here.

He was the first person to do that. Harry Cobden. You should talk to old Harry.

Brower: It might be a good idea. I think we need this perspective that you are giving me now.

Rumford: Yes, you need Harry Cobden.

Comparison of Conditions in Two Periods

Brower: I think another generation needs to have this explained to them.

Rumford: They think we sat there and did nothing. How in the world do they think they ever got a person on that highway patrol? We had to fight to get persons on as toll collectors on the bridges.

Furthermore, we had problems all up and down the valley where you couldn't eat. We broke all that down. We went to Governor [Pat] Brown when he got in, that was later in the '60s of course, and had him break all that stuff up. Prior to that--you sleep in the car.

It's unbelievable, really, as far as the West and California are concerned, but these are real experiences.

Some of the old-timers haven't gotten away from it yet, especially politically. I experienced that. It was very difficult.

Brower: In what sense do you mean they hadn't gotten away from it?

Rumford: They haven't gotten quite used to black people here doing the things that they're doing.

Brower: Oh, you mean Caucasian people who haven't gotten away from it?

Rumford: Yes, some of the old-timers like, frankly, Frank Coakley, D.A., and some of his friends, and I think Jensen and that crowd. This has nothing to do with what you're saying, but I'd like to tell you what's happening in this community.

Brower: I'd like to know.

Rumford: It has nothing to do with Walter Gordon at this point, but I'd like to express myself and tell you what they've done.

Brower: I'd be interested and I think we should have it on tape, if you don't mind. It's part of the same world.

Rumford: I don't mind at all and I will talk about it at the proper time.

Brower: Right. It seems to me that the methods that Walter Gordon used at that time were just about the only methods available.

Rumford: You must realize that you're facing a hostile group to begin with. Walt was accepted primarily because he was a good football player at the time.

Rumford: What's the difference between Walter Gordon's experiences then and those of the athletes now who are going through the same thing? They're athletes and they've experienced a lot of changes. They're lauded because of their ability to throw the basketball and this kind of thing.. It isn't because they went through school and accomplished anything in the field of race relations or anything else. It was because they're good basketball players. Muncie was a good football player at Cal. He was a great guy--no different.

Walt was a good football player. They recognized that and they all thought he was great. Some of the old-timers out there who saw him play and knew him playing respected him. Then as they began to know the man they respected him as an individual. Then they respected his ability to move ahead under all kinds of handicaps to become a policeman and a lawyer.

He aspired to be a lawyer. Where was there anything for him to accomplish out here in Berkeley as a lawyer? He didn't have too much population to work with. Not too many Caucasians were coming to him--a few did. I think gradually more Caucasians probably came to Walt for assistance as a lawyer than blacks. That was because there weren't too many blacks out here. Those that did go knew that Walt had a few friends here and there. That's the way this relationship was built.

I don't think you can compare the man and the time with what we have today or have had in the last ten years. I don't think there's any relationship. You might make comparisons as to gains. Even so it would be difficult to do because it was under a different set of circumstances.

Brower: What do you know about his own feelings about racial inequities? He didn't seem to be awfully bitter--maybe not bitter enough.

Rumford: That I couldn't tell you.

Brower: Did he express himself about his inner feelings?

Rumford: You must remember that Walt's family came out here from Georgia where they had really been oppressed. As I understand it from talking to Walt, they came out here from Georgia because they wanted an education for their children and they settled in Riverside.

Brower: Relatively, things were enough better, I suppose--?

Rumford: Oh, my goodness, yes. Here he's going to bring his children up and they're going to the University of California. How many blacks went to the University of California at that time and went through the school? I think that in itself was something to make a man feel good, aside from the fact that he played football and was accepted by many people there as an outstanding person.

Rumford: I think you can look at Walt's associations and tell, if you went to his funeral, that most of his friends were Caucasians, the old-timers, let's say, because most of the other people have died off.

Brower: How do you account for that?

Rumford: Well, the same setting, an early setting in Berkeley where there weren't too many educated blacks. There weren't too many in Oakland. I guess you didn't have over three or four lawyers, if you had that many, and you must have had two or three doctors if you had that many. One of his good friends was Dr. Newman, the dentist, who--he helped to get on the hill up there.

The setting was entirely different, the relationship was different. It's the same as the political setting in which I went to Sacramento where you had to develop friendships in order to accomplish something, and if you didn't do that, if you don't know how to do it, then you're not a success.

I can possibly relate some of my circumstances in Sacramento to something that's going on now in Sacramento. I don't see where the blacks are doing anything. They've got five or six of them up there. I don't know whether I should say it as a matter of record, but if you're going to compare times and personalities then you have to compare them all the way down the line.

Brower: Exactly.

Rumford: If there is anything such as a white folks' Negro, in some instances people have said that exists in Sacramento today because they're not doing anything. I don't think that's wholly true, frankly, with all due respect to Walt and the men who are in Sacramento today, but people have a tendency to look at things that way.

Walter Gordon's Later Years

Brower: Did you see him after he came back from the Virgin Islands?

Rumford: Yes, I did.

Brower: How did he seem to you? Was he in pretty good spirits? That hadn't been a very good experience I guess.

Rumford: Walt had been submitted to a set of circumstances that he'd walked into. Walt, as I told you before, I think was a fellow who was pretty sure of himself and he domineered the scene pretty much. He knew when he'd run into the wall, occasionally [laughing].

Rumford: I think that in moving to the Virgin Islands (these are my own thoughts, Walt never discussed this with me) that Walt found it quite different. Here was this group of people who in the first place, I learned by reading the paper, wanted a person who was of their own culture and background to be the governor. Not that they disliked Walt, they had nothing against Walt Gordon, as such, but they were dissatisfied when he came because they had hoped they would get somebody from their own setting, which they didn't.

I think he had some problems, I think he worked them out, and I think it was better for him to go to the judgeship. This was what he wanted. I think he assumed the demeanor of a judge, more or less. I think he did. I think he resolved himself. "Here is where it is and I'm happy with this." He was a different type of personality.

Brower: He seems to have had a considerable capacity to adapt.

Rumford: Well, he did there, [laughing] he did there.

Brower: Did you see him often after he got back?

Rumford: Not too often, because he wasn't well. Then I left. I went back to Washington in 1966 and I was gone for five years.

Brower: That's right, of course.

Rumford: So, I didn't have a chance to talk to him at length.

Blacks and Politics

Rumford: He always wanted me to come over because he always liked to talk to me. He called me "the Democrat." [Laughter]

Brower: He was a Republican, of course.

Rumford: Yes. I was one of the earlier Democrats around here. He'd say, "There's old Demo." He'd call me Demo. [Laughter] But I always worked with him and we always got along.

Brower: Do you understand why he chose that political party?

Rumford: Yes.

Brower: What was his motivation in that, do you know?

Rumford: Because all blacks were Republican at that time. There weren't a handful of Democrats throughout the United States in the early days. Why, it was ridiculous to think that a person was a Democrat--until after Roosevelt.

Brower: Oh, of course, because of the South being--

Rumford: Sure. Absolutely. They were all--I guess the story about the change has really not been written, but the philosophy--now they've adjusted the country, of course.

The political system in America today is not a keenly divided separation of thought and action. You find regional differences. You find Connally and his crowd going over to the Republicans, and Democrats--

Brower: It's almost a reversal of roles.

Rumford: However, I think there will come a time when even the Democrats are going to find themselves needing to take a second look at their position. More and more they're swinging, I don't think to the center of things, but to the left. The other fellows are going to the right so there's no center for those that want to go down the center. You either have to be over here or be over there [gesturing].

Brower: This doesn't really relate to Walter Gordon, but I would like to ask how you feel about Carter.

Rumford: Well, let me tell you, I'm one of those that thinks that we have to measure a man based upon his own thoughts and opinions and expressions. I don't think that because he comes from Mississippi or Georgia or Texas that he dislikes blacks, nor conversely do I think that because a person comes from the north, and particularly California, he's crazy about blacks, is in love with them. I don't think that either. I've had that experience pointed out to me in my political experiences.

I heard Jimmy Carter speak in Savannah, Georgia in, I think, 1974, when I was working for the Federal Trade Commission on a mission to the South to meet with the Southern legislators in Savannah, Georgia. The closing night, after four days of session, Carter was the principal speaker.

He spoke in general. I never heard of [Carter]; I wasn't interested in Carter, and didn't know about him. I didn't even know who the governor of Georgia was, really. Anyway, they said the governor of Georgia was going to speak and his name was Jimmy Carter, and he spoke.

He spoke about the consumer problems and what they had to do. Then he began to elaborate upon the treatment of the black in the South and how things were going to have to change, that he was going to work for a new South, that they didn't need anybody from Washington to tell them what to do with their native blacks, that things were going to change, that people were going to be treated as people and that this was going to be a new South.

Rumford: I was so impressed with what he said. My wife and I were the only two blacks in the audience, say of about five hundred.

Brower: So he certainly wasn't speaking to--?

Rumford: No. He could have made that speech in Harlem. When he finished, I went up and shook hands with him and told him that I enjoyed what he had to say and I was surprised it was a very enlightened speech.

I had no knowledge or any indication at all that eventually he'd be a candidate to be president of the United States, but I think he's an honest man. What else can I say under those circumstances? I don't think he's any political genius. I don't think any of them are, as far as that goes, and the record reveals that. We might as well have a common thinking person, a man who is intelligent. I don't think they could say that he's not an intelligent person.

Brower: No, certainly.

Rumford: He's an intelligent man. He may not express himself in the manner of Kennedy, but not too many do.

Brower: I certainly hope that in office he will implement some of the good things that he says.

Rumford: I think he believes that way.

Now whether he can do it as a matter of fact, is something else again. He still has to deal with the Congress and he's got to go through the established bureaucracy, which is something. You don't clean that out. That's full of cobwebs and everything else. I spent six years in bureaucracy and I know how it works, and I know how the legislative end of it works, I've been in both.

It's going to be interesting to see what he's able to accomplish different and above and beyond what some of the rest of them have done. If he's honest that will be helpful.

Brower: It's interesting to me that the greatest strides in civil rights were made under, well, under Truman, but also under Johnson, so that we can't just assume that a Southerner is going to be--

Rumford: In 1960 I was a delegate to the convention in Los Angeles. This has nothing to do with Walter Gordon, again, but it has to do with something of background, which all in all has to do with something we're talking about, let us hope.

Brower: That's my feeling.

Rumford: We were called over by the head of the Matson Lines, not Roth, the other fellow who retired as president of the American Lines, or one of them, a big Democrat. I can't think of his name right now, but he was a big Democrat and closely associated with the big Democrats over there at that time. He was giving a cocktail party at the Fairmont Hotel for Johnson. He asked me to come over and introduce Johnson.

I didn't know Johnson too well and I said, "I don't think I can make it. Frankly I don't think I'd better do that." I was running for office and Johnson didn't have such an excellent record in the Congress. I said I'd come over, but I didn't want to really get involved.

We went over, my wife and I. It was a small party of about twenty-five or thirty close people. Johnson was there with his family, his two daughters and his wife. At the beginning they asked him to say a few words and he spoke and said how nice it was to be in San Francisco. Then he said, "I'd like to introduce my daughters and have them say a word. They did. They spoke of how much they liked San Francisco and all. One of them said that she liked the cosmopolitan aspect where people were just people and it didn't make any difference about color, and this thing and all. Johnson just beamed all over, you know, and this was what he liked.

It went on to Los Angeles to the convention. In short, he was nominated with Kennedy. Kennedy chose him. This upset the black delegates in Los Angeles and so they had a meeting at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. They called this meeting because of Kennedy. He wanted to explain his position. He said he would bring Johnson and let Johnson talk for himself.

He did that afternoon and we were all there, maybe about a hundred delegates or so. Johnson said, "I know that you're upset. You're a little skeptical about me and my position in here, but I want to tell you this: the group, the race, will be better off in four years with us than they've been in a hundred years." He said, "I promise you this."

I've never forgotten it. The man worked toward it.

I was down in Austin, Texas in September when they reviewed the records of both Kennedy and Johnson as far as civil rights is concerned. It was something that certainly is a credit. Mrs. Johnson was there, and the daughters were there. It was held at the L.B. Johnson Memorial Library in Austin.

Brower: I'm glad because he's been getting so much flak, it must be hard for her.

Rumford: Well--

Brower: The Vietnam war was such a hideous error, and a terrible tragedy.

Rumford: That's right, he fell into that. When we speak of his civil rights record and what he did and accomplished in breaking down barriers for us, "we're better off than in a hundred years." All this has come about, you know, through these little contributions along the way. They just didn't happen that there was a hurricane over night. It didn't happen that way.

You can't help but give those pioneers credit for laying the groundwork and making it easier and putting the heat on people like that.

We put the heat on Johnson, not that he needed an awful lot. I think the man had made up his mind that he was going to change and that things needed to change. Who knows that when he was teaching down there in Texas (he taught the Mexicans), that he felt some need for a change at that time.

Of course as a politician he had to go along certain lines in order to get re-elected down there in Texas. We wouldn't expect him to put through a fair-housing bill here.

We can talk about that a little bit too.

Brower: One of the disappointments Walter Gordon had, I think, speaking of fair housing, was the failure of Warren to sponsor and support fair-employment practice.

Rumford: No. I was with Earl Warren up there in Sacramento. Warren, I think, was a little shaky of Gus Hawkins because Gus had played left-wing politics up there whether we like it or not. He was courted by, I'm not saying that he was himself, left-wingers.

During that period that Gus Hawkins went to Sacramento, he went there in the thirties, I don't think he was friendly to Earl Warren.

Now when I went up there in 1949 it was altogether different. Earl Warren was from Alameda County. Earl Warren had appointed me to the Housing Commission here and I felt I knew Earl Warren.

Earl Warren was not a swinging liberal in any sense of the term, but nevertheless Earl Warren came to me. I went to his house as a legislator and dined. They were very friendly. He was very fine, called me in to talk to him.

Rumford: By that time he was having trouble with the medical group, and medical insurance you know. He wanted to put through some kind of health-insurance coverage.

Brower: It was very far sighted.

Rumford: Yes, at that time. He broke with his conservative friends on that.

And, of course, he said to me, "Look, you get that FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] bill amended into any labor code bill." (You had to put it into the labor code.) "You amend it in there," he said, "and I'll sign it." That's what he told me personally.

Not only that, he signed the bill I sponsored to bar discrimination in the National Guard. He was always very proud of it. We had chats back in Washington on this thing.

He changed, too. He changed for the better, but Coakley and some of the rest of them changed for the worse.

Brower: The other way--

Rumford: Yes, the other way.

Brower: Evelle Younger, too, went from apparently something sort of liberal...

Rumford: I don't know what Younger's position is. I'll tell you this, I did talk to him. I know you want this on the record. It doesn't matter to me because it's a matter of fact. I talked to Evelle Younger in Washington after I went there with Mr. Weinberger.

Weinberger and I happen to be friends, and he's a Republican [laughing].

Brower: He sure is.

Rumford: He did more for me at that point--fought for me there, stayed there, too.

Brower: That's the nicest thing I've heard about Weinberger in a long time.

Rumford: Yes, well I know that he's a very conservative man, but he's not a politician. He's an honest person. He's sometimes too rough as far as his financial position is concerned, but that has nothing to do with him as an individual.

Anyway, we had breakfast, Younger and his chief assistant, at the Washington Hilton. He chatted with me and said, "I'll tell you, I'd like very much to put a black on somewhere." I said, "You don't

Rumford: have to look for one, you've got one right down there in your office in San Francisco. You've got Wiley Manuel." He said, "Yes, he's been head of the Civil Division." I said, "Yes, he used to work in my drug store and I know him very well. He's one of the finest persons that you've ever met, and he's a good attorney, recognized." (He'd been there for quite a while, but Lynch and none of the rest of them would elevate him.) The attorney general said, "My only question was that he supported Dellums. I have to consider that." I said, "Maybe he did. Perhaps, maybe, he was wrong in your thinking, but that has nothing to do with his ability." He said, "That's all right. I'll think about it."

He came on back and he appointed him the chief of the Civil Division. He made Wiley Manuel one of his chief assistants. Of course he's a judge now. He was appointed superior court judge here about two or three months ago. He was born in Berkeley, lived right down here, and worked in my drug store as a kid. He's one of the finest persons you've ever met. He graduated from Cal and then went over to Hastings [Law School].

All I'm saying is that these things don't just--I'm talking too much, and we're not talking about Walt, but you have to understand what we were talking about.

Brower: You brought up Dellums just now and I'm curious to know, have you any idea what Walter Gordon thought of Dellums?

Rumford: He thought an awful lot of Dellums. He kept him there as vice-president, [of the Alameda County NAACP].

Brower: I didn't mean C.L., I meant Ron.

Rumford: No, he didn't think very much of Ron.

Ron has done some good things, but he's come about in the sixties and he represents--

Brower: A different generation?

Rumford: Yes, and a different approach. I don't know too much about Ron myself, to tell you the truth about it.

I'll say this, there's a difference between Ron Dellums and Eddie Brooke. I don't think Ron Dellums will ever get to be a senator of California. Ron Dellums dresses nicely, the women like him, he fashion shows, and this type of thing is what he does in Washington.

Brower: Let me tell you something else about him. The League of Conservation Voters keeps a tally of politicians' voting records. He is closer to a hundred percent in his voting on environmental issues than any other congressman.

Rumford: I think he votes right. I don't think there's any question of that.

Brower: What else can you ask of a congressman?

Rumford: That's what I say. He's satisfied the people and that's all you can ask of him. [Laughing] As long as he satisfies the people that's all. The rest of it doesn't matter. But I still don't think that--

Brower: His style wouldn't have been appealing to Walter Gordon?

Rumford: No. I don't think he'll go anywhere in Congress. I don't think he'll ever be a leader in Congress.

I was just giving you my opinion on Ron. I like Ron. I've known him as a kid. I think he's doing the job that people want him to do and that's it. But you see, it's just that I think that he has a mighty narrow position.

Brower: You probably didn't talk much with Walter Gordon in those last years?

Rumford: No, not too much. You know Walt was ill. He wasn't too well.

Brower: I was pleased to learn that he was very useful when he was on the Housing Authority here in Berkeley.

Rumford: Walt? I don't recall.

Brower: Perhaps you weren't on the same side in the matter of the land redevelopment down in Oceanview?

Rumford: No, I wasn't--you see Walt was a Republican. We didn't always go along together. I was a Democrat. [Laughing] I've always been a Democrat. Walt was a Republican and we didn't enjoy everything in the same light.

Brower: But it didn't interfere with your friendship?

Rumford: No, because we would hoorah. Just like he called me "the Demo," and I said, "Okay, Demo, yes."

But, you see, when I came along, I came along when they had cross-filing. I won two or three elections on both sides, winning both--

Brower: Like Warren.

Rumford: Yes, at the same time. My position was a little different. There was a different setting here in Oakland. Oakland was a different town. It's a different town now. They're having problems down in Oakland now. We've got problems in Berkeley. So it's a different setting altogether.

Brower: Walter Gordon never stood for elective office did he?

Rumford: No.

Brower: His offices were all appointive.

Rumford: Yes. There again he didn't run for anything--there weren't too many--the only thing he could have run for then was the assembly like I did. Maybe he would have gotten in there, and maybe he wouldn't have, I don't know. [Laughing] Maybe he didn't have the temperament to get defeated.

Walter Gordon and Earl Warren

Brower: Do you have any feelings about his role on the Adult Authority?

Rumford: They seemed to like what he was doing. Now, whether he was compassionate at that time--I imagine a lot of people would have felt, Walt's up there, he's a black guy and he'll be soft on blacks. Knowing Walt, I doubt if he was soft on anybody. [Laughing] It didn't make any difference what color you were if you committed a crime. But I never heard anybody say that he was rough.

Brower: You don't think that blacks thought he was too hard on blacks?

Rumford: No, I never heard that, but I wouldn't be surprised if some didn't have that tendency. I think that Walt was tough on anybody who committed a crime. He was a policeman, an ex-policeman.

He did a good job I'm sure, because Earl Warren kept him. You know that was Earl Warren's first appointment of a black.

Earl Warren, prior to that time, had not associated himself in any degree with the blacks of this community. As I told you he appointed the first black secretary, through Walt's efforts when he was attorney general.

Brower: I guess it was a more or less accidental relation, too, somehow through the U.C. Alumni Association. Also when Earl Warren was district attorney Walter Gordon must have had contact with Warren.

Rumford: Earl Warren, I don't think, prior to that time, had had any great experience with blacks at all, coming out of Bakersfield as he did.

Brower: That's right, Bakersfield still seems to be--

Rumford: Behind the times.

Brower: To say the least.

Rumford: That's right. Then to come up to the University of California--the man had gone through a complete metamorphosis in his philosophy and thoughts.

Brower: I'd really like to know more about how that happened.

Rumford: Well, to me--

[Interruption: conversation with Mrs. Rumford.]

Byron Rumford: Background

Brower: I'd like to ask you why you came to the University of California?

Rumford: Primarily I wanted to enter Berkeley because of my former teacher Ellis O. Knox, who graduated from the University of California. He was teaching in Phoenix, Arizona. He later went to U.S.C. [University of Southern California] to get his doctorate in education and went on to Howard University to become professor of, I think, history. I visited with him back there. It was largely through Ellis Knox that I aspired to come to the University of California.

Brower: He was Caucasian?

Rumford: No. Ellis Knox was a black person. His sister taught school in Oakland, I think, not in Berkeley. He was originally from Oakland--Berkeley, his family.

Brower: How many teachers did you have in that school?

Rumford: Arizona was segregated, its schools were segregated. In high school we had four teachers who taught everything, from military to Latin. All the teachers, if you will--

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Brower: Would you tell me a little about your background before you got to that school in Phoenix?

Rumford: I'd first like to say, since Haley's book [Roots], that we've always thought something about our backgrounds. Ours is such a heterogeneous thing that it's difficult to pin down. I don't think that like Haley I could trace my background back to any particular foreign soil. As far back as I could go is my grandmother at this point, in the southern part of Texas near the border.

Rumford: My mother was born in Uvalde [Texas] and she was one of five daughters and one son. My grandmother had to raise this family by herself and her own wits.

It's always been interesting to me how people got from one place to another. Transportation was not too convenient and it cost money to go. To take a family from Uvalde, Texas or San Antonio and down in that area, up, apparently following the Rio Grande, to El Paso, Texas and living there for a while, and then over to Arizona where my grandmother had lived in Bisbee and Douglas in the mining countries and where she ran a rooming house.

I always said, putting it very politely, that she was a pretty tough woman because she had to bring up those girls and to rear the family and to make a living for them and she did all of this.

Brower: Approximately when would this have been?

Rumford: It must have been around 1910 or 1912. It was before Arizona became a state because after Arizona became a state it was segregated. There was no segregation in the schools in Arizona prior to it becoming a state. While it was a territory there was no discrimination.

My grandmother was a strong personality and she liked this. As soon as it became a state and the school system became segregated why she moved out. She took the children to Los Angeles to receive their basic education while my mother remained in Arizona. I stayed with her there until we went to Los Angeles for a while. Then I came back and graduated from high school in Phoenix.

My grandmother wanted no part of that segregated system. She's just as strong a personality as she was. I guess I inherited some of that from her, getting involved in all these things that I've gotten involved in.

I thought it might be interesting.

It was always interesting to me how the people got from one place to another without a great amount of funds and how they were finally able to get to Los Angeles from down in Texas. That's a long ways.

Brower: Do you know how she did it?

Rumford: I imagine it was a piece by piece sort of step, just one step--

Brower: In stages?

Rumford: Yes, in stages, as much as I can gather.

Brower: What mode of transportation do you suppose?

Rumford: Train.

Brower: That was an undertaking, five daughters!

Rumford: Yes. My mother was one of them. My uncle is living in Los Angeles now, Clarence Johnson. He was with the federal government. I don't know whether you know Clarence or not. He doesn't usually want to talk about the family for some reason or another. I haven't been able to get too much out of him.

Brower: That was the one brother in the family?

Rumford: One brother, and he lives in Los Angeles. Clarence Johnson was well known here in Berkeley. He's the head of the S.F. Urban League over there and been very active in church work. You might want to talk to Clarence some time just for general history. It would be interesting because he's a fabulous person to talk to.

Brower: I don't think enough has been done about black history in this area.

Rumford: No. Clarence, without formal education, reached all kinds of heights. He worked with the Labor Department in Washington, Weaver and all that crowd back there. You know Weaver, the former head of H.U.D.? He was Weaver's close friend. All of them worked together many years ago under Roosevelt. Then he came back. Then he worked for H.U.D. in the race-relations division of housing. They retired him. Then they called him back and he's still working.

Brower: It must have been quite a family.

Rumford: There's nothing I'd say that we received a lot of laurels or anything for, but I think it was a sound, good American family, that's all.

Brower: That grandmother must have really had what it took.

Rumford: Yes, she taught us good sound things I think. We had a great deal of respect for her. The elders, and particularly the mother, the grandmother of the family, ruled the roost. Not today. No, they would put her out somewhere.

Brower: Blacks haven't been quite so quick at that pattern as whites. I mean you don't pop everybody in a nursing home.

Rumford: No, but we're seeing more and more of it. We have erected several homes for aged people. I don't know whether we finished with Walter Gordon or not, whether we got off on other things.

Brower: Let me go back and look at my questions about Walter Gordon. I think we pretty well covered it. I wondered about the fraternal organizations. Were you in any other fraternal organization with him?

Rumford: I'm not sure. I think Walter was a Mason, but I don't think he, like myself, had ever been too active. But he had a great deal of love for the college fraternity group.

Ellis Knox was an Alpha man, too. I guess by some coincidence I just seemed to take his leadership.

Brower: He must have been a good guy. What about Mrs. Gordon? Were you also friends with her? I mean was it that kind of a relationship?

Rumford: Yes, through the fraternity meetings that met at his house and things like that we knew "Sis" Gordon. Everybody used to kind of hang around, the college gang. It was, we'll go down to Walt's.

You might want to do a story sometime on Ed Fawcett. Did you ever hear of him?

Brower: I don't think so.

Rumford: He's another character. Ed Fawcett was an unusual man. He ran a cleaning and pressing place up here on Bancroft or Durant, where the bank is. Right in back there Ed Fawcett had a cleaning and pressing parlor. Ed used to house all these blacks in his basement. They had no place to live. You couldn't find a place to live in Berkeley. George Johnson lived there, and Ken Johnson and four or five others. We used to call it Fawcett's Basement and we'd say that an individual was educated in Fawcett's Basement.

Ed Fawcett had no formal learning himself, but he was a very successful business man and owned three or four apartments.

His widow lives down there on Acton Street, on the corner of Berkeley Way, I think, just one block off from University. He built several apartments around here.

He and Walt were just like that [gesture]. You might want to talk to Mrs. Fawcett.

Brower: Thank you very much. I know I can't keep you another minute.

Transcriber: Gretchen Wolfe
Final Typist: Teresa Allen

III. STATE SERVICE: Member and Chairman, California Adult Authority

Interviews with:

Ervis W. Lester
Lewis Drucker
Clinton T. Duffy
Allen Moore
George McDaniel



Ervis W. Lester

Ervis W. Lester

Introduction	193
Letters to the Regional Oral History Office, March 9 and March 28, 1976	194

INTRODUCTION

Ervis W. Lester first met Walter Gordon in 1943, when as a Los Angeles police representative he testified before a team, headed by Walter Gordon, that had been sent by Governor Earl Warren to investigate clashes in Los Angeles between young Mexican Americans and servicemen. In 1945 Governor Warren appointed Mr. Lester to the California Adult Authority and thereafter the two men were in daily contact until 1955, when Walter Gordon became the governor of the Virgin Islands and Ervis Lester succeeded him as chairman of the Adult Authority and as Interstate Parole and Probation Compact Administrator. Although the year 1955 ended their close professional relationship, the friendship between Ervis Lester and Walter Gordon endured to the end of Walter Gordon's life.

It is not surprising then that when the initial planning was being done for the preparation of the Walter Gordon memorial volume the suggestion was made, by more than one friend of Walter Gordon, that Ervis Lester be approached for an interview. However, Mr. Lester's half-time residence in Oklahoma and his other commitments seemed to make a taped interview impossible. We settled instead for a written version of Mr. Lester's recollections of Walter Gordon and his assessment of his character.

These written remarks follow. In their admiration and love they are yet another testimony to the good fortune Walter Gordon enjoyed in his friends and they in him.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

LETTERS FROM ERVIS LESTER TO THE REGIONAL ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

March 9, 1976

How well do I know Walter A. Gordon? Please bear with my pride while I tell you. First, however, let me thank you for this opportunity to discuss my feelings for and evaluations of the most unusual man I have ever known.

It has been my good fortune to know many outstanding persons in the field of public service. The list includes several governors, three United States senators, a number of congressmen, quite a few mayors, city councilmen, and county supervisors, as well as many state legislators and countless judges. Also, I have known and admired numerous men and women in the educational field and the business sector too, including representatives from agriculture to finance. Most of those who come quickly to mind have made significant contributions to the advancement of our social order. The most unforgettable character in this distinguished company is Walter A. Gordon.

I first met Walt at the height of the so-called Zoot Suit Riots of Los Angeles in 1943. For a few weeks there were clashes between Mexican American youths and servicemen. The news media played it up and Sacramento became interested. Governor Earl Warren sent a team, headed by Walter Gordon, to Los Angeles to evaluate the conflict.

I was a police representative requested to appear and give testimony. Mr. Gordon's questions were brief, direct, and penetrating but his voice was soft and his attitude friendly. It was clear he was there to discover and record the facts and not interested in possible headlines. In that brief encounter he exhibited his true character. Walt is a man's man with unquestioned integrity and a judicious temperament, which includes the ability to assess facts with objectivity and apply the appropriate remedy with understanding and consideration to everyone concerned.

Two years later Governor Warren appointed me to the same state board and I worked daily with Walter Gordon for more than ten years. We were members of the California Adult Authority--the term-setting, parole-granting agency for

adult males sentenced to state prison. We jointly made between 7,000 and 8,000 decisions each year affecting the liberty of prisoners and thus, to some extent, their lives and the lives of their families. Walt's attitude was always the same, that is: "But for the grace of God, there go I." He diminished no man. Every inmate was treated with respect, even the hostile and threatening, for Walt understood their moods and while not excusing neither was he accusing. He was very astute in evaluating character. He had an amazing ability to recognize a fabricated story and usually, with some light kidding, could persuade the story-teller to abandon his pretenses and face reality. In such cases he was always gentle and considerate in expressing approval of the individual's ability to accept responsibility by laying aside his false defense.

Everyone who knows Walter Gordon knows he is a compassionate man with deep sympathetic feelings for all human beings. This was evident in all of our work together on the parole board. However, his compassion was never blind to reality. He had strong feelings about the deleterious effects that imprisonment has on offenders. On the other hand, in his mind there was no dichotomy between the welfare of society and the welfare of the prisoner. He always took the position that their interests were compatible, that it was good for both the prisoner and society if, upon release, the parolee could and would become a contributing member of the community. However, if he either could not or would not assume his responsibilities it would be unfair to both him and society to release him. For under these circumstances the releasee would have still another failure which he could ill afford and the community would suffer his new crimes plus the expense of returning him to prison. Walt's interest, understanding, and fairness made him popular with the prisoners and institutional personnel alike. No man could have been more respected nor more worthy of respect.

Walt was chairman of the Adult Authority for nine consecutive years. The other members asked the governor not to rotate the chairmanship because we felt his leadership was too valuable, especially in our contacts with the state legislature and in the field of public relations. Sometimes we would need budget support, at other times bills that we were sponsoring or opposing would come before assembly or senate committees. Walt was always our spokesman and no agency could have had a more effective one. Always genial and with perfectly timed humorous quips, he made his points skillfully, often dramatically with devastating results for the opposition. One day, during a recess, I overheard a long-time highly respected senator, now deceased, say to a couple of colleagues: "I think Walter Gordon is the finest person I've ever known in public service. He is honest, intelligent, and dedicated. I would never hesitate to support him on any issue. I have watched him through the years and studied his approach. Each time I've seen him in action two things have been present--the subject matter was important and Walter was right. He is the only person I know who can count on my vote before I have had time to study the issue."

Walt's public relations expertise was not confined to the legislature. He enjoyed public speaking and excelled in it. He was as much at ease before one group as another and equally popular. He presented important facts in an

interesting manner and received the same rousing approval whether in a small-town service club or the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. He was a frequent speaker at law enforcement conclaves, judicial conferences, and correctional gatherings. In an effort to promote employment opportunities for parolees and ex-convicts, he made numerous talks before employers' groups and labor meetings.

As a conference speaker it was common for him to be on the program along with the governor, the attorney general, and other notables. Even so, at the tail end of those gatherings the remark most often overheard was: "Well, the best thing on the agenda was that talk by Walter Gordon." I used to think to myself "What the heck does Walt really have? If I were to say the same things no one would be that impressed!" But that was Walt's uniqueness! There was some undefinable something about him that was different. He somehow related to people in a remarkable way. He made everyone feel included and important whether in a one-to-one relationship, as in talking to a prospective parolee, or in a one-to-one-thousand in addressing an international congress of corrections. It is hard to know the exact basis of his charisma. But the nicest thing about it is that time did not diminish it. The longer one knew Walt, the closer one got to the center core of his life values, the greater the admiration. The more complete the knowledge of Walter Gordon in every dimension the more impressive was his wholeness. Walt had faults I'm sure, even though none comes to mind at the moment. They were small faults that served to enhance his true stature by adding the element of humanness to the character of this most unforgettable personality.

It gives me an overwhelming sense of satisfaction and well-being to recall our ten years of daily contact and to know in my heart he is one of my closest and warmest friends.

March 28, 1976

A couple of incidents come to mind which help, I think, to understand the unusual qualities of Walter Gordon. It seems anecdotes are often required to reflect the real essence of a person.

Once I had lunch with Walt in the main dining-room of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. He was the only black in sight and as Walt used to say he was "highly visible." As we were being seated several men scattered around that large room greeted Walt with a "Hi, Walt," a nod, or a wave. I was surprised that so many recognized him. It was like walking in with a celebrity. Everyone beamed in response to Walt's nod and smile. After we sat down a man came from across the room and, with a happy smile, greeted Walt most warmly with a handshake and several slaps on the back. He expressed delight in seeing Walt and decried the fact that it had been so long since they had seen each other.

Walt then introduced me to his friend who, with an arm resting affectionately across Walt's shoulder said: "Let me tell you about the first time I ever met this s-o-b! He came to my office representing the NAACP and had the effrontery to charge me with discriminating against black customers in the conduct of my business. Man! I saw red--guess I should have seen black but I saw red! I told him to get the hell out of my office--that he or no one else was going to tell me how to run my business! And what do you think this guy did? Well, he didn't leave; he just laughed. Oh maybe not laughing so much, but smiling, and he said: 'Well, I expected you, as a businessman, to be open-minded and interested in any report I have to make. After all, you don't know that my advice won't improve your business, as a matter of fact, I think it will.'

"The upshot of that first encounter was other meetings with Walt. I got to know him and respect him and in the end to love him like a brother. He was always honest with me, always fair, interested in my problems and helpful in every way. Walt sold me on certain changes in my business practices and to my surprise our sales actually improved. And that is the story of how I first met Walt Gordon. When I didn't know him I saw him as a enemy. But to know him is to admire and love him. It was a great day for me when our paths crossed. I feel fortunate and happy that Walt is my friend."

The other incident was quite similar. Again it was an introduction to one of Walt's friends, this time in Oakland. This man had owned a restaurant in Berkeley and he said Walt had been called on, through NAACP, to investigate complaints of refusal of service to blacks.

This man said at first he was angry and indignant that anyone should question his methods of doing business. He said he had never had any personal feelings against blacks but sincerely believed his business would be ruined if he should serve them. He said Walt was understanding and sympathetic with his feelings but suggested his fears might not be well founded. Walt assured him, he said, that the last thing he wanted to see was a loss of business.

After two or three meetings Walt's friend said he agreed to try an experiment by serving everyone for a period of time. He said he did so with misgivings but at the same time feeling that Walt would "get off my back" if, as he suspected, a serious drop in business occurred. He said Walt helped him to see the problem from a minority person's point of view and then he had some guilt feelings about nonservice to blacks.

This former cafe owner said Walt was a good prophet. Sure enough business got better, not worse. His conscience was not only clear but his bank account improved. And all credit went to Walter Gordon, a great community leader, an astute business psychologist, and a warm and reliable friend.

When I worked with Walt he was a registered Republican and enjoyed appearing occasionally on the political platform, speaking in behalf of the governor's position on political issues falling in the purview of Walt's

interest and knowledge. Even so, he was not a partisan in political matters and in the state legislature he had a world of friends among the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

One day Walt told me he had strong feelings against any minority over-identifying with one party; that it put the minority in the position of being pretty much ignored by both parties; that it was a "two-edged sword" with either side cutting down the power of the group with equal efficiency. The party of their choice could count on them without sharing either authority or responsibility and the other party could go on as though the minority did not even exist. Walt said he felt the principles espoused by the Republican Party at the moment were somewhat more in keeping with his values, nevertheless, he felt sure he would have no difficulty working effectively in either party and that his choice, to some extent, rested on the fact that too many blacks (he said "colored") had, in his opinion, ignored the opportunities in the Republican Party.

You asked my opinion about those persons who seemed to have had a lot of influence in Walter Gordon's life. I think it safe to give much credit to his immediate family, his parents and his wife, Betty.

Walt had great love, admiration, and respect for his mother and father. He was proud of them for their honesty, forthrightness, self-confidence, resourcefulness, and their all-around well-adjusted wholesomeness. And he knew they loved him and held him in the same high regard. He often revealed his own values by telling anecdotes about his parents. Specific incidents are hard to recall after so many years.

However, I remember once an inmate on the parole calendar at San Quentin was being interviewed. He had a rather lengthy criminal record but at one time had been a preacher of a small Eastside Los Angeles church. Walt asked him about his preparation for leading a congregation and learned that there had been very little from either the religious or the educational point of view. Then Walt asked him why, with so little background, he had decided to go into the ministry. The prisoner replied: "Well, Mr. Gordon, I was called to preach, I felt a definite call; I know I heard God's call for me to preach."

Walt said, "Let me tell you what my father once told a friend of his under very similar circumstances. This friend of my Dad's had just about your qualifications to lead a church. He came to Dad and said he had heard God's call to preach and had decided to go into the ministry. Dad asked a few questions about the call and then offered this comment: 'Well, George, I only have this to say to you, in my opinion, a lot of men who thought they heard a call to preach in reality heard nothing except a jackass braying in a nearby pasture.'"

Betty Gordon is a very outstanding person in her own right. She is highly intelligent, of unquestioned integrity and sensitive to all of the factors of change in our social order. Betty has a wide diversity of interests

and is deeply motivated as a supportive wife. They are a sharing couple and have the capacity to help each other maintain great objectivity. Walt has always been realistic, taking an analytical approach to life. Thus, he found it easy to see the world through the eyes of others. Betty has this same gift and often uses it to add a new dimension to Walt's perspective. I think her impact on his life is incalculable.

I believe Chief August Vollmer had a great influence on Walt's life. The chief put Walt on the Berkeley Police Department where he worked for about eleven years. During part of this time Walt went through law school at Boalt Hall and during all of it he was assistant coach of football at Cal. Vollmer and Walt remained close friends until the chief's death. Walt always had warm praise for Vollmer as an administrator, as a community leader, and as an unequalled instructor in police science.

Walt's love of sports had to be observed to be believed. Where came the capacity to maintain such a deep consuming interest in all competitive athletics remains a mystery to me...of course, he was a letterman at Cal and worked on the coaching staff there for twenty-three years. He adored Andy Smith and Stub Allison and admired all the others. I feel sure they had a deep influence on Walt's life. He frequently talked about persons whom he held in high esteem and the names of Vollmer, Smith, and Allison came often into his conversation.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some memories of my association with this most remarkable man!



Lewis Drucker
1951

Interview with Lewis Drucker

Interview History	200
Early Days of the Adult Authority	201
Personnel of the Adult Authority and their Responsibilities	202
A Controversial Special Service Parole (Bobby Pender)	206
Walter Gordon's Efforts for Rights of Prisoners and Others	209
The Adult Authority in Action	210
Elizabeth Gordon	211
Walter Gordon Appointed Interstate Probation and Parole Compact Advisor	211
Integration of Prisoners	212
Relations of Adult Authority and Prisoners	214
Bobby Pender	217
Walter Gordon's Philosophy as Chairman of the Adult Authority	218
Walter Gordon as Friend	220
Past and Present Attitudes in Penology	221
Racial Incident Involving the Gordons	222
Walter Gordon in the Virgin Islands	223
Appreciation of Walter Gordon	224

INTERVIEW HISTORY

On May 1, 1944, the first day of operation of Governor Warren's new Adult Authority, Lewis Drucker, previously deputy attorney general of the state of California, met as chairman with the two other members of the Board, Dr. F. Lovell Bixby and Walter Gordon. The professional association between Lewis Drucker and Walter Gordon continued for more than four years; the friendships begun that day were to be lifelong.

Earl Warren named Lewis Drucker to the bench first of the municipal court (1947) and then of the superior court (1953) of Los Angeles. From 1967 to 1971, Judge Drucker served on the faculty of the College of California Trial Judges at the Earl Warren Legal Center, University of California, Berkeley.

Judge Drucker was interviewed about his recollections of Walter Gordon on November 19, 1976, in the Beverly Hills law offices of Herman Selvin. He had made the trip from his Westlake Village home in order to facilitate the interview. Sitting behind Herman Selvin's large desk as we taped the interview, Lewis Drucker looked very much the judge, and his measured and careful delivery added to that impression. Oral interviews tend to be somewhat hesitant and fragmentary, but Judge Drucker spoke steadily, in full sentences, and a little as though he were addressing a courtroom. He had thought through the content of the interview so carefully that he had no need to make substantive changes when he came to edit the transcript; his alterations were for increased clarity only.

The genuine warmth that Judge Drucker felt for Walter Gordon penetrated the atmosphere of formality of the interview setting. Lewis Drucker's clear and judicial account of the philosophy and procedures of the board of the Adult Authority is pervaded with his affection and admiration for his colleague on that body, and his final appreciation of Walter Gordon is the sincere tribute of a devoted friend.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: November 19, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH LEWIS DRUCKER

Early Days of the Adult Authority

Brower: Mr. Drucker, when did you first meet Walter Gordon?

Drucker: I first met Walter Gordon May 1, 1944, in the office of Governor Earl Warren together with Dr. F. Lovell Bixby, who was a member of the federal prison system and loaned to the state of California for the purpose of getting a new program started. Also present was a new Director of Corrections Richard McGee. Dr. Bixby was a classification expert, and Mr. McGee had a vast amount of experience in the penal field. Walter Gordon, who I was very much interested in meeting because I'd heard so much about him, proved to be a very congenial, affable man, very easy to talk with, and very gracious. He had had some experience in the penal system prior to the time we met to start the new program.

I may say that the program was referred to as the Prison Reorganization Act of 1944, which was introduced by Governor Warren before the legislature, and passed. This program was intensively studied before its submission to the legislature, by penologists, sociologists, and others interested in the penal field, and it was felt that this was, in effect, a "new horizons in criminology," if I may borrow the title of one of the well-known books by a very famous penologist. In our discussions we began to recognize that the nature of the program was entirely new, that new concepts were being introduced, and that we would have to start from scratch in building up the program. We were most fortunate that Walter Gordon had some previous experience as a member of the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, but only for a short time. But nevertheless, he had a good concept of the job that was facing us.

Drucker: We didn't waste any time the very first day. As soon as we went through the formalities and discussed the various subjects of interest to us and what we hoped to achieve, we immediately went back to our offices with the best wishes of the governor, Governor Warren, who wished us a very successful tenure.

I was appointed the first chairman of the Adult Authority, Governor Warren indicating at that time that this chairmanship would revolve among the members of the Adult Authority.

When we got back to our office that was waiting for us, it didn't surprise us that the desk was full of papers that had to be reviewed and acted upon. We already had our executive secretary, a Mr. Burkhardt, who had furnished us with all the material that we would necessarily have to review. Walter Gordon and I got very busy in reviewing many of the documents then before us. Dr. Bixby was busy in beginning his preparation for building up the Bureau of Paroles, and after a review of the documents, some of which had to be immediately acted upon, we then attempted to survey what our immediate needs would be.

Dr. Bixby, likewise, was a very affable man, a very learned man, and we certainly welcomed his association at that time. So at the outset we all got along extremely well, and by the end of the day we began to feel that we had known each other for some period of time.

Walter Gordon explained the operations of the old Board of Prison Terms and Paroles to us; he gave us some insight into some of the conditions within the institution with which he was then familiar, and we found that it was necessary first to adopt resolutions so that we could be considered a going business, so to speak. And we adopted by reference all of the resolutions then existing that was passed by the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, with the purpose of reviewing each and every one of them as time permitted. The transitional period ran rather smoothly. I trust that the presidential transition that is forthcoming within the next several weeks will be as smooth as it was between the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles and the Adult Authority.

Personnel of the Adult Authority and their Responsibilities

Drucker: Walter Gordon immediately demonstrated quite an insight in penal affairs. Not only an insight, but a great deal of interest in hoping that we would be able to achieve at least a program that could be beneficial to inmates, and that protection to society could be a reality rather than an open-door policy that is usually ascribed to a parole board.

Drucker: Under the new act, we were more than a parole board. We had authority to do many things. In one way, the Prison Reorganization Act of 1944 supplied a deficiency that existed at the time the Indeterminate Sentence Law was passed in 1917. This act gave us the tools to achieve that which was intended by the Indeterminate Sentence Law. The theory was to keep a man in prison no longer than it was necessary, that a man who comes into prison should not go out one whit worse than he came in, and that he should have at least some opportunity for improvement and be encouraged to achieve either good work habits or improve his educational needs, and also to, if it was possible, change the attitudes that had gotten him into prison in the first place. We knew that that was a big job, a lot to ask for, but we did have the tools, such as the formation of the diagnostic clinic.

Walter Gordon and I and Dr. Bixby discussed the needs of having a director of the diagnostic clinic. This is where Dr. Bixby came in. He was well versed with those who were engaged in guidance work. In fact, he said there was a man in California whose work he used in preparing for his Ph.D., that he was outstanding, that he was then a professor of education at Stanford University. We went to Stanford to interview him, and he was the most congenial and the most pleasant individual I've ever had the opportunity of meeting. And from 1944 until this year we still communicate. [Dr. Fenton passed away January 18, 1977. I attended his memorial service held in Carmel February 3, 1977. L.D.]

Brower: Who was that man?

Drucker: Dr. Norman Fenton. He was a clinical psychologist and an expert in guidance work. He expressed a great deal of interest in this new bill, the Prison Reorganization Act. He said he had read it and he felt that it was a step in the right direction. And he was very enthusiastic about the results that one could hope for. But, he said, he enjoyed his work very much as a professor of education at Stanford. He was very reluctant to give that up even though this project that we were to undertake was very challenging to him.

We felt he kind of left the door open a bit, so we opened it a little wider by contacting Governor Warren and advising him that we had met a man whom we felt was the ideal man to direct the diagnostic clinic and set it up, but that he was reluctant to do so because he loved his work at Stanford. We asked the governor whether or not he could contact Dr. Tresidder, president of Stanford University at that time, and suggest to Dr. Fenton that he would be granted a leave of absence for at least one year until we got under way. This the governor readily acceded to, because he was quite interested in this man, and his background, of which we informed him from the material we had with us. Dr. Tresidder said that he would hate to lose him, but if

Drucker: this would be of help to the state of California, he would suggest that to Dr. Fenton. Well, Dr. Fenton was told that the governor requested his services, and Dr. Tresidder thought that it would be a very fine contribution that he could make to the new penology that was then a part of this new law. I don't think that Dr. Fenton was able to overcome the persuasion that came from these sources, and so he came to us even at a reduction of his salary. We said we hoped that when we prepared our budget that we could obtain an increase at the next budgetary occasion.

Dr. Fenton was a man of action and knew just exactly what he wanted. He spoke to all of us; he got Walter Gordon's views particularly, because of his experience. And Dr. Bixby, of course he knew about him, and they used a language common to clinical psychologists sometimes that makes it difficult for us to follow some of the colloquy that takes place. But in any event, they finally came down to earth and we realized that they both were very plain talking men and very explicit as well as very concise in their views about the penal system.

Under the act I was the lawyer member of the Adult Authority--I might add that the law required that of the three members to be appointed, one must be a lawyer, one a sociologist, and one experienced in handling prisoners.

Brower: Walter Gordon was also a lawyer at that time.

Drucker: He was a lawyer, yes, but he also fit in another category which I didn't fit, so I was classified as the lawyer member. And we explained to Dr. Fenton the legal implications involved and the objectives that we had, and we then drafted the philosophy of the Adult Authority, dated 1944. That was a short period of time after Dr. Fenton came, and we began to understand just where we were going.

This philosophy related to the purpose of rehabilitation under the Indeterminate Sentence Law; that was the theory for the passage of that act, so that a man could come out of prison much better than when he went in. That is a large order, and at some off times very difficult to fill, because a penal institution does not have a therapeutic atmosphere.

But we did have many incentives under the act because we were given authority to do many things. (When I say "we," it's the Adult Authority.) We had supervision and responsibility for the diagnostic clinic. We had supervision of the training and treatment program within the institution. We also had supervision and control of the Bureau of Paroles. We had the authority to determine the

Drucker: extent of disciplinary punishment that would be meted out in the prison. In other words, there were checks and balances to avoid any brutality within the penal institution, because we prescribed what could and what could not be done.

This was prepared by Dr. Bixby because of his experiences in the penal system. And we also had the advice of Director McGee on this subject matter. In fact, anything that pertained to the prison itself we agreed to discuss with the director--any matters that may affect the internal workings of the prison. And vice versa, so that we had an exchange of our ideas and policies that were then contemplated or that we seemed to feel might be of some advantage. But this was not done without getting the views of each other upon these various enterprises that we wanted to undertake. So that in determining the punishment to be meted out for infractions within the prison, it was provided that no man could be kept in solitary for more than twenty-nine days, that he was to be examined by a doctor each day, that he was to have a satisfactory diet that was commensurate with his needs. Although it proved to be a monotonous diet, nevertheless it had all the nutrition that a nutritionist required for a balanced diet.

A punishment book had to be kept by the director through the captain of the guards, and subject to our inspection periodically as to what punishment was meted out. I believe it was on a monthly basis, if my memory serves me right.

It didn't take too long before there developed an extremely close association between Walter Gordon, Dr. Bixby, and me. We spent so much time each day together, almost our entire waking hours, because we worked from morning to night. It was during war time, and it was not easy to get the amount of help that was necessarily required. There was so much to do that we did not have ample time to really cover the job that we had. Furthermore, it was a sort of a pioneering effort; we had few precedents. And consequently, we had to experience some trial and error before we finally adopted a number of programs.

What we had Dr. Bixby do was to bring up and instruct the parole officers so that we could at least advise them what our philosophies, our objectives, were, and they were indeed a very important part of the work of the Adult Authority. Dr. Bixby set up a program of reporting, of not only writing the reports but the actions that would be necessary to take in order to protect society, and yet at the same time to encourage parolees to be able to adjust themselves in the community. We had some of the parole officers detailed to try to get jobs for parolees, so that they were given as much emotional support as it was possible to do under the circumstances.

The Adult Authority and the Armed Services

Drucker: There were many young men in the prison, and unfortunately a number of them came from the armed services during the war. They were naïve youngsters who got into difficulty because they wanted to demonstrate their manhood, that they were real soldiers, and sometimes they went a little too far to impress someone.

Brower: Why would they not have been under the control of the army, under the discipline of the army?

Drucker: They did face a court martial after they were released. Now there were many occasions where the offense was such that we felt that we could give an early release and make a recommendation to the army authorities for a review after their court martial for the purpose of determining whether they could remain in the armed forces, when the soldier or the sailor evidenced a desire to make that his career. That was only when the nature of the offense was such that would permit such consideration.

A Controversial Special Service Parole (Bobby Pender)

Drucker: We, of course, also had a special service parole provision in the law that enabled us to parole youngsters into the armed forces, which we used with the advice of psychiatric assistance. There was one particular man that attracted the attention of the guards and the warden at Folsom. We were told about him, and Walter Gordon had known about him when he was a member of the Board of Terms and Paroles. He said that this man had really done a remarkable job in the penal system. When he was recommended for special service parole, we first felt that the circumstances may militate against giving such consideration, because the record indicated that he had committed a robbery at Hale Department Store of Sacramento, that he seemed to have some degree of notoriety, that he was in prison in San Quentin and was very intractable, and consequently landed in Folsom, a maximum security institution. He was getting into difficulties with not only the inmates but also with the guards; he rebelled against some of the brutality that was existent at the time; he talked about the dungeon that had previously been used. And he rebelled in an open manner and was very defiant. Consequently, it was felt that his background would be such that he would be spending a good part of his life in the penal institution.

But something happened while he was there. Then Captain Ryan of Folsom, who became the associate warden of Folsom, took this young man under his wing and, for the first time, this man felt

Drucker: that somebody, somebody in this world had an interest in him. We reviewed his case history and we found that he had very little home life. I don't recall all the details--whether or not he was brought up in an orphan asylum--but he had first gone to reformatory because of truancy. And there he received his education in criminal activity, and when he got out, he got into difficulty again, and then one difficulty after another, because he could not adjust to society. But when Captain Ryan took him under his wing, there was a complete metamorphosis. He began to take interest in helping people, because he was helped. And he told, I remember, one young man that took on the name of Dillinger to try to appear to be a very tough man, he told him he better change his name before someone would knock his block off. And he gave counsel and advice and yet he was a very scrappy man that no one dared to trifle with as a rule, because he would fight back at the drop of a hat. In any event, he took interest in much of the organizational work. He studied radio and he became quite proficient at radio. He helped many people and he helped the Alcoholics Anonymous Program that had been introduced into Folsom not too long before; he was secretary of that organization even though he was not an alcoholic. He encouraged many people, so that the warden and all of the prison personnel had nothing but the highest praise for him.

A special service parole means that a person could be paroled into the armed forces even though he may not otherwise be legally eligible for release. But this was permissible and, of course, the statute provided that the names be kept secret because it should not be publicized that men from the prisons were going into the armed forces. In any event, the prison psychiatrist--and we had also a psychiatrist from the navy who processed these men--both said that he was excellent material.

Brower: So the navy psychiatrist saw him too?

Drucker: The navy psychiatrist thought that he was excellent material, and I recall his words as follows: "If I were in combat...."

[end tape 1; begin tape 2, side 1]

Drucker: He said that if he were in combat, he would want on each side of him a man like this one and a man like this one, pointing to this particular inmate who was the subject of our discussion.

The man was granted a special parole together with some seven, eight, or nine others and by the time we got through with this review, it was quite late. An army officer had been assigned to escort them to the appropriate military headquarters but, because of the lateness of the hour, decided that he would put them up at

Drucker: a hotel that night. They all left the prison and all the prisoners wished them the best of luck and they were all shouting their goodbyes and hoping that they too might be able to join them.

They were granted a one-hour leave by the officer who was in charge of this detail. He told them, "You're now in the army, and you will be permitted to have one hour's leave, and be back at the hotel by eight o'clock." Well, while they were looking around and enjoying their freedom and looking at many new innovations, to them, one of them, the subject matter of our discussion, was recognized by an officer who had arrested him in the department store robbery in Sacramento (Hale Department Store). He immediately took him into custody and the subject told the officer that he had received a special service parole. The officer verified that when he checked with the prison officials.

Immediately the newspapers made quite a furor about it, because they claimed that no one had any knowledge of such parole, and referred to it as "the secret parole." Of course, Governor Warren, who was very much against secret paroles, and had voiced his feeling about that many years ago, had occasion to do so then.

The governor's secretary called us up. We were unaware of all this furor because we had traveled down to Chino; we were on a schedule. And we didn't know about this adverse publicity until the next day after we received a telephone call from the governor's office. The governor's secretary stated, "Looks like you made a mistake in granting this special service parole," and I said, "That's bound to happen," but I didn't know who he was talking about. So he reports back to Governor Warren that Lew said that they made a mistake. He assumed that I knew all about the newspaper criticism relating to the granting of special service paroles to a group of persons whose names, except one, were not too familiar to me then even though I had processed them at the time. (But I still remember that one name; it was thirty-two years ago. His redemption is a story to be told someday.)

So Governor Warren immediately issued a condemnation of "secret paroles." Walter Gordon and I got him on the phone when we read in the newspapers about this condemnation of our actions. The governor stated everyone knows his policy about secret paroles; he's not for it and he's not going to put up with secret paroles. So we told our executive secretary to have all the papers ready, and we flew up to Sacramento and met with the governor and laid out the whole thing before him. We informed him that the statute provided that the names of special service parolees cannot be made public, and that it was the recommendation of the entire prison personnel together with the navy psychiatrist and the prison psychiatrist that the parole be granted to this one man who had done so well in prison and had completely changed. The army needed radio men, and he was trained, trained himself in prison as a radio man, and he was immediately accepted.

Drucker: Governor Warren realized then that there was a misunderstanding between his secretary and the call he made to me, and he told Walter Gordon and told me that he had the highest regard for us, but he felt that if such were the case as indicated by the newspapers, he couldn't tolerate such a condition no matter how well he thought of us. So when he was informed of what the situation was, he immediately called in the newspapers and publicly apologized to us, and we thought that was extremely gracious, because Walter Gordon and I, when we talked it over, we decided that we would tender our resignation if the governor felt that he couldn't have any faith in us. We didn't reach that stage, fortunately for both of us. We really got to know each other through all the travail that we experienced during the organizational period. The first year was the most difficult period for us.

Walter Gordon's Efforts for Rights of Prisoners and Others

Drucker: Walter Gordon was really a tower of strength on the Adult Authority. The prison officials had a great deal of respect for him; the inmates respected him; he was a pleasure to work with. He was very pleasant but he was a firm man in a very pleasant way, and he was a very strong looking man, tall and muscular. And, of course, he did command a great deal of respect just when he came in sight. We used to meet the prisoners as we walked through the prison (which they don't do today) and as we walked through the prison, we had no fear of any assault by the prisoners because, as Dr. Fenton stated in one of his books, the prisoners felt that we were fair in our dealings with them, and we felt secure in going through the prisons to see how things were.

We had been invited up to death row on one occasion because of complaints, and Walter Gordon and I went up there. Walter had a knack at putting people at ease. These people were very much agitated; they weren't able to get much exercise. Walter and I tried to make some arrangements for that, but we weren't successful because the physical arrangements didn't seem to permit that.

Brower: You spoke of having looked forward to meeting Walter Gordon, and that made me wonder what you had heard about him before you met him.

Drucker: Actually we had been on a committee at one time, he on a northern committee and I on a southern committee, and I knew of him. They spoke very highly of Walter Gordon, and yet I had never met him. The committees didn't meet. Members were appointed by the state bar and Attorney General Earl Warren. We were appointed immediately after war was declared to serve on a committee to assist people in maintaining their civil rights if there were any problems that involved any legal situations. This committee would attempt to act

Drucker: upon that and see to it that no alien was unduly taken advantage of. So Walter Gordon's name appeared on that northern committee, and I heard quite a bit about him and yet I had not met him.

There was another time when our paths crossed and yet we didn't meet, and that took place many years ago when I was a clerk of the court and Walter Gordon was then in practice of law. He was on a committee to investigate the hanging of an inmate whose case was pending on appeal. It so happened that the clerk didn't send the formal notice of appeal to the clerical staff of the prison, but the record did show that there was such a notice of appeal given at the time the sentence was imposed. I was sent into that court to replace that clerk. It seemed to me that there should be such a record. I reviewed the entire record and found that a notice of appeal was given during the proceedings at the time of the imposition of sentence of the death penalty, a copy of which was sent to the prison officials. They admitted that, and so that brought about a change of law that the committee of which Walter Gordon was a member had recommended; that henceforth all capital cases involving the death penalty are subject to automatic review by the Supreme Court. So I heard of Walter Gordon at that time, and the work he did that brought about this revision of the law that now requires the Supreme Court to review all death penalty cases, whether or not there was any formal appeal.

The Adult Authority in Action

Drucker: We worked. We had rooms at the various prisons because we worked late, and we sometimes would stay over several days because we had a schedule to meet. We had a calendar set up at Chino, San Quentin, and Folsom; at that time we had Lancaster, which was temporarily being used for an institution for the younger prisoners, which later on was replaced by the Deuel Vocation Institution.

Brower: What was your approximate case load?

Drucker: It varied. We didn't have as many prisoners as we have today. We only had three members on the Adult Authority. I think we had about six, seven, or eight thousand prisoners in the entire system. Now they have provisions for about, I think, ten members of the Adult Authority in addition to a similar number of hearing officers to assist the members of the Adult Authority.

Brower: Did you make any division of the case load, or did you each review everything?

Drucker: We reviewed everything. The only division we made was that we alternated in conducting the examination of each prisoner. We would review the digest of the material that was contained in the file before us. All the information about the prisoner was contained in the file. Whenever it was necessary to go into detailed matters, we would do so. But there were many cases that the nature of the crime was such that the man had a long period to serve. We wouldn't spend as much time as we did in cases where we felt the man could be ready to go out on parole or his term fixed.

Elizabeth Gordon

Drucker: There is one important part of Walter's life that I didn't mention, and that was Betty, his very charming wife. Walter Gordon was a family man and he took great pride in his wife and family. Really, they were a close-knit family. I had the pleasure of meeting them all, but Walter Jr. more often than the other two.

Brower: Did Mrs. Gordon accompany him at all when he served on the Adult Authority? Warden Duffy spoke of her staying occasionally at San Quentin.

Drucker: Occasionally she did when she was that close. We all had our rooms there; we had our rooms in Chino and also in Folsom. But she didn't go too often; she occasionally went with Walter. But she did go with him, I remember, to St. Louis, and had a very disagreeable experience there.

Walter Gordon Appointed Interstate Probation and Parole Compact Advisor

Drucker: Walter was appointed by Governor Warren as the Interstate Probation and Parole Compact Administrator. I won't go into the details of what the administrator does, but it has reference to sending prisoners to another state to do their parole, and also receiving prisoners from another state to do their parole here, mainly because their family ties were here, and the opportunity for adjustment was much better in one locale as compared to another. So wherever adjustment proved to be more promising, consideration was given to allowing these transfers between states, and the parole supervisor in that particular state would undertake the responsibility of supervising the man on parole in his own home territory.

Drucker: Later on Walter became the national president of this organization. They all had such high regard for him, and he demonstrated a great deal of competence and know-how in determining some of these procedures that would lend itself to more efficient administration of the compact.

[Tape recorder skips here. Some sentences inaudible.]

Brower: That brings something up that I wanted to ask. You spoke of your being the first chairman of the Adult Authority. When did Walter Gordon become chairman?

Drucker: The plan was to rotate the chairmanship of the Adult Authority annually. The governor had apparently forgotten about it after the year was up, but I reminded him and Walter was then appointed chairman. When Walter was appointed chairman, he did an excellent job.

Integration of Prisoners

Drucker: We were getting under way very well. We were operating rather smoothly. Our difficulties did not descend down upon us as often as it did initially, except that we did have one big upheaval. Of course, we can say that both Walter and I had something to do about it. This related to a riot that we had in the prison that was brought about by conditions then existing in the prison which we took some affirmative action on. I presented the motion to the Board of Corrections to eliminate segregation in the prison system. This was in 1945. It kind of rankled us to see a group of Negroes having to go on one line into the mess hall and another line for the whites. They were also segregated in the mess hall. And we felt that this practice was inconsistent with our program. Walter was very concerned about that, and he took some very definite actions to overcome the situation. He complained to the director and to the wardens that we wouldn't countenance that and I made this motion before the Board of Corrections to eliminate segregation. But unfortunately one of the wardens jumped the gun in letting it be known that that's what we were going to do, and we had a full riot on our hands. The wardens were to have ninety days to arrange for their subordinates to make provisions for such a changeover in procedures.

Brower: This would be sort of an educational program to persuade them that this was a good move to make?

Drucker: No, not to persuade them, but to at least get them accustomed to the proposed integration. Unfortunately, some of the prison guards torpedoed this idea by telling the white prisoners that this isn't

Drucker: going to work, and that didn't help any. In any event, we found ourselves with about a thousand men in lockup. The situation was very tense, and we discussed whether or not we should request the calling of the National Guard. I won't mention the names of the prison officials, but they asked Walter and me to rescind our motion to eliminate segregation, and we said we would not, because the question now was, who was running the prison, the prisoners or the prison officials? I said not only is it wrong, not only is it against their constitutional rights, but morally wrong, and we don't feel that we should countenance that. And furthermore, in the diagnostic clinic (which was later changed to "guidance center" at the request of Dr. Fenton) we eliminated segregation because the prisoners were under our supervision and control there, and we demonstrated that it worked. There were no problems there. But when the men had finished their period of incarceration in the guidance center, they were transferred to the main line where segregation was practiced, and everything that we had accomplished by eliminating segregation in the guidance center was nullified in the main line of the general prison.

We had a number of meetings. There was a danger of a great deal of violence, a race war, and so Walter Gordon requested the Negroes to meet at a certain place within the prison, and he and I both went there. And Walter and I, but Walter mainly, made it plain to these men that they would ruin all of the possibilities of achieving our goal if they were to engage in any violence. They had been arming themselves with all kind of extraneous types of weapons, and it seemed that there was a great deal of difficulty that might ensue. We prevailed upon them to bide their time and said that we would continue to work and would not recede from the position we took that segregation should be eliminated.

The governor gave us his support, and then the prison committee wanted to meet with us. We agreed to do that, and we met with them at night; but first Walter gave a very fine and excellent dissertation over the prison radio, and also at the meeting, of the problems and why segregation should be eliminated.

I mentioned the fact that here the United Nations is meeting in San Francisco so that people could learn to live together and with each other in such a manner that peace could be achieved. And of course these men said that they felt that they had to be educated about this first before it was introduced, and we said, "Now you are a minority group, and if we were to wait until we educate the public about the advantages of a parole system, none of you fellows would ever get out." And they then backtracked on some of their remarks, but it continued on for a short period of time without any progress being made, and finally the director

Drucker: felt that he had a compromise which we refused to accept. The compromise was that there be three areas in the mess hall: one to the right could be occupied by the Negroes, one to the left could be occupied by the whites, and in the center the whites and Negroes who wanted to join together. It so happened that the center was not occupied.

Brower: Had that already been put into practice?

Drucker: No, it was tried, but it didn't work out. And eventually segregation was eliminated, but it took a few years; we had a setback for giving in to the prisoners at that time. But Walter's and my position was quite clear, and Walter did a yeoman job in preventing a great deal of bloodshed, and yet at the same time continuing to defend his position and assert it as a matter of principle that all human beings in the prison should be treated equally. And I can remember Walter as he addressed these men, how attentive they were and how much respect and confidence they had in him.

Brower: Were these the black prisoners?

Drucker: These were the black prisoners, yes. And when we spoke to the committee, there was only one black on this committee and about fifteen others were white. They had their mind made up on what they wanted, and so there was no use talking to them.

Relations of Adult Authority and Prisoners

Drucker: Then we got to know the prisoners. We constantly walked through the prison, and sometimes the guards would feel uncomfortable. The guards were on these ramps up above. If we walked one way, they would walk that way. If we turned around, they would turn around. They kept a close watch on both Walter and me, and we of course checked the conditions.

Brower: What was the reason? Did they not want you to be in conversation with the prisoners?

Drucker: No. They were a little fearful that some of them might attack us, but we didn't feel that way. And we felt that we had their confidence, and at the same time, they got what was coming to them. If they had, as we used to say, "a break" coming to 'em, they got it and were released at an early date. If they didn't have it, why they were postponed until the next hearing. Some of them, we felt, should never be released because they were so dangerous.

- Drucker: And this was the advantage of the indeterminate sentence law--that when a man conducts himself in the same violent pattern on the inside as he did on the outside, he certainly hasn't changed his ways. The dangerous propensities that he had exhibited in society were still with him, and we didn't feel that a man like that should be released, or even have his parole date set until such time as he's demonstrated that he's ready to adjust to a different pattern of life than that which he exhibited before.
- Brower: Is there really a direct corollary between behavior in prison and behavior outside?
- Drucker: Well, there are many prisoners who know how to do time. That is to say, that on the surface they appear to be very cooperative; they do everything that is expected of them; they say what they think you want to hear. And they are clever enough to know that they can make an impression much better that way, and yet we would get reports that these so-called model prisoners were heads of gangs in the prison and would engage in blackmail or threaten the prisoners. So we had our representatives report to us on many of these cases. We had a representative in each prison who would report to us how the prisoners conducted themselves.
- Brower: You don't mean among the prisoners themselves?
- Drucker: No. They were outside paid help.
[end tape 2, side A; begin tape 2, side B]
- Brower: You were talking about the Adult Authority representatives in prisons.
- Drucker: They were instructed to call our attention to matters that would redound to the benefit of some inmates. For example, they would report that an inmate has made an excellent record and he has an opportunity for a job and he has family ties well intact. We would advance his case on the calendar with a request for a complete report upon the man's adjustment. We watched for those who appeared to be ready for release and we felt it wasn't necessary to wait until the next appearance time that had previously been fixed. So we had cases like that.
- We even had one case--Walter was interviewing a man in Folsom, I recall--the representatives had directed our attention to a letter that had been sent out by this inmate requesting the services of a lawyer because he felt that maybe his stay in prison was illegal. It so happened that this information was given to us and we had the record brought before us and found that there seemed to be some validity in the prisoner's position.

Drucker: He had saved some \$600 from working in the harvest camps during the war and was willing to part with all of it if he could get a fifty-year sentence reduced to any amount. The fifty-year sentence had been imposed upon him by the Board of Prison Terms and Parole several years before. We checked the record and found that it was imposed at a time when a previous sentence he had had expired, so that at the time this was imposed upon him he was no longer a prisoner, legally. His time had expired and they could not modify the sentence to fifty years.

I won't go into the details that led up to it because it would take quite a bit of time--I mean, led up to the reason for that modification. But when they did modify it, his term had expired and we checked with the Attorney General; they agreed with us that we could not keep him in prison because of an invalid commitment. So we placed this man's case on the calendar and by the time he got to us it was five minutes before midnight, and by that time he was just a bundle of nerves because he didn't know why he had been placed on the calendar. It didn't occur to us that he would be so apprehensive about it or that he would be at the end of the list--we had no way of knowing at the time.

When he came before us we said to him, "We feel that there is some validity to your complaint."--He was quite nervous about it; he thought that because he wrote that letter we took some umbrage about it.--"And we are going to discharge you tomorrow morning." And here he had a fifty-year sentence, had served about four or five years of it, and by the time he regained his composure, having broken into a crying jag, as they call it, he looked at the clock and it was about three minutes after midnight--and we had said to him, "You're going to be discharged tomorrow morning"--he said, "It's now tomorrow morning. Can I leave now?"

Brower: He had no recourse. I mean, he couldn't sue you for having kept him in prison?

Drucker: Well, we had no knowledge of it until it was brought to our attention.

Brower: No, of course, you didn't. But I meant the system.

Drucker: I don't know. There were some other circumstances which I didn't want to go into.

Brower: Most interesting. The poor man. He did get off?

Drucker: Yes, he did. He got off, all right. We never heard any more from him, so I guess he was rehabilitated.

Bobby Pender

Brower: I wanted to ask you about the Hale Brothers man. How did he serve in the war effort?

Drucker: Bobby Pender--I can mention his name because he publicly mentioned that he was in prison--and it's quite a story. Bobby Pender became a corporal or a sergeant--I don't remember--had a good conduct medal. He had an excellent record, and he wanted to make the army his career. The army was very satisfied with him; the reports were good. In fact, they did perform one operation upon his ear that might be interesting to know about. When Bobby Pender committed the department store robbery he was a pretty violent and tough youngster. He got into a fight with an inmate in the Sacramento County Jail and this inmate bit his ear off. When they wanted to sew it back on he said, "Oh, the hell with it. I'm not gonna need it where I'm going." But when he got into the army, they did do some plastic surgery and restored his ear.

Bobby Pender wanted to make the army a career. But unfortunately, when the war was over, the army discharged all men who had come out of prison--with an honorable discharge. Bobby Pender, who wanted to stay in there, was very disappointed. In fact, he was so angry about it that we found that he was again associating with some of his old cronies, so we had to yank him back in prison because he was getting into the same situation that brought him into prison in the first place. He was kept in prison but a short time. He calmed down and regained his composure and his equilibrium and the stability that he seemed to possess while he had been in the army.

He decided that he would go and locate in a small town up north--northern California. One of the parole officers found a job for him. He was entitled to a pardon because he had an honorable discharge. This was a part of the Special Service Paroles--if they had an honorable discharge they would get a governor's pardon, which he did. Then he went into this small town and he became quite active. I don't know whether he went into the radio business or what it was. He became active in the Chamber of Commerce and he told the people when they wanted to elect him an officer, "I want you to know all about me before you do that." And he told of his prison life, what he had done, his army life, and instead of people shunning him, they took him into their arms and into their hearts and made him feel that he was worthy of their trust and confidence because he didn't hesitate to lay it all out on the table. He became one of the leading citizens of the town.

Drucker: Unfortunately, one day he was involved in an automobile accident and was killed. At his funeral the entire town turned out and the local newspaper gave him quite a eulogy. This is one of the cases of reformation that you very rarely hear about because you don't hear about those cases; usually people hear about the failures.

Walter Gordon's Philosophy as Chairman of the Adult Authority

Drucker: Walter Gordon had a knack of talking to people. He was a good speaker, and we used to meet with the prisoners we called the "fish"--that's the new prisoners coming in, the fish. We would answer their questions. Walter was very forthright and didn't pretend to sell them on anything, but he told them in effect, "You're going to fix your own time by the way you behave and your ability to do your time without getting into difficulty, and also taking good advantage of your time by making use of all the facilities--either learn a trade or advance your education. There are many things that would be helpful to you, and how you take advantage of those facilities determines to a large extent how long you're going to remain here. Of course, we also have to consider the nature of the offense that brought you here." He used to have a favorite expression when some man would say, "When am I going to get out?" He says, "You'll get out in due time. Don't forget, you're not here because you didn't go to Sunday school."

Brower: Did you think his treatment of black and white prisoners was exactly the same?

Drucker: I think so, and not only do I think so, I know so because he treated all people alike. He had no compunction about criticizing or giving credit to a white or a black the same way if they had earned either one, criticism or an accolade.

There was one interesting time when Walter Gordon received a telephone call from General Jimmy Doolittle. It was shortly after his remarkable aerial attack on Tokyo. He called Walter up one day and said he hadn't seen him. He found out that he was in San Francisco and obtained his telephone number and wanted to come over and see him; he hadn't seen him for so long.

For about an hour or an hour and a half I sat by just to listen to both of them reminisce about their days in college at Berkeley. It was really a wonderful dissertation. I wish that it could have been recorded at that time, but in those days I don't think we had recorders like you're using now. It was a splendid get-together and

Drucker: I was very pleased to meet General Doolittle, particularly when he spoke of the time he boxed with Walter Gordon and the thrashing that he got then. They were telling each other about other experiences that they had during the time they were in college.

Brower: Wasn't there another errand that General Doolittle had at that time? Didn't he come with respect to a prisoner in whom he had a special interest?

Drucker: No. At least if he did, I wasn't aware of it. There may have been but it didn't come to my attention.

Walter Gordon had a deep understanding of human nature and of motivation. He actually was a good psychologist and he understood people, and they understood him very easily. He wasn't a difficult man to understand. He was very open, gregarious, and friendly, and yet he could be very firm with people and very adamant at times.

He was inspired to a large extent in dealing with people by his association with August Vollmer, who was Chief of Police of Berkeley at the time that Walter was a policeman on his force. I met August Vollmer and I have some of the speeches that he made in the early twenties ('20s) in which he felt that it was the function of the police to engage in crime prevention, that they could serve society much better by taking an interest in the youth and seeing to it that they have the opportunities for recreational activities and other well-known character-building organizations like Boy Scouts. He encouraged the police officers to take some interest and also become active in these organizations, and Walter just idolized August Vollmer. He was very happy in his work as a policeman. This was during the time he went to law school. He had a night shift and went to school in the daytime.

I remember him recalling his first experience as a policeman; he received a report that a disturbance was taking place, and he came to this place and he opened up the door of the vestibule--whatever you call it--and he proceeded to rush upstairs where these people lived and he looked upstairs, and at the top of the stairs there was a big, burly man with a gun in his hand. He hesitated a moment and in his own "falsetto" voice he said, "What's going on up there?" [said in a very deep gruff voice, laughter]. The big, burly man at the top of the stairs with the gun in his hand--which Walter said looked like a cannon to him--said, in a pipsqueak voice, "Oh, nothing, officer." [Laughter] And Walter delighted in telling his first experience as a policeman.

He served as chairman of the Adult Authority for many years. Everybody was satisfied. Ervis Lester said that Walter was doing such a fine job, he didn't want to disturb the atmosphere that lent

Drucker: itself to a well-run organization. In fact, for nine years there was nothing but acclaim, particularly at the American Prison Association organizations, which today is called, I believe, the Correctional--I've forgotten the name they go by now. But Walter really was a good administrator.

Brower: This was an office he wanted to keep? He wanted to remain chairman?

Drucker: He was willing to. I left in 1947 when I was appointed to the bench, and Walter continued on as the chairman for I don't know how many years--I believe until he himself was appointed Governor of the Virgin Islands.

Walter Gordon as Friend

Drucker: When I was appointed to the bench, Walter was the one who came down to see me inducted. The Chief Justice was there to swear in the group of judges who were appointed; then we had a robing ceremony and Walter Gordon was the one who put the robe on me. It was the Cloak of Justice, I believe is how they refer to it. When we got through, everyone came over to Walter. Everyone knew Walter Gordon. Men from school--who went to school during his period--judges who had been at the ceremony came over to him and talked about the Wonder Team of Berkeley and about Andy Smith and also his [Walter Gordon's] position as coach and scout, and many other things, and he was just continually surrounded.

Brower: It sounds as if he'd stolen the thunder of your day!

Drucker: No, no he didn't. When he put the robe on me, that was the end of the ceremony. There were about eleven judges appointed at the same time. Mildred Lillie and...it was 1947 when I was appointed.

All I can say is that Ervis Lester enjoyed the same association that I did with Walter. Bixby did, more so I suppose, than anyone because Bixby said that in the short period of time that he was here he never had worked with a man...I'll just merely refer to Walter Gordon...like Walter Gordon, who was so congenial, and never was there a harsh word between us all during that period of time. When we did disagree we did so agreeably. It was a relationship that we have never forgotten. In fact, Bixby (who died last July) when I talked to him by phone--he was back in Arlington, Virginia, he had cancer and he knew he was going to go--he said, "You know, I've got a picture of Walt Gordon and you right in front of me, and me--the three of us--right up on the wall where I see it every day." His wife told Betty [Gordon] that he took that picture with him wherever he went.

Brower: It must have been a very unusual relationship.

Drucker: Yes, it was the most pleasurable relationship that I have ever had. (I feel the same way about my relationship with Governor Warren when he was the Attorney General and I was a deputy in his office.) But the three of us--it was just as if we were brought together by fate and yet we enjoyed each other's company and we shared each other's sorrows and shared each other's work, and we worked together as a team.

Past and Present Attitudes in Penology

Brower: And you worked very hard.

Drucker: We did. This we did. I don't mind saying that because the hours that we put in would indicate that we weren't trifling on the job. There was so much to do and it was such a challenge to us, and we derived a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that everyone recognized that we were making some history in penology.

But unfortunately there came a time when people in the Department of Corrections felt we had too much administrative responsibility that belonged to them, and bit by bit they began to whittle away the responsibility that made it possible for us to administer the Indeterminate Sentence Act in a very appropriate way. Until, now, the Adult Authority can be considered as nothing but a parole board, right back to where we started from when the indeterminate sentence law was introduced by Hiram Johnson in 1917.

Brower: Aren't we now back before the introduction of the bill, since it has now been rescinded?

Drucker: I think this goes into effect in mid-1977. But I think this is the greatest step backwards that we've had, and I just have the feeling that if there are enough people to take some interest in what has been done that possibly some reconsideration might be given to the action that has been taken.

Walter Gordon contributed a great deal to the advancement of penology. He did it in many ways and he conveyed his philosophy to many organizations, probation officials, peace officers. It was he and Ervis Lester both who decided to invite peace officers to sit with us at the hearings of the Adult Authority. All of them came away with surprise that we had such an organization and the work that was then being done in the penal institution. The police themselves got into the spirit of trying to help these men who

Drucker: came out of prison. Quite a difference from years ago when these prisoners would be hounded, and that no longer occurred after the police got to know what the program was.

Brower: You mean parolees were hounded?

Drucker: Parolees were hounded, yes.

But we had our critics, too. Some police would say, "Keep them there for the rest of their lives." There were some decisions we made that were unpopular because at the time of the commission of the crime the people were aroused, and they had that in their minds. But the adjustment and the progress that some of them had made, which earned them a release, was taken into consideration. Also, many of them got out because their term was expiring and they had to get out. So we had to have some hold on them by parole. Parole was not given as a reward. A parole was really to protect society outside so that these men would be under proper supervision. Walter Gordon, Dr. Bixby, and I enhanced the caliber of the parole officers, we obtained increases in salary to attract competent men. Walter Gordon had a lot to do with building up that Bureau of Paroles because he would look after it with a great deal of attention after Bixby left.

Brower: Of the three of you, he was the one who remained longest?

Drucker: He remained the longest. No, let's see, Lester remained the longest, I think.

Brower: I meant of the initial three.

Drucker: Oh, yes. Of the initial three.

Brower: Can you think of anything more you'd like to say about Walter Gordon?

Racial Incident involving the Gordons

Drucker: There is a great deal more that I could say about Walter. I didn't mention his experience back in St. Louis when he was a compact administrator. They had a meeting there, and so he told his wife, Betty, to go to the hotel and he would meet her there right after the meeting because their plane was late in arriving. So, she took a taxi to the hotel and he took a taxi to the meeting. When she got there they told her there must have been some mistake, they didn't have a reservation for them. She was compelled to sit in that lobby most of the day, and Walter was incensed about it.

Drucker: He made quite an issue about it in that community there. I don't know all the details of it, but I had written to some people back there and they assured me that such things would not happen again. But I don't know whether or not they have changed their ideas about race.

Brower: I was told that that was more disturbing even to his friends than it was to him.

Drucker: That was disturbing to a lot of people.

Walter Gordon in the Virgin Islands

Drucker: I didn't meet Walter in the Virign Islands, but Bixby did. And he wrote a letter and said, "You're the only one who's missing here." They had a wonderful time. When my son and his wife went to the Virgin Islands, Walter and Betty just spent a great deal of time with them. And they had just a wonderful time. Betty still asks...even when I talked to her a few months ago when I found out Walter had passed away--I called her up, I didn't know it...

Brower: She told me.

Drucker: She asked, "How is that wonderful son of yours?"

When Walter came back from the Virgin Islands he had retired. He was a little inactive. I, at that time, was on the faculty of the College of Trial Judges, and I got Walter to come over to the Earl Warren Center at Berkeley to speak to the new judges...

[end tape 2, side B; begin tape 3, side A]

Drucker: ...the new judges were very appreciative because they were listening to a man with vast experience, both in penology and in the administration of criminal justice that went way back. And of course many of them knew of him by reputation--some of the instructors particularly, the lecturers, the older judges remembered him, some of them, from school days. So, again, there were reunions. In traveling with Walter it was one reunion after another, so it seemed.

When Walter was appointed Governor of the Virgin Islands, we communicated with each other. Walter indicated that he knew he didn't enjoy this political bickering that went on, and he was always hopeful that he would be on the bench--he looked forward to being on the bench--and he was rather disappointed that he wasn't

Drucker: appointed to the bench here, but that was made up when he was appointed to the federal bench in the Virgin Islands. Then he felt that he had reached the goal that he really had set for himself. From what I understand, he did a very creditable job as judge. When I finally visited the Virgin Islands--Walter was here in California--that was only a couple of years ago that I was back there--I went to see his court and talked to the court attachés and they all had such fond memories of their association with him.

Appreciation of Walter Gordon

Drucker: So, wherever Walter Gordon has gone, he has left his imprint of goodness and kindness and work for his fellow man. As anyone could say when they see Walter Gordon, There is a man. I think that he has contributed a great deal more, not only in race relations--which I don't think has been very much publicized--but he has made a contribution in many fields of endeavor relating to the penal field and the legal field and he has earned the respect of every man who knew him. I don't know any man--if I may paraphrase Will Rogers--I don't know of any man that he didn't like or that didn't like him.

Brower: Thank you very much.

Transcribers: David Shiang and Marilyn Ham
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Clinton T. Duffy, 1960

Interview with Clinton T. Duffy

Interview History	225
Walter Gordon on the Adult Authority	226
Breaking the Color Line at San Quentin	229
Adult Authority Procedure	231
Criteria for Parole	232
Changes in Penal Philosophy	234

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Clinton T. Duffy, as warden of San Quentin, was associated with Walter Gordon both when he was a member of the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles and when he was chairman of the California Adult Authority. In December of 1951 Warden Duffy joined Walter Gordon on the board of the Adult Authority, and the two men worked closely together there until Walter Gordon's appointment to the governorship of the Virgin Islands in 1955. Their views regarding correctional matters were very similar.

The interview with Warden Duffy took place on a warm August day at his pleasant home in Rossmoor, Walnut Creek, California. Rossmoor is a suburban development for older citizens. Security is one of the features of such communities and I had made arrangements with Warden Duffy to be admitted at the guard station through which all visitors must pass. Rossmoor's garden setting certainly bears little resemblance to the stark surroundings of San Quentin, but I was struck by the similarity of the admission formalities of the two places.

Warden Duffy spoke warmly of his acquaintance with Walter Gordon and from the interview there emerge portraits of two men of good will. Both men retained their humanity and their hopefulness in the dark prison setting and worked for an improved prison system with vigor and insight.

The long involvement that Warden Duffy has had with the penal system of the state of California makes his remarks of particular historical interest. His editorial changes were few. They were directed at assisting the reader by filling out the account with omitted names and dates. No deletions were made.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: August 26, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH CLINTON T. DUFFY

Walter Gordon on the Adult Authority

Brower: Warden Duffy, could you tell me how you first met Walter Gordon?

Duffy: I first met him when he was appointed by Governor Earl Warren as a member of the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, before it was the Adult Authority. The board met in the various prisons throughout California, the adult male prisons. And of course San Quentin was the largest; they met there usually a week or more every month. And so I got to know Walter Gordon through his parole board meetings, and I attended the meetings almost every time they met.

Brower: I was going to ask you about that. Was that mandatory or did you just choose to attend?

Duffy: I just chose to do it and the board wanted me to, but it was not mandatory.

Brower: You joined the board [then the Adult Authority] yourself in 1951, did you not?

Duffy: Yes. December 27, 1951.

Brower: Had you known about Walter Gordon by reputation before you met him?

Duffy: No I hadn't. I hadn't known him at all, but I got to know him real well when he became a member of the board and I liked his way of handling cases. He was fair; he was just; he was honest. He treated the blacks and the caucasians, the orientals--every race, every person--equal. No one got any favors; no one got any special attention. They all got good equal treatment from Walter Gordon.

Brower: You didn't feel that he leaned over backwards not to seem to be favoring blacks?

Duffy: If he had any leaning about the blacks, it was that he would jump on them a little bit harder than the others.

Brower: That's what I wondered.

Duffy: Yes. He would take out after their weaknesses and their faults and their crimes possibly just a little bit harder than he would on some of the others.

Brower: But in the main you felt that he was fair?

Duffy: I don't think there was any member of the Adult Authority or the parole board, during the years that I knew about them, attended their meetings, and was a member--I was a member for ten years--there was no one any more fair than Walter Gordon. They were all good people but he seemed to have a way of handling the men, handling their problems, feeling them out, getting them to relate, getting them to talk, and to try to understand about their faults and their weakness where some people didn't have that ability.

Brower: Do you think you and he were in general agreement about prison affairs? Did you have similar views on punishment?

Duffy: I think so, generally. Yes. Walter Gordon seemed to approve of what I was doing. Maybe not everything but just about everything. He used to tell me about some of the things that I had inaugurated there, like academic and vocational training, counseling, therapy, psychiatrists, religion. They had one psychiatrist when I was appointed and when Walter Gordon was appointed, there was one. I built that up to about six or seven. We put in sociologists and psychologists; he approved that. As chairman of the board, he approved the transfers to other prisons that I recommended. The transfers had to go through the board. Generally he and I got along beautifully.

Brower: You raised a question that I had in my own mind. I wondered if there weren't potential areas of conflict between the warden and the Adult Authority in the reorganization arrangements. In the reception guidance center, for example, which was their responsibility but in your prison, and in their responsibility for the assignment of prisoners to particular prisons?

Duffy: I had no trouble at all with him on that because each case was treated individually and I guess Walt Gordon and I sort of clicked. We treated the individual case, not the mass population. And he was real good at that, at working with the individual. So when I

- Duffy: recommended transfers to other institutions, I don't think there was hardly a case where he'd say no, you can't do that, you can't send that person to Folsom or to Chino. No.
- Brower: The Adult Authority even had some control, did they not, over the nature of punishment in San Quentin?
- Duffy: Well they had some say. The big say was by the State Board of Prison Directors, however. They were the ones that had the management side of the prisoners and the prisons where the Adult Authority, the parole board, had the sentencing and release procedure end. For the kinds of programs that the prisoners should enter into--like education and training, treatment they received--they had no say, but they could and did make recommendations.
- Brower: I wondered what is meant in the legislation by "classification of prisoners." Is this equivalent to assignment to prisons?
- Duffy: Well no. In the classification of prisoners you would classify them into brackets like medium, minimum, maximum. We had another one in there, "close." The maximum were the ones that had to be watched, the bad ones, the rough ones, the dangerous prisoners. The close ones were the ones who had holds on them by other agencies. Medium were the ordinary run-of-the-mill prisoners. And the minimum were those who you could let outside the walls, have work around the homes and the gardens, send out to camps, things of that nature. We had committees that worked with that. And Walter Gordon was in favor of all of that procedure.
- Brower: I noticed that this classification by the warden was subject to modification and revision by the Adult Authority, and I wondered if that made for friction. But apparently you just really got along.
- Duffy: Oh yes, we had no problems with it. We had discussion once in a while about an individual case, but it wouldn't be a problem.
- Brower: Given another cast of characters I imagine that could have been quite an explosive situation, where you have people's responsibilities overlapping.
- Duffy: It could be, but there was no reason for it to be. We worked it out, mutually agreeable in the end.
- Brower: Did you support Warren's corrections reorganization bill? When it began?
- Duffy: In the beginning, no. I wasn't actually against it; I didn't go out and drum the sidewalks in favor or against.

Brower: Was this in part because of your loyalty to the old board of prison directors?

Duffy: I think partly, just partly. But then it seemed to work out all right. Warren and I became very good friends, up until the time of his death. He kept me on, in fact he wanted me to stay on when I said I wanted to go, on the Adult Authority. I retired under Governor Pat Brown, Sr.

Brower: And Walter Gordon had left some time before that?

Duffy: Yes, he had gone to the Virgin Islands. In fact, he'd gone to the Virgin Islands while I was on the Adult Authority as a member with him.

Brower: Was your association with Walter Gordon entirely professional or did you know him at all socially?

Duffy: Socially only with the Adult Authority, when we'd go to different institutions. Sometimes our wives would travel with us, and we'd all go out to dinner together, all go out to the same restaurant. And when the board came to San Quentin we'd encourage Walter to bring Betty [Mrs. Walter Gordon, Sr.] over and stay during the week that they were there, in our home, eat at our table, stay in our bedroom, and all. And they did that quite regularly and we just had a good relationship with both Walter and Betty.

Brower: Could you tell me a little bit about your impression of Mrs. Gordon?

Duffy: Well she was a very lovely person, intelligent. I believe she was a school teacher once upon a time, wasn't she? Yes she was. In fact, my late wife and she were in San Francisco State at the same time.

Breaking the Color Line at San Quentin

Duffy: There was one incident with Walter Gordon that would be interesting. All during my early life at San Quentin there were no blacks working in the prison, there were no orientals, there were none but caucasians. And when I went to work at San Quentin in 1929 it was the same thing. When I was appointed warden in 1940, July 13, 1940, we had no blacks, no orientals--you were white, or else you did not get a job. So one day after I was warden say a year and a half, Walter came down to attend a meeting there. He said, "Clint, I know a man who would make you a good guard if you have an opening." I said, "I have three

Duffy: openings, Walt." He said, "Would you mind talking with him?" I said, "Send him on over." He said, "He's black." I said, "Send him on over. I'd like to talk to him." And he came. We talked for a couple of hours, and I put him to work. I sent the usual memorandum to the captain who's in charge of all uniformed men, with a copy to the night sergeant because every new employee went to work on the midnight shift--indoctrination type of thing--and the very next day the night sergeant came to me and he said, "I hear you've hired a nigger." Not a negro, not a black, a nigger! "I said I hired a man, sergeant." And he said, "He's going to work on my shift, isn't he? I said, "They all do." He says, "There's not room for the two of us on this reservation." I reached for the telephone, he says, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm calling the captain; you've just resigned."

The man [the black guard] is still working in the prison system. That's thirty years ago and he's working now at the Crittenden Center in Oakland and he's the man you should see.*

Brower: You mean the man who was hired as guard?

Duffy: Whom I hired. The first black man in the history of the California prison system. I hired several others after that, many others. I hired a Chinese gal working in my office, quite a number of Mexican Americans, and I had a Japanese. The Japanese who is head of corrections now worked at San Quentin later, not when I was there, but he was with the system anyhow.

Brower: Did the black guard you hired have a rough time, do you know, with the prisoners and with the other guards?

Duffy: At first. Fortunately, or I wouldn't have hired him, he was a gentleman, a good man, an intelligent man. And that's the system I used. I wouldn't hire you unless you qualified. I wouldn't hire a black unless he qualified, or an oriental, no matter what--or a white.

At first--he lived over in the East Bay--but going back and forth on the Richmond ferry was a long, long trip. There were some quarters upstairs for single men, or men who wanted to stay there. He took one of those rooms. And then there was a dining room, the officers and guards dining room, outside the walls. He'd go in there and nobody would sit with him. This lasted for about three meals. Pretty soon somebody was sitting with him, and then soon they were almost fighting to sit with him. They just wanted to get over there to sit with this man, who was a gentleman, a real nice fellow. And he clicked with the prisoners, the whites and the blacks and the other nationalities. He clicked with all of them.

*George McDaniel, pp. 269-282 below.

Duffy: It was very fortunate that he was the type of man who could break the ice with me in hiring people not races.

Brower: Probably Walter Gordon suggested him for that reason too.

Duffy: I think so. He said he was a good man. He was an honest man, he's sincere.

Adult Authority Procedure

Brower: Could you describe a typical board meeting, very briefly?

Duffy: The board hearings are held on what we call calendars, monthly calendars. There are many names on the monthly calendar, and each month had its own new list. The lists were made up in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Adult Authority. If you're a lifer, first-degree murder, you could not be considered until you had seven years in. So in six years and nine months, you'd come up before the board and your name would be on the calendar if you had that much time in. If you're a robbery case, two years to life, you'd come up in eighteen months. If you're a forgery case, one to fourteen, you'd come up in eight months. That's the idea.

The clerk of the board, which I was at one time, before Walter Gordon, under the old board; that's when I was appointed warden, from clerk of the board--of both the board of prison terms and paroles and the state board of prison directors, a dual job....When the board says they're coming to San Quentin let's say, or wherever they're going, the clerk of the board notifies the prison warden that the Adult Authority will be at San Quentin from say Monday, until Friday. And so we get the cases ready. The board arrives. There's a meeting room in the administration building at San Quentin, and at most of the prisons. And the board sits around the table; the chairman would be at the head and the members would be on his left, or there'd be two at the head if they're only two. The prisoner would be brought in and seated opposite, or across the table from the Board members. There is a narrative written up by the staff of the whole life and background of the prisoner being considered. It is a case history. The board members have read it, and each board member takes a case. If there are three members present I would take one case, another man would take the next case, and the third man would take the third case, then I'd take the next one after that. The prisoner's brought in, seated, and whoever is hearing the case asks whatever questions he wants, that's his part in it. The prisoner answers, and then when the prisoner is finished talking I would say, "Mr. Doe do you have any questions?" And he would ask questions if he had any. He might

Duffy: say, "No, I don't have any; it's all covered." Or he may ask any number of questions. Then the prisoner would be asked if he had anything else to say. He was given every opportunity to say whatever he wanted to as long as he wanted to. And if he had nothing more he was excused.

And then the board deliberated, sometimes at length, sometimes not very long--if the case was very obvious, either he's ready or not ready. Then the board would decide whether or not he could be considered for a fixing of his indeterminate sentence and given a parole release date. If that was done it was recorded by the clerk and the board members wrote it on their case history and that became part of the record. And then the inmate received what they called a "ducket." A ducket is a notice, in inmate parlance. They received a notice of the action of the board that evening in their cell. That's a very tense time for the prisoner, waiting from the morning let's say, if he had his hearing in the morning, until possibly eight o'clock that night before he got his ducket.

Brower: Is that parole release date a firm date?

Duffy: It's a firm date if everything else is in order. He usually has to have some place to go; he has to have a job or a family, mostly a job. In rare cases they let him go to his family and then hunt for a job, or he can be paroled to go to the Crittenden Home in Oakland or one in Los Angeles, as a part release from the prison, to the home, to the community. That date was firm if the prisoner didn't get into any serious trouble again of any kind before his release date.

Criteria for Parole

Brower: What were your criteria of readiness? What did the men have to do for you to regard them as ready?

Duffy: Well, many things. The case history covered everything from the time the man was born until the time he was seated in front of you in that chair, everything you could possibly get a hold of, his life as a child--was he a good child, was he a delinquent, if he was a delinquent what kind of delinquencies, did they carry on in the same pattern, did he continue in delinquencies, was he just a one-time offender and what type was it? What kind of young man was he, growing up? How was he on the jobs he might have held? Did he have a good work record wherever he worked? What did his employer think of him? What did the community think about him? Did he pay his bills?

Duffy: Did he have a good family? If he had a wife and children did he take care of them? What about his church record if any, did he have good community relations? Was he well thought of or otherwise? All was recorded. What kind of a mother did he have; what kind of a father did he have? What kind of sisters and brothers did he have? Were they typical of him, similar? Were they good people? Was he just one who went off on tangent or was it sort of a family thing, which is so true in many cases, where he didn't get the proper attention at home. I have a little saying that fits with most of the people that I knew in prison: you did not come to prison, or you were not a juvenile delinquent, if in your home you had love, understanding, direction, religion, and discipline. Those kind of kids don't usually go to prison. They rarely become delinquents. So therefore a lot of this reflects back into the home and the raising of a child.

If he does have a job to go to, the employer is not obligated, only the same as he'd be obligated to anybody he might hire right off the streets. If he [the parolee] does not do a good job he is subject to being fired. If he does a good job he's subject to get a raise or whatever happens. The employer does not have any obligation, except to take an interest.

If the prisoner gets into trouble in prison before his release date arrives--and he has a release date--he's brought before the prison disciplinary committee. This used to be one man; I changed that to a committee of the captain, the warden, the psychiatrist, and a member of the parole board staff--and they would hear the disciplinary cases. If the case was serious enough it was recommended to the board that his parole be rescinded, that is the release date was taken from him. Then he'd be put on another calendar for another hearing. And then the board could do as they wished at the next hearing.

Brower: When you spoke of readiness you mentioned things that were essentially pre-prison experiences but surely his behavior in prison was taken into account as well?

Duffy: His behavior in prison has a minor part, yes. The public seems to think that if they have good behavior you let them out. Now that is silly. You can behave and be a bad person or you can misbehave and not get caught. You can do a lot of bad things, be clever enough and not get caught, and still go out because you didn't have anything against your record. It is part of the whole person. The other part is, what kind of changes have you made? Have you made any changes in the inner man? Have you made any changes in your emotional make-up? In your violence, if you were a violent person? Do you have any understanding of why you are here and what you have done and how you should have reacted in the community? Have you gone to counseling and therapy? Have you taken any trades if you're trainable, or academic work if you need more of your three Rs? Religion sometimes helps people. Things

Duffy: of that nature. Have they done something to make themselves over in prison, remotivate themselves, remake themselves, rehabilitate. I don't like the word rehabilitate because if you look it up in Webster it literally says: returning to your former way of life, and that's not good. [Laughter]

Brower: And you would say that this was the direction you were all interested in? You agreed?

Duffy: Yes, and that's the direction Walter Gordon was interested in.

Brower: That was to get the men back out again, if possible.

Duffy: As a better person.

Brower: As a better person.

Duffy: To live with you as a good neighbor. And that's what happens; they do become your neighbor. And we should see to it in prison that they go out a better person.

Brower: That's very interesting. It seems to make so much sense not to take into account only behavior in prison. I mean, the man who can knuckle under quietly is not necessarily the man who's going to make the best citizen.

Duffy: That's for sure. He's playing a game.

Brower: I've often wondered how prison officials regarded that. It's interesting to me that you put a greater emphasis on the ability to live in the outside world.

Changes in Penal Philosophy

Duffy: But today they seem to be heading back to the pound of flesh, eye for an eye.

Brower: How do you think Walter Gordon would have felt about dropping the indeterminate sentence?

Duffy: I don't think he would have stood for it a minute. He would have been out there pounding the table in the governor's office, or wherever he could--the legislature, the legislators--to try to stop them.

Brower: How do you account for this change in attitude on the part of penologists?

Duffy: Well I don't know. I don't know exactly what they are doing in California corrections to revert to this old way of treating prisoners. I don't think they've done an awful lot yet because most of this is before the legislature and hasn't passed yet, although they have cut out some of the vocational training and academic training. I don't like it at all. I think this is going to send people out to prey on you again and that's not what prisons are supposed to be.

Brower: Is it a budgetary matter? Does that have something to do with it?

Duffy: No, I think it's that people are fed up with crime and they say: beat the daylights out of them, literally not physically, punish them and maybe they won't be doing this thing again. Well it hasn't worked before. You have to change the make-up of a person.

Brower: And when you are returning them to society with the same frustrations or possibly worse; the lack of employment, etc., I don't see how you can expect them to make good.

Duffy: I don't either, no. You just kick them out of prison without any guidance, any direction, any supervision. There are rare cases that do not need parole. There are some rare cases, yes, but there are very few of them. They need guidance to get adjusted to the community again, to guide them to a proper niche in their life.

Brower: Do you recall any specific anecdote about Walter Gordon, anything you observed that was particularly typical of him?

Duffy: Not right off, no. He had a good sense of humor and people generally liked him. I don't know of anyone who did not like Walter Gordon. They appreciated his ability and his fight to make it to where he was, to become the chairman of the Adult Authority and finally become governor of the Virgin Islands and later a Federal Judge of the Virgin Islands. That's a hard battle. He being black he had a little bit harder fight to go. He always appreciated what came his way. He was never one to say, "Well, I've got it coming."

Transcriber: Michelle Guilbeault
Tinal Typist: Teresa Allen



Allen Moore
ca. 1945

Interview with Allen Moore

Interview History	236
Walter Gordon's Early Days on the Adult Authority	237
Walter Gordon Esteemed by the White Community	239
Walter Gordon's Attitudes toward Race	240
The Department of Corrections and the Adult Authority	245
Development of California's Parole System	248
New Attitudes of Prison Reform	251
Gradual Modification of the Reorganization Act	252
Parole Officers and Law-Enforcement Officers	253
Governor Warren and the Adult Authority	254
Rehabilitation vs Punishment	259
The Death Penalty	262
Drugs and Crime	263
Changes in the Prison Population	265

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Allen Moore was Chief Parole Officer under the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles when Walter Gordon was named to that board. Their close association continued after the Adult Authority was formed and Walter Gordon became a member of that body. Mr. Moore was suggested as a contributor to the Walter Gordon project by Ervis Lester. Mr. Lester described Mr. Moore as having "amazing recall and a style and vocabulary usually witnessed [only] in professionals." This description proved apt, and these qualities were combined in Mr. Moore with a robust personality and vigorous delivery. His own vitality served to communicate that of his subject and a lively portrait of Walter Gordon emerged in the interviews. Two interviews were held, the first on May 8, 1976 and the second on July 9, 1976. The setting for both interviews was the kitchen of the Allen Moores' home, situated on a street just off one of the busiest thoroughfares in East Oakland but in a surprisingly sylvan setting.

The latter part of the first interview and the greater part of the second do not deal directly with Walter Gordon but are concerned with the philosophy and practice of the California parole system and the nature of crime and criminals during the period in which Walter Gordon was chairman of the Adult Authority. There is also some discussion of the changes that have taken place in these areas since that time.

Mr. Moore's editorial changes were few, but some deletions were made in the transcript of material he felt was too remote from the experiences he shared with Walter Gordon.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: May 8, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN MOORE

Walter Gordon's Early Days on the Adult Authority

Brower: Mr. Moore, you and Walter Gordon were both on the old Board of Prison Terms, weren't you?

Moore: Yes. I was Chief Parole Officer under the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, and Walt came on that Board in 1938 or somewhere around there. His was one of the first appointments that Governor Warren made, after he became governor.

I had really not had much contact with Walter Gordon prior to that although I knew him by reputation because of his athletic background at the university, and also because of his reputation as a policeman. And of course after associating with him as close as I did over the years, I felt like I'd known him forever. I can't remember a time that I didn't hear about Walter Gordon and know who he was.

Brower: When you actually met him, how did he impress you?

Moore: Well, I was a little awestruck, you know. I was a kid of 33, 32 years old, something like that--that's a kid now. He was very courteous. When he first came on the parole board, there was a lot of speculation. He was the first black man to be appointed to any position in the Department of Corrections, or in the prison system of California. There had never been a black guard or anybody. At this time the prison system had just gone through a reform movement under Governor Olson, and it changed the approach to prisons considerably.

There were still a lot of the old-school people in the personnel of the prison department and there was a lot of speculation that the blacks would take over the prisons and that they'd all get a parole

Moore: and that sort of thing. The percentage of black population in the prison at that time wasn't nearly what it is now.

Brower: Or in the state either, I guess?

Moore: No, in proportion it probably was the same, but the population was quite heavy at the time. The institutions were all overpopulated and always had been. When Walter first came on the parole board everyone was quite--well, a lot of people were really worried, you know, and there was a lot of speculation.

Walt was not a guy who lacked confidence. I used to facetiously say that the only person Walt Gordon was ever afraid of was his wife. [Laughter] When she told him to do something he did it, but nobody else could. Walt came on very confident. He knew what he was up against. The people who were on the parole board at that time were appointees of Governor Olson's and they welcomed him and made him feel at home, and they had a lot in common ideologically and philosophically.

I was quite close to a lot of the inmates at that time. In fact when he first came on the board, I was secretary of the parole board. (I was appointed Chief Parole Officer in 1940.) And I'd sit with the board during his first days on the board, at San Quentin. It was amusing. The black inmates were, of course, quite overjoyed at the fact that he was on the board. And there was a lot of speculation, you know, that they could con him out of his eye teeth, appeal to his sympathy and one thing and another.

For the first two or three meetings of the board at San Quentin, it was like a scenario: every black inmate that came in on a parole application, Walter would say to him, "Well, what about this hold-up?" And the guy would say, "Well, I tell you Mr. Gordon, the real problem is discrimination." And Walt would look at the record and he'd say, "Discrimination? It says here you stuck up a service station!" "Well, I know, but if it wasn't for discrimination I wouldn't have stuck up the service station." "Well, let's get the facts of this stick-up together. And after we've decided what you did and when you did it, then you and I'll talk about discrimination."

And it didn't take but a couple-three months before the guys realized that he treated everybody alike; and there was no bias or prejudice in his approach to any case that I ever saw him have anything to do with.

Brower: You don't feel that in his effort not to appear to favor blacks he leaned over backwards a bit?

Moore: Well, Walt was a peculiar guy--"peculiar," listen to that, that's not the word!--in his approach to his blackness. It was quite different than most people would imagine. When you stop to think, here he is--what was it?--the grandson of a slave?--a slave of General Gordon? His father was one of the first black policemen in California, Riverside.

Walt came to the University of California and was one of the first black athletes at Berkeley. In fact, he used to tell the story that when he first went out for football at Cal-- Those were the days when the fraternities were politically powerful on the campus, and they pretty much decided who was going to be the quarterback, and the coach was allowed to go along with it, you know. Anyhow, Walt said that they all got together and they said, "This guy can't make the varsity, no way! And here's how we'll stop him: every time there's a scrimmage we'll all twenty-one of the rest of us jump on him and just beat the hell out of him." And Walt used to say, "I was a junior before I found out that wasn't the way you were supposed to play the game!" [Laughter]

Walter Gordon Esteemed by the White Community

Moore: Walt had lived a very different life because of his fame and was as much at ease in a white setting as he would have been in a black setting.

There's a story that illustrates this. This was when--listen, the progress that's been made in this respect! This was back in the 1940s sometime. And a very distinguished member of the American Prison Congress, from Washington or New York or some place, had come to California and was in conference with the Adult Authority, and Walt said to me, "We want to take him out to a nice luncheon and you make a reservation for us." Now this is San Francisco in the forties, and in those days blacks didn't walk into the Saint Francis Hotel for lunch. But an assistant maitre d' up there I knew quite well--in fact he'd been on my parole case load at one time [laughter] and I wanted to give this guest a real nice lunch. So I called this fellow at the hotel; he had a little dining-room that he ran, a small room, and I told him who I was bringing. He knew who was on the board, because Walt was on the board when we gave him a parole. I deliberately picked this spot because I figured this guy--if anything happened, this guy would give us a little assistance. Well, we get up there for lunch and my guy had been taken off this job temporarily and he was somewhere else, and there was a big, red-necked-type character at the door. I introduced myself and said, "I'm the chief parole officer and I have the Adult Authority here; we have luncheon reservations." He says, "Oh, fine, come on in," and then he saw Walt and his face turned absolutely white--1940, can you imagine it!

Brower: It's hard to believe.

Moore: And his face went almost white and he said, "Oh, there must be some mistake" you know. Well, when I had first come up to the door I noticed a table over to one side--there were only half a dozen tables that were occupied at the time, and over in one corner there was a table with about seven or eight people there. And if you were going to call a roll of the power of San Francisco--I mean they were the Fleishhackers and the Crockers, I don't know who all they were--or what they were doing, but they were having a conference there, you know. The rulers of San Francisco, the top brass, the money and the power of San Francisco! All represented at this table of seven or eight people. And as I was getting ready to slug this guy, one of the guys at this table looks up and he says, "My God, there's Walter Gordon!" And all of them, every one of them got up and they ran to the door; they put their arms around him; they slapped him on the back! You know, they were all old Cal guys. And, you know, I gave a very obscene gesture to the waiter as we went by.

Brower: He deserved it!

Walter Gordon's Attitudes toward Race

Moore: He was so accepted, in so many circles of the white society that he had a different approach. The blacks, I know, a lot of them, were critical of him, called him an Uncle Tom. They sneered at him even sometimes. Of course, there was jealousy, particularly at that time when very few blacks rose up to that sort of a--of a pinnacle. There was an awful lot of jealousy.

He wasn't the typical freedom fighter, by any means, because he didn't have to. As soon as people knew who he was he was accepted. And as I say, I traveled all over the state with him for four years, and it was rarely that anything of a racial nature came up.

Brower: I was going to ask you about that. Did it come up?

Moore: Oh--yes--but really it didn't.

Brower: Did you observe him handling things like that?

Moore: He told me a story himself, which I think kind of demonstrates how he handled it.

I noticed that when we were going to Los Angeles, going to Southern California--I usually did the driving and the board went in the car with us--and every time we'd go through Fresno, Walter would

Moore: insist that we stop at a certain restaurant, if only for a cup of coffee. And the owner of the restaurant would greet us very happily, so glad to see Walter. He was a--I don't know whether he was an Armenian, probably was, Middle Eastern. Walt told me how he got acquainted with him and why he always went out of his way to see him.

During the time that he was at Cal and had graduated, he became the coach of the freshman squad, and also was the chief scout. (Walt never saw his freshman team play because he was always scouting next week's opponents, you know.) He and Betty, his wife, would normally head out to wherever they were scouting and he'd get an end-zone seat so he could see the line play. And he'd sit there with a pair of glasses and he'd dictate his notes to Betty as the play was going on. They said that he was probably one of the greatest scouts of all time. Cal teams were always well aware of what the other team had.

On this particular instance, he had worked all day--I don't know whether he was still in law school or what--anyhow he was headed for Los Angeles, and he had worked all day and he drove that night, and by the time he got to Fresno he was very tired and hungry. So he stopped at this restaurant. And he went in and sat down at the counter and nobody paid any attention to him.

So finally he said to the waitress, "Young lady, I'm very hungry. Can I get something to eat?" She says, "Oh, you're hungry, are you?" And she goes back into the kitchen and she gets an old beat-up tin plate, puts two pieces of crust on it, with a piece of bologna in the middle. She came in and slapped it down in front of him. And Walt said, "I ate every bit of it." And when he got through, he got up and he took the plate with him to the cashier, and the guy was the owner of this restaurant. He'd been watching this by-play. So Walt paid the bill, and it was outrageous--I mean fifteen times what it should have been--and he never said a word, just paid the bill. Then he said, "I want to buy this plate." And the man said, "What do you want with that plate? It isn't for sale." And Walt said, "Oh, I've got to have it; I'll pay anything you want for it." The man says, "What the hell you want the plate for?" "Well," Walt says, "you don't think I want anybody to eat off this plate after I've eaten off it, do you?" The guy looked at him for a minute, and then he said, "Listen, mister, you're a better man than I am. Come on, I'll buy you the best meal we got in the house." And he took Walt and bought him a dinner, on the house, and they became great friends, over the years. This was fifteen or twenty years later that I had contact with him.

Brower: It's amazing to me that he could roll with the punches that way and still come out on top!

Moore: Oh, yes. I think a lot of the black people didn't really understand Walter. They had no concept of the background.

It was very seldom that things ever got to a black-and-white issue with him. You were right or you were wrong. You were a good guy or you were a bad guy. And it didn't matter what the hell your color was, or anything else. And if you were a good guy he would go to hell for you, and it didn't matter if you were white or black, or what you were!

[Chuckle] I don't know whether I can put this story on this tape or not, but-- It's a little off color.

Brower: Unless you mind, it's fine.

Moore: We had a lot of harvest and forestry and road camps in the prison system and one summer we--the Adult Authority and myself--were going around to all the camps to hear the cases that were coming up for parole hearing out at the camps. And on this occasion we had been driving for two or three days at a time. We'd drive to a camp and hold a meeting at night. We got up to a certain camp, up out of Yreka. The cooks, of course, knowing the parole board was there, would give us a big, beautiful meal, you know. After dinner, we went in to have the hearing. We were just a little sleepy, we were a little tired--well, we weren't tired; we were just sort of relaxed, you know, a lot of good food, and tired.

And this one character came in and he was a white man and he was in for having had sexual relations with three minor girls, young girls, twelve, fourteen, sixteen years old. Walt was interrogating him and he was a typical con man. That type of sex offender can't face up to what they've done, and they'll con you out of your eye teeth. I mean they rationalize everything.

And finally--it turned out that these three girls were the daughters of a woman he married--he married this woman and these three little girls were her daughters. And he says, "Mr. Gordon," he says, "you know after I married this woman I found out that these three little girls were all oversexed. And I didn't want them ruining all the young boys in the neighborhood, so I--" He went on for about five or ten minutes developing the theory that he was an outstanding benefactor of society by this kind of action, you know.

And old Walt was sitting there. And the guy figured, gee he was real interested--really he was bored--we all knew what the story was. But Walt was sitting there with his chin in his hands, and you could just see the wheels go round in this con's head: "I've sure got this guy Gordon on the ropes. He's buying this one." And he backed up; he was going to give the coup de grace. He said, "Mr. Gordon,

Moore: I want you to understand that I've always been a very moral man. I've never crossed the color line!" And old Walt never changed expression. He just said, "Man, you don't know what you've missed!" [Laughter]

I let out a shriek that could have scared all the coyotes out of the Siskiyous. This guy, he just wilted, he knew he hadn't--that Walt wasn't buying his stuff. But you know this was one of the few times that Walt ever did anything like this. He didn't joke about race. It was a very serious thing to him. But his approach was so different from what we went through in the fifties and sixties. And in many cases a lot more productive, I think.

You take men like Lester and Drucker, very outstanding men all of them--and in my own situation all the rest of us in the parole division--once you knew Walter Gordon, you just accepted him as a hell of a human being and the fact that he was black and you were white never was a problem. It never occurred to you, that this wasn't the way it ought to be, that this was different.

Brower: Was there any resentment at all that he retained the chairmanship [of the Adult Authority Board] so long, that it didn't rotate, when apparently it normally did?

Moore: Oh, there may have been, a little. I think he wanted it. I think he wanted to be chairman very badly. And of course Governor Warren would have done anything in the world for him.

Brower: Why do you think he wanted it?--The prestige?

Moore: I think--I never heard him say anything about it--but I always had the feeling that he was the ranking black in the state government, and--

Brower: that it would help his race?

Moore: ...that he was a symbol, you know? I think he felt that it did Warren good politically--and, of course, he was proud of it. He was a modest man, but at the same time he was a human being. I mean he was proud of being the chairman of the Adult Authority. It was a good big job and an important job and it meant a lot to the people in the state what happened. And I think that he thought that having a black in that spot was important.

Brower: Did he select his own staff? Was that possible for him to do?

Moore: No. It was all pretty much civil service.

Brower: I wondered what his criteria were for picking people if he did.

Moore: Well, he didn't have too much choice on it. Because the civil service procedure is--

It's just almost impossible, as you reminisce like this to realize that this was only thirty years ago! There had never been a black parole agent. And I ran across a kid down in Los Angeles, who had a wife and about five kids. The guy had pretty well educated himself by real hard work. I mean, he worked days and nights, and he went to college and in those days not a lot of black kids were going to college. I was quite impressed with him and I had made up my mind a long time before this that if a black guy came along that I thought could make a good parole agent, he was going to get appointed if it was the last thing I did. Well, of course, at that time Walt was on, and I told Walt what my problem was, that I wanted this guy in, and he gave me some assistance on it. And so I appointed the first black parole agent in the history of the state.

Brower: He worked out, I hope?

Moore: Well, yes and no. He was a good parole agent, but--he resigned. He got involved with a parolee in a financial way, you know. Actually, he had done nothing illegal, but the Adult Authority and my own position was that you don't have financial dealings with the parolee--then you're working for him, not for us, you know? But he functioned well, and broke the precedent. There was never any problem after that. There were some morale problems when he was first appointed, but after that there was never any problem because all the other officers liked this guy and realized that he was just as capable as they were.

But Walt was very aware of, and had a lot of sensitivity about, this racial situation. And his sons, of course, were different. I mean, they'd fight right back, tooth and toenail. Walt Jr., particularly. Walt Jr. is one of my closest friends and one of the great guys, you know. But Walt was a fighter, Jr. Of course, he always lived in the shadow of his father, which irked him. Walt, he'd sue; he'd fight--anybody stepped on his toes got in trouble.

Brower: Did father and son tangle on this issue at all, do you know?

Moore: I don't think so. Of course I don't know for sure. But I never felt so.

Brower: They just had different styles?

Moore: Yes, different eras. Walt was a guy who, you know, you had to do what you had to do. In his contact with the prisoners and the parolees, there was a lot of empathy there. He was not disdainful of the black's cry of "discrimination is the reason I'm here." He just didn't want them to forget that they'd committed a crime. After all, he was a law enforcement man, and a good one!

Brower: That's an insight I'm glad to have--that he did feel--that in spite of his own success he did recognize that it was uphill.

Moore: Oh, definitely! He was very understanding, very knowledgeable. And I've been party to a lot of conversations he had showing that. The guys would leave the parole-board room and the board would say, "He told us that he committed this crime. There's no argument about it. The courts found him guilty. The board can't go behind it." And Walter would turn to me and say, "Well, we're going to give this guy a parole. And I think there's a lot to his story of how he got involved in this. Pay particular attention to this case, will you?" They realized that there was plenty of evidence that the man had been discriminated against, that there was a lot of poverty problem and one thing and another that had led to his criminality. And many times Walt would say to me, "Watch this case, will you? I think this kid's got some potential."

Brower: Did this mean, watch this in the sense that--the decision to parole had already been made, but watch him after he gets out?

Moore: Well, "Give him all the assistance that you can." You know, we did more--well, now we call it social work. We would have hit you in the nose if you had called us social workers, but actually in those days we were doing more job-finding and counseling and getting involved with the families and that sort of thing than any other parole system in the United States. And I think Walt had a lot to do with that, too. This was the sort of approach he wanted. He was very firm--if you committed a felony, you're in prison and you belong here, that's what you got here for. Now the problem is: How do we get you out of here and what's going to happen to you afterwards? He was not a--by no stretch of the imagination was he a--sob sister. He was a law enforcement man. He believed in it. He was proud of having been a policeman.

[end tape 1, side A; begin tape 1, side B]

The Department of Corrections and the Adult Authority

Brower: Was there any friction between Walter Gordon and Richard McGee regarding allocation of authority?

Moore: Yes, there was. However, it was--they both wanted to be the boss, which is a laudable, bureaucratic ambition.

Brower: Apparently the looseness of the legislation permitted some ambiguity about who did what?

Moore: Governor Warren called the special session of the legislature in 1944 to organize the Department of Corrections and eliminate, really, the State Board of Prison Directors, which was a constitutional body. I was in Sacramento all during that thing. In fact, the State Board of Prison Directors sent me there to lobby against the governor's proposal--a nice position to be in! Anyhow, Walter had already been on the parole board a couple of years under the old system. The theory of the reorganization bill was that this Adult Authority would be an all-powerful agency, which would control the felon from the day he entered prison until the day he got off parole--cradle-to-the-grave sort of philosophy. And that while they would not administer the prisons, they would develop the classification system, they would develop the disciplinary rules and regulations, and would be responsible for (quote) "the care and treatment" (end quote) of all the inmates.

Now, when you've got one guy running the prisons and a board sitting here telling him how to do it, there's bound to be some conflict, particularly when one of them, the director, is a professional and the board is a lay board, really. So there probably was a lot of instances where the Adult Authority would say, "Well, we got to do it this way," and the director says, "I don't agree with you, but even if I did I haven't got the man power or the money to do it." This sort of thing. I don't think there was anything personal about it. I always had the feeling that McGee and Gordon were--liked each other and were quite--they fought each other bureaucratically, you know.

And, over the years, McGee won! He was one of the greatest public relations men that ever hit this state. Not--the last guy in the world you'd think was, because he was very unassuming and quiet, nothing like the usual picture you've got of a good PR man, con man. I'd meet members of the legislature between sessions and they'd say, "Boy, am I going to get that boss of yours next session!" You know, "That McGee, he's a--he's going to ruin this state. He's a--I'm going to get him!" So the next session of the legislature, you'd start watching to see what was happening and wondering when this guy was going to go out to get Dick McGee, and he was so busy introducing Dick's legislative program!! [Laughter]

Brower: McGee must have been a very effective man!

Moore: Dick gradually, over the years there, took a lot of--most of--I would say all of the administrative functions of the Adult Authority away from them, by legislation. Until today the Adult Authority is much like the old Board of Prison Terms and Paroles insofar as it is a quasi-judicial agency. The parole division when I was first appointed chief state parole officer was appointed by the State Board of Prison Directors yet my work was almost 100 percent with the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles. And in the 1944 reorganization act the parole

Moore: system was put under the Adult Authority, and finally, after several years, McGee took it back, got it back. So now the division of paroles has been sort of kicked back and forth between the parole board and the director.

Brower: But the Adult Authority is still an agency? It still exists?

Moore: Oh yes, and it's not a part of the Department of Corrections. By that I mean, the director of the Department of Corrections has no power or authority over the Adult Authority.

Brower: Well, what is its relation to the parole board as it now exists?

Moore: The Adult Authority is the parole board. Of course now it has nine members and thirty hearing officers.

Brower: And how many were there when you were parole officer?

Moore: There were three parole board members and no hearing representatives at all. I think I had forty-six professional parole agents the last year I was state chief parole officer and now there must be 250 of them.

Brower: Part of that must be increased population, I suppose, and part of it must be a lighter case load?

Moore: Speaking of case loads, my guys were carrying 175 to 200 cases.

Brower: How many cases would you hear in the course of a year, would you say?

Moore: In Gordon's days? Well, for most of that time there were only three prisons, San Quentin and Folsom and Chino. Oh, I'd say they probably heard 340, 400 cases a month.

Brower: That's a pretty big job!

Moore: And they had the parole calendar, too, you know. I mean the parole division calendar.

Brower: How did that differ from--?

Moore: Well, the chief parole officer would bring into the Adult Authority the requests for revocation of parole, suspension of parole, maybe a recommendation to chop off some of the time a guy had to be on parole, you know. Maybe he had served eighteen months and come out all right; he'd proved his point--he'd established himself; let's get off his back. There would be one day a week pretty much devoted just to parole division matters, parole division business. That left four days for travel and hearings.

Brower: And the other cases were the ones that came up in the normal course of parole schedules?

Moore: When a man went to prison he was given a calendar date, depending upon the crime and legal status. And he knew then that he was going to appear before the board, providing he didn't get in trouble, he would appear before the board eighteen months from that date or that month. A man is given a calendar status so that you don't lose him.

Brower: What do you mean when you say "lose him"?

Moore: Well, I read of a case back East where a guy was in for ten years before they ever got around to--they didn't know he was there! "Lose him" from the standpoint of the record. It never happened in California that I know of.

The board back in Gordon's time--that was an outstanding board. We always had an outstanding board, but particularly the original board of Drucker and Lester and Gordon. To be a good parole board member you have to rise above your own prejudices and your own biases. You can't work with a person or be completely objective if you say, well I don't like what he did. Of course you don't like what he did but the point is--

For instance, I have a bias; I can't stand a pimp. I hate a pimp like poison; I don't know why. I mean, I've worked with murderers by the dozens, you know, and it never bothered me, but I have to just force myself to be objective under that condition, working with a pimp; it's a deep-seated bias of my own. And everybody's got them.

But not once in all the months that I spent with those three guys did I ever see a case decided on other grounds than the merits of the case and the policy of the board. Never once did I ever see a single instance of any one of those three men-- They'd look at each other and say, "This guy is terrible; this is a horrible thing he did." And then they'd come to their decision on the basis of the facts.

Development of California's Parole System

Brower: How do you account for California's having such an enlightened parole system? Was this something that began with Olson and then was developed by Warren?

Moore: Well, the parole system really got started after the indeterminate sentence law, 1917. Of course, I think the first parole law was 1898 or 1890, some time around there. But it was purely a record-keeping

Moore: sort of a deal. The warden at San Quentin was responsible and nobody ever got a parole anyhow. But gradually, as the population grew--as the parole population grew--they took a couple of guards at San Quentin and their job was to do the clerical work, but there was no field work done. After the indeterminate sentence law was enacted, they set up the bureau of paroles.

The first chief state parole officer was a former sheriff of Tulare County, who started getting some officers, some parole agents, and beginning to do some field work. He was quite paternalistic. His approach to paroles was probably ahead of his time. He did a lot of the right things sometimes for the wrong reason, you know. When he died, they appointed a fellow who was there only a couple, three years, and if you had toured the country and conducted investigations and offered a prize for the guy that shouldn't have been the chief state parole officer, it was this dude. If there was trouble in Eureka he was in San Diego, you know. His name was [Charles C.] Coxe.

I wish I could remember the sheriff's name, the first parole officer [Ed H. Whyte]. He was a well-liked guy; the cons liked him; the officers liked him; the board members had a lot of confidence in him. He really was the first administrator of paroles in California. Then after Coxe, John Chadwick, who was the chief probation officer in Santa Barbara--Olson appointed him the chief state parole officer. He was a commander in the Naval Reserves and went to war right after Pearl Harbor, back to the Navy, and I was appointed. So I was fourth chief parole officer in the history of the state. I was only thirty-three years old at the time. I wasn't very old.

Brower: The improvements in the system, then, were not so much in the legislation as in the personality of the men who were running the show?

Moore: The basic law--the indeterminate sentence act, the basic law of California paroles--was way ahead of its time. To have a good parole system you've got to get people like Walter Gordon and Drucker and Lester, and say, "Here it is and we're going to put as few legislative blocks in your way as possible. You do the job." And they aren't going to do the job if you pass a law today that says you can't do this, and tomorrow a law that says, you can't do that. You've got to have people who know what they're doing, and leave them alone. It's the philosophy, the ideology, the humanity of the people. The people in this business get mean and tough if they're no good, and they get wishy-washy if they're no good. You don't help a man--and I think this happened in the psychological and psychiatric phase. We get the school of psychological counseling and therapy where they seem not to be asking this guy to face up to reality, but finding reasons why he's where he is, other than his own actions.

Moore: Many a time I've had guys come out and they know twenty psychologists and psychiatrists by their first names by the time I get 'em. They've been through the county set-up; they've been through the county jails; they've been the juvenile route. They're professional patients. They used to come into my office and I'd say, "Well, Joe, how long are you going to be with me this time?" They'd say, "Well, what do you mean?" And I'd say, "Last time you lasted sixty days and the time before that it was four months. Let's get a target day here so I know when I have to start getting mean." "Well, I don't want to go back." "Fine, that's motivation. That's number one in the thing we have to think about. But what makes you think you're not going back this time, when you went back every other time?" "Well, I'm just not going back to prison. I don't want any more of it. But you got to realize that if I don't make it, it's really not my fault." "Oh? How come?" "Well, you see my mother was a prostitute and my father was an alcoholic. I was born on the wrong side--" I mean, they give you all that, right out of some psychologist's or psychiatrist's pointed little old head, you know. And I wasn't interested in that a bit. I'd say, "Well, Joe, I've got news for you. This is a new ball game. I'm sorry as hell that your father was an alcoholic and it breaks my heart to hear the sad story of your life. But from this minute on, you are going to be held responsible for your behavior. Not your mother! Not your father! Not society! Now I'm here to give you every bit of assistance and aid that I possibly can. And I'll go to hell for you as long as you're trying. But, brother, if you do something, if you commit another caper, pull another job, commit another felony, I'll get you before the cops do if I can."

Brower: And this was pretty much Walter Gordon's view, too, was it?

Moore: Yes. As long as a guy's trying, give him every break in the world and work like hell for him.

Brower: But he is responsible.

Moore: But you're responsible. All these other things are contributing, maybe, to your personality make-up, but don't tell people that they're not responsible--and this is happening to these kids!

Brower: As if you weren't a free agent?

Moore: Yes. If you knock an old lady down and take her purse, dammit, you did it! Not society. That makes me angry, you know? Sure. I understand what society has contributed to bring this about. But the permissiveness of making excuses for people's behavior is pretty stupid when it's because they're doing what they want to do.

New Attitudes of Prison Reform

Moore: Well, now we've been having a lot of prison-reform groups around the last few years, and they're bleeding for the guys in prison. I don't believe in that! Most of them worked hard to get there. And they say, "Well, then, how could you work with a guy on parole?" As I said awhile ago, Walter's attitude was, "Look, you got here all by yourself and we're not going to waste a tear over the fact that you're in prison. Our problem is: How do we get you out of here? How and when? And how do we keep you out? The fact that you committed all these horrendous crimes hasn't anything to do with the problem of a parole board and the parole system." The parole board's job is to get the guy out and keep him out, if they can.

You know, I've never worried too much about a man's criminal record. I wanted to know what it was so I would be aware of symptoms of returning to this kind of behavior.

Brower: It's really water over the dam.

Moore: That isn't the problem! It's a new ball game, and that's why what happens to a guy in prison is important. You can't bounce a guy around in prison and expect him to walk out into a parole agent's office full of motivation and ambition, you know?

I have a friend who is a Ph.D., and a professor of sociology in one of the local colleges. I got him out of Soledad Prison, into the college as a student. He organized one of the prisoners' unions on the outside. His philosophy is: If a guy commits a felony, and he's convicted of it, put him in prison with a minimum amount of--I mean, just see that he gets fairly decent food, period. And when he gets through with his time throw him out in the street. No after-care, no counseling, no guidance, no nothing!

Brower: That's kind of cold-blooded, from him!

Moore: Well, there are so many of these prison reformers--and these guys say, "Look, what right have you got to tell this guy he can't be a burglar? He's got a constitutional right to be a burglar!" This is ridiculous! This is the motivating philosophy back of a lot of your prison reform: "What right have I got to mess with this man's mind?" Now this is what my friend the Ph.D. says: "You have no right to try and mold this guy into a respectable citizen because his life style is here and this is what he wants to do. And if he does it again, put him back again." See?

Brower: Did Walter Gordon ever express himself about these new reform attitudes and philosophies?

Moore: Well, of course so much of that happened after Walt went to the Virgin Islands. But Walt was a strong man. I mean he had a strong character, a strong will. He was no namby-pamby; he was a rough, tough guy when he wanted to be. And a lot of them found this out.

But I can't imagine Walter philosophically adopting that sort of a deal, because he was a strong believer that people should face up. "Face up, face up," I've heard him tell that to a thousand guys. "Don't come in here and tell us all this cr-, baloney. You committed a crime. We know you committed it. You know you committed it. Now you face up to that fact so you can start all over. But we can't start all over unless you face up to the fact that you committed a felony." And in just about that tone of voice. He never screamed at them, never raised his voice to them. But he could be pretty stubborn too. You didn't change his mind very much. [Laughter]

Gradual Modification of the Reorganization Act

Brower: You said that he contributed to the conditions within the prison. How did he manage that?

Moore: Well, after the reorganization act, of course, the Authority was all-powerful there for a couple of years. They set the rules; they wrote the prison rules and regulations.

Brower: I thought their authority was confined to the reception center?

Moore: No. The reception center was entirely theirs, their baby, by statute. But, for instance, discipline--they developed the disciplinary code, under which the discipline in the prisons was administered. And their influence--they were three distinguished Californians and Dick [McGee] was a foreigner, you know. Incidentally, Dick McGee is an outstanding man. Dick McGee said, "If I'm going to be responsible for what happens in a prison, I've got to have authority to run it. I can't do it when the Adult Authority is meddling around with it." That was his approach. It never got into a public beef, you know, but just gradually-- McGee was a master at handling the legislature. Little by little he whacked away at it till he got the whole thing back, including the parole division!

Brower: Did that happen within Walter Gordon's era?

Moore: Yes. Actually it was an evolutionary process. We really didn't know it was happening. [Laughter] We were getting stabbed but it hadn't started hurting yet! [Laughter] But then the case loads too of the Adult Authority were getting so heavy that they didn't have the time to devote to either the division of paroles, or the guidance center, or anything else! They couldn't handle it administratively.

Brower: I guess a number of prisons had been added to the system too?

Moore: Yes. Over the years there had been Soledad, and San Luis Obispo, and Susanville, and Jimtown. And one time we had five thousand people in camp.

When I first went to work at San Quentin in 1940, there were 5600 people there, and you could single-cell 2600. We had 450 guys sleeping all over the prison. There wasn't bed space. I had seven guys sleeping in my office, the administrative office, outside. They were stacked in there like cord wood. That was before Chino opened up and took a little of the pressure off.

Parole Officers and Law-Enforcement Officers

Moore: Prison and parole people have to take what resources they have and one of the problems that as chief parole officer I used to have, every once in a while some chief of police or sheriff would get uptight about parolees living in his area or he wanted my agents to go to work for him instead of me, you know. And my philosophy all during my career was all I wanted a policeman to do with a parolee was leave him alone. And if the parolee was wrong, the police didn't have to worry about him, I'd go and get him. If I needed help he could send somebody along, but there was never any reason for conflict between law-enforcement and parole as far as I was concerned. Because we should have been on the same thing.

But once in a while one would get out of line and old Walt would walk in there and I'd go to Walt and say, "Hey, that chief down in Riverside is getting-- He and I are going to go to bat here in a minute." And old Walt would drop in on him and they'd tell lies about what great policemen they were. And of course Lester too was a deputy police chief of Los Angeles. Those two guys were a tremendous help to the parole division in helping us to maintain a working relationship with law enforcement.

Brower: How about law-enforcement officers? Do they tend to harrass the parolee?

Moore: Oh, that's the old wives' tale. But it isn't true.

Brower: When you said you just wanted them to leave parolees alone I thought that was what you meant.

Moore: Well, look, if a crime is committed the easiest thing to do is to think of everybody who ever committed that crime and to arrest them. The federal courts have laid down such stringent rules about who you can and who you can't arrest that there's less of that sort of thing going on than there was in the days back when Walter was on the parole board.

A policeman, or a police administrator, or a chief of police, or a sheriff who's having a crime problem in his area--and a lot of crimes are committed by ex-cons--he's going to find somebody--he's getting it from one side and he's going to pass it on, you know.

I remember, back about that time, back about 1940, attending a law-enforcement banquet or something there, or meeting. I knew they could run me out of business, if they wanted to, you know. And so I worked awfully hard at maintaining relationships with law-enforcement people, and so did Walter, and Erv and the rest of those guys on the parole board. This was their policy, their philosophy.

This banquet was a regional meeting of chiefs of police and they were all telling about the crime wave they were having. And one little town, you know they hadn't had a crime in it since--a little, high-economic-level community. And this poor chief of police was screaming about the parolees. They were overrun with parolees. I said, "Chief, there isn't a parolee living in your damn town; they couldn't afford to rent there!"

Brower: Piedmont?

Moore: No. Woodside. I said, "Elucidate," and he said, "Well, a guy had a painting crew out here and a fellow came in and stole all our ladders." Other chiefs of police have got murders and rapes and bank robberies on their minds and this guy's screaming about a fellow who went in and got a couple of ladders!

[End of May 8, 1976 interview]

Governor Warren and the Adult Authority

[Interview 2: July 9, 1976]

[begin tape 1, side A]

Brower: Mr. Moore, will you tell me again the story of the Hale Brothers robbery?

Moore: Well the story is significant primarily because it demonstrated somewhat the way that the Adult Authority and Governor Warren worked. I have stated before that Warren and Walter Gordon had a very close

Moore: relationship going back to the time that Warren was in the district attorney's office in Alameda County. Drucker was a very bright young lawyer who became one of Warren's chief trial lawyers when Warren was attorney general of California. Warren had tremendous respect for Drucker's integrity and his ability. One of the goals that Warren had when he was attorney general was to strengthen the conspiracy laws in the penal code. He fought for it in the legislature and finally got a new conspiracy law through which made it just about as tough on you, if not tougher, to conspire to commit a crime as if you committed it.

Shortly after it became law, there was a big confidence racket which involved real estate, selling nonexistent oil wells and that sort of thing. And there were a group of about seven or eight defendants in this trial. It was in Alameda County, and the district attorney in Alameda County at that time I think was Ralph Hoyt, who was chief deputy district attorney when Earl Warren was district attorney. He asked Warren for some specialized assistance because this was the case that would establish the constitutionality of the new conspiracy law. Every one of these defendants happened to be Jewish and Drucker of course was Jewish. Warren assigned Drucker to this trial and he tried it; he prosecuted it for Alameda County as district attorney. The constitutionality of the law was upheld as a result of this trial.

I had two or three of these guys on my case load later on, and one of them was the most difficult case I had ever had to handle. In spite of knowing what I did about him, when I knew he was a damn crook, that guy could sell you oil stock for wells that didn't exist. He was just one of the greatest con men I've ever met, and I've known a few.

[Ervis W.] Lester had been a deputy chief of police in Los Angeles and had quite a bit of contact with Warren, particularly when Warren was attorney general because his assignment as deputy chief was to represent the department in various situations--he was sort of a community relations man for the department.

So here was Warren, Drucker, and Lester, all three men for whom Warren had personal feelings about their integrity and about their ability. That's the background on it for you.

We had a guy in and out of prison who was a rough, tough, mean little con; he was white.

This is the funny thing--everybody talks about the prisons being full of blacks and that we execute more blacks than whites, which isn't true. We execute more whites than blacks. Proportion-wise there are more blacks than whites, but numerically that isn't true, never has been. Still over 50 percent of the prisoners in California prisons are white not black.

Brower: That's surprising.

Moore: Well it's true. I think the last figures I saw there was about 17 percent chicano and somewhere around 30 percent black. The rest of them are white. So all this propaganda isn't necessarily true. We've executed a tremendously greater number of whites than blacks in California. Proportionally that isn't true, and there's more blacks in death row right now in the United States than there are whites.

But anyhow, that hasn't anything to do with this story. This little con was a real menace, and everybody knew him. Inside the prison he was a deputy warden; you could give him the keys to the place. Most psychopaths are that way. Under a structured situation they do well. It's when they have to make their own decisions that they get into trouble. He was sort of a likeable little hood and everybody enjoyed him. But nobody wanted him out on the street very badly.

Well, he was out on parole one time and he pulled a very daring one-man robbery at Hale Brothers in Sacramento. During the trial several executives of Hale Brothers came in and identified him and their testimony is what convicted him. And being a loudmouth he promised them all that some day he'd get out and the first thing he was going to do was look them up. And that scared the hell out of them. Now if they'd known these cons the way I did--if they told me they were going to do something I didn't worry about it. It's just when they looked at you real careful so they wouldn't forget what you looked like that you worried, you know. You worried about that guy. The guy who said he was going to kill you, you never bothered, never wasted much time on him.

So he goes to Folsom, and he's been there about five years, four or five years. Along comes World War II and the legislature in '41 or '42, I forget which it was, enacted a law which permitted the Adult Authority to parole an inmate to the army. It's called a special service parole. This somewhat was a waiver of the minimums in the law. This guy had a minimum of maybe ten years because he had two or three convictions--I mean, a three- or four-time loser for armed robbery, his minimum starts building up under the indeterminate sentence law, which is another reason the cons don't like it. The public ought to like it real well, but the cons don't like it.

And of course the army didn't want to accept our people, on that basis. But each draft board or each reception center had a psychiatric staff who, if we could convince the psychiatric staff that this guy had potential as a soldier based on what we knew and what we thought about him and the time he had to do, they would okay him, quite often.

Brower: Who would initiate this action to take a particular prisoner?

Moore: The parole board; if the guy was already out on parole I would do it. If he was still in prison--as a matter of fact, the army started coming to the prison at the parole board's request and doing some screening before the board. They all wanted to join the army, you know. Every guy that came up before the parole board, he could hardly wait to get into the army and start shooting someone, which was a lot of baloney. And the board would try, the Adult Authority would try, and they'd say, "Look, this guy has got potential," and they'd get word to the psychiatrist at the reception center and the guy'd do a little screening and he'd say, "Well, we don't want this guy," or, "Hell, yes." We had hundreds. I can tell stories about a hundred of them, a long list of them. And a lot of them that couldn't get into the army would get into the merchant marine. I had men in the merchant marine in every possible part of the globe. And it was my neck, because these people weren't under supervision, and I had no legal right to waive supervision. I'd see the guy going out through the Golden Gate from my office in the Ferry Building, I'd see a ship going out and I'd say, "There goes old Joe. He's headed for the South Pacific and I won't see him from six months to a year, and I'm in trouble if he gets into trouble."

Brower: It was only the merchant marine people who were not under supervision? Or did this apply also to anybody in the army? The army people presumably were under supervision?

Moore: We had no way of knowing where the army people were, and the army didn't want us within five miles of them, which was right. So whenever they got into the army we really suspended supervision over the guy until he got out of the army. And some of them forgot to come back. [Laughter] The theory was that Warren would pardon those if they came back with a good record. It wasn't in the law but that was the theory at the time the law was enacted; but the governor never got around to doing it; he wasn't much of a pardoning man in those days!

Anyhow, the psychiatrist initiated this particular transfer. He came to the Adult Authority and put up a plea for this little hood that had robbed Hale Brothers in Sacramento. He says, "I've had a half a dozen officers talk to this guy; we know all about him. I've gone through his record. I've spent a lot of time talking to him. They're getting together a special unit, and they don't want anybody in this unit except those guys that are hardnosed, have no fear of anything." This guy wasn't scared of anything. "The officers say they want this guy."

This is the last guy in the entire prison system that we would let out on parole at this time. Of course he's going to get a parole eventually, but we mean way back in the next ten years some time. But they put up a pretty good case; they wanted this guy. So the Adult Authority said, "Hell, we've got to win the war, don't we? If he's any good to them, he's sure no damn good to us where he is, or to anybody else." And, rationally and logically, they said, "Ah, you can have him."

Moore: So, he's paroled out of Folsom, and one of my agents takes him down to the reception center and he goes through the initial reception process. He's waiting to go, and he happens to be walking down the street in Sacramento and one of these dudes from Hale Brothers sees him on the street. Well, the Hale Brothers guy goes home and locks the door and gets a shotgun, puts it up alongside of the door, and calls the rest of those people who were involved at Hale Brothers. They all go home and barricade the doors; they call the police department and demand special protection. Both newspapers came out the next morning with a blast at the Adult Authority that you couldn't put on asbestos paper. Here's this notorious criminal that threatened the lives of leading businessmen of Sacramento walking the streets a free man after only four years in the joint.

Oh, I mean they really let the Adult Authority have it. They demanded an investigation, et cetera, et cetera. It was a big deal. So, the next day the press descended upon the governor. They said, "Governor, what are you going to do about this case? What do you think about it?" The governor says, "I think it is an outrage. I don't know why they did it, but I think they were wrong. And I think that I'm going to have to find out why and what, and I'm sympathetic with the press and their attitudes toward this case." And he was quoted in all the newspapers.

Well the Adult Authority was down in Chino on the day that the governor had his press release, as I remember. When they got back to Northern California, the three of them walked into the governor's office and laid their resignations on the table. And Walter [Gordon] said, "You have demonstrated that you no longer have confidence in us personally or in our philosophy or in our policies, and quite obviously we can't operate under those conditions. If the governor doesn't have confidence in us nobody else is going to have confidence in us. It just puts us in an impossible situation. You'd better find yourself three guys you believe in."

Warren looked at him for about four or five minutes; he didn't say a damn word. Finally he says, "Why did you parole that man?" So they told him, he was paroled direct to the army at the request of the army. And Warren says, "I've been so wrong, I've been so wrong. I made a snap judgment without getting the facts and my days as a prosecutor sort of colored my judgment. I'm tearing up these resignations, and furthermore, if there's ever another beef like this I'm going to tell the press to come talk to you. I don't know a damn thing about it but if you did it, I'm for it." [Laughter]

Brower: Was there any form of public retraction from Warren?

Moore: Oh, the whole story finally came out. I think the press did come back to the governor and the governor told them. He says, "Hereafter, if there's a beef on these matters, I believe in these three guys. I

Moore: believe in these three men. I've known them for a long time. I know that I have complete respect for them as individuals and for their honesty and for their ability and for their knowledge in this particular field and I'm not going to second-guess them. You go to them because I'm not going to second-guess them. If somebody convinces me that they're doing wrong then I'll do something about it, but they're the experts in this business, not me."

Brower: In a way it was probably good that it happened.

Moore: Yes, because it was good for Warren too. Every governor that's messed around with prisons has lived to wish that he'd never been born. There's no political harvests in prisons. The guys don't vote. Most of their relatives don't vote, so politically prisoners are a dead issue. All you can get out of prisons is scandal, riot, everything that happens in a prison is a political liability. So any politician who thinks he's going to go to a political heaven by messing around with prisons is crazy. Politically it's a liability.

Brower: Except that the prison reform undertaken by Olson and Warren--don't you think they were helpful to them among the liberals perhaps?

Moore: Oh, yes. I suppose. But they were part of the people that were for them anyhow.

Olson took a tremendous whipping from the press, during his reorganization of the prison system--he held hearings and fired the whole board of prison directors for malfeasance in office. I'm quite sure that it did him no political good because those of us that were helping him in this prison investigation (that's how I got into the thing in the first place), we were for him anyhow. I don't think he picked up very many friends back in 1940-'39.

Rehabilitation vs Punishment

Brower: So attempting to reform prisons is really just a liability.

Moore: It's always a liability. The average person doesn't give a damn about what goes on in a prison. I mean the average Joe says, "If this guy belongs there, that's fine and dandy." And that's all he wants to know. As a matter of fact, the whole philosophy of corrections is coming back to what it was before 1939: the purpose of a prison is to punish. This is what your penologists and your sociologists and your prison reformers are saying. Don't mess with his mind, don't give him any counseling, don't give him any education. Just put him in jail.

Brower: The notion of rehabilitation has gone out?

Moore: Well, I pick up the paper, and I read the correctional magazines and literature, and I read people who I know are expressing some of the most--what's the word I'm trying to think of--punitive, the most punitive philosophy that I can imagine.

There are in every prison a group of inmates who are not motivated to change their life style or habit patterns. They are a lost cause. No rehabilitation program can touch them. However, there are many inmates who are motivated. Enough that Corrections should always have programs available to this segment of the population.

In California our prisons have a higher percentage of hard-core inmates than in any other state. This is due to California's greater use of probation. Our big problem wasn't whether the guy should be there or not. The courts sent him there.

Brower: But it's how to get him out?

Moore: How you get him out, and when you get him out, and what do you do with him out. Now under this very punitive philosophy that's beginning to sweep all through the correctional field, these things don't matter. And they say you don't rehabilitate people in prison. That's damn sure. But I've seen a lot of guys who because of something that happened to them in prison or on parole made it and they're out today. And I see them on the streets. I saw one just the other day at the Safeway store down there [pointing], been off of parole for five years and it took us four times back to San Quentin to convince him that he couldn't win.

Brower: What was Gordon's philosophy in this matter? Did he regard prisons as a means of rehabilitation?

Moore: He believed that the state was out of its mind if it didn't do everything that was humanly possible--with the knowledge that we had in the field, which wasn't very much. If we didn't do everything possible to turn a guy around we were negligent in doing our duty. Sure, we knew that there was a percentage of those hard-core guys who are going to commit a crime. You can't always tell which one it is, if you did you wouldn't let him out. But our philosophy was based upon the theory that, sure we're not going to make it with everybody, but a criminal career can cost the taxpayers \$150,000 in custodial care, in a whole career. If you can do anything to turn this guy around a little bit while you've got him under your control and you don't do something, you're negligent in doing your duty as far as I'm concerned.

Brower: Wasting the taxpayers' money.

Moore: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I don't buy this. I never would. I'm a pragmatist. I know that some guys we could work with and some we couldn't. And I know a lot of them that would have never made it without us, on parole. I thought that every time we got a guy straightened

Moore: around, between the prisons and the parole system, we saved the taxpayers \$150,000, plus somebody didn't get his head knocked off. And the guy that we couldn't reach, so we couldn't reach him. What the hell. You put him back. There's no great deal about it. I can't buy the idea that the state has these people under its control and won't do anything, anything, to try to give the guy a chance to turn around.

A lot of those guys want to turn around.

Brower: How do you account for this change in philosophy?

Moore: Because there's a high crime rate. People are screaming about the crime situation and they've got to blame it on somebody so they blame it on the prisons, which is a crock because in California there's nobody that got into our prisons that didn't work his way there. They're losers; no virgins come to prison. They've been through the mill. They've been the juvenile-hall route, youth-authority route; they've been in county jails, and finally they reach the point where the court says: there's no place we can send you; you've been there. So we're going to send you to prison.

Now you take a guy who's a confirmed, hard-core professional criminal and you put him in prison and then society jumps all over the warden because he doesn't make a Christian gentleman out of him. No way. Can't do it.

Brower: Then where do you exert a rehabilitative influence in this set-up?

Moore: It's expensive; this is another thing about a lot of governors and legislatures, they don't want to put up the money. They never have wanted to, even in the old days. They tell the story at San Quentin about an old Gatling gun they used to have up in the armory, which was supposed to repel the Indians I guess. I can't figure out what else it was good for. Anyhow, some con out at the waterfront gets ahold of a rowboat and he's rowing like hell to get away from the place and the captain runs up to the tower and unhoods this Gatling gun and the bullets come out--pop, you can almost see them come out. Old ammunition. The legislature wouldn't give them the money to buy ammunition for the Gatling gun. This has been the story of prisons; it's the story of paroles. The money wasn't there.

Brower: In spite of the cost of having somebody in prison, and the human waste.

Moore: It's tremendous. It's just absolutely unbelievable what it costs. But not doing something costs.

Brower: Yes.

Moore: Not doing something costs. And it's so easy. What's left over the legislature gives the prison system.

Brower: It's always the last?

Moore: It's always been that way. Cons don't have a lobby. Well, they have a lobby but it's such a bunch of screwballs that the legislature doesn't pay any attention to them.

The Death Penalty

Brower: When you spoke earlier about the number of blacks in death row it reminded me to ask you, do you know how Walter Gordon felt about the death penalty? Of course it wasn't questioned very much in those days.

Moore: He had nothing to do with carrying it out--no official responsibility. I think he was somewhat like myself, ambivalent, ambivalent. One of the greatest foes of the death penalty was Clint Duffy, and Clint executed, well he was warden and he executed forty men and three women. If ever a man approached this job full of--I mean, he would spend hours with them just--particularly when he knew a man was going to go. We'd all go down there quite often with him just to give him some moral support, knowing how he felt about it. Hell, I saw seventeen or eighteen executions.

Brower: Is the warden required to witness these executions?

Moore: He does it. He has the legal responsibility. He has to make arrangements and he's the guy who tells the executioner when to drop the cyanide. He suffered like nobody's business about it.

I've gone from being a foe of capital punishment to an advocate of the death penalty in some types of cases. The classic murder--a crime of passion--doesn't shake up prison people. I worked with dozens and dozens and scores of these people who never again in their life got themselves into the situation where they would have done what they did then. And most of those people made a successful adjustment. Hell, if a guy in a first-degree murder case got fouled up on parole it shook up the whole outfit because it was so unusual.

But the guy who takes a gun and goes out and pulls a stick-up deliberately, he has that gun to kill somebody if they get in his way. He's a murder walking around waiting to happen. These terrorists--these kind of people. I'll pull the trigger; I'll drop the cyanide and they won't have to pay me a hundred and fifty dollars to do it. And I'm not vindictive. It's just that there's no other way you can stop them.

Brower: You think it is a deterrent then?

Moore: This is the argument: Is it a deterrent or isn't it? Those who are against capital punishment say it is not a deterrent and those that are for it say it is. It sure as hell deters a lot of guys. I know a lot of stick-up men who walk around with unloaded guns, pulling jobs with unloaded guns because they didn't want to go to the death chamber. On the other hand, I know the guy that put the death chamber together at San Quentin, who went out on parole, committed a murder, and came back and died in his own gas chamber.

Brower: My word!

Moore: It's not going to be a deterrent for the crazy guy; it's not going to be a deterrent to a hijacker or a terrorist, who is already dead as far as his own thinking goes; I mean he's reconciled to the fact that he's going to die and I think he should be accommodated.

[end tape 1, side A; begin tape 1, side B]

Drugs and Crime

Moore: Then we have the real crazy people, a guy like Manson, for example--

Brower: That was a weird phenomenon. I think that's new. You didn't have Mansons, quite, in that period, did you?

Moore: Manson was a result of the sixties, the late fifties and the sixties.

Brower: Then, what about the impact of drugs?

Moore: When I first went to San Quentin, of the 5600 guys there then I doubt if there was a guy there for using drugs. And even during the height of the drug scene many addicts came in for burglary and other crimes. I tried to tell the parole agents, try and make a judgment on these addicts. Was this guy a criminal who became an addict or was he an addict who became a criminal? Now your chances of working successfully with those two people are entirely different. If the guy's a professional criminal who sets up drugs as another manifestation of his pure cussedness, forget him. But if the guy was an addict who stole to support his habit you had some hopes of success. Our overall experience with addicts is an almost 90 percent failure rate.

Brower: Why did you have such a high failure rate with drug addicts?

Moore: Because the cause of their behavior is the addiction, and how do you cure the addiction? Nobody cures an addict. Did you ever see an old addict?

Moore: I used to go down to the coroner's office and I'd identify parolees a dozen times a year, DOA [Dead on Arrival]. They'd overdose on something. But a lot of those addicts were already criminals before they became addicts. And this is something that the average person doesn't understand. The guy who was a criminal, a professional criminal, was more likely to take up the drug than the others.

Brower: Do you feel that the British system makes for a better set-up?

Moore: Well, friends of mine that have gone to England and studied the British says there "ain't" no such thing, that it's a lot of propaganda. The so-called British system is shot full of holes right now. But say go back ten years and talk about the British system. They were dealing with a group of people who were English, who were a part of the culture, who were most of them low-middle-class working stiff, although some of them were professional people, doctors and nurses and what not. Here's the British system; they say: All right. We're going to give this guy enough heroin, mainly a maintenance dose; in order to keep him from getting so sick he'll climb the wall, we'll give him a little.

Well the addicts that I've known in this country are pigs.

Brower: They don't want a little?

Moore: They don't want a little. There's no way that you could give them enough to satisfy them, because the more they get the more they want. They're pigs.

Brower: But don't you think that the system we have invites the Mafia and others into controlling the drug business?

Moore: There's no doubt about that, but you could also carry that same thinking into other fields besides.

Brower: Yes. It was true for instance during Prohibition.

Moore: I've never known an addict who didn't need a good therapist before he ever shot in the first place. I mean, nobody in his right mind, who has any kind of a value system at all, is going to put a shot of anything in his veins. He's got to be a screwball to begin with. There's something wrong with him. There's a personality deficiency there somewhere.

Brower: Unless his life is so insupportable he wants out any way he can find.

Moore: All right, but this is committing suicide and why doesn't he commit suicide and get it over with and not break up his entire family. They're a hard bunch of people to work with, I'll tell you that, addicts. You can't trust them; they'll steal their mother's last dollar. Remember this, I'm dealing with people that are in prison.

Moore: Most people in prison don't go to jail for narcotics. Maybe they're addicts but they're there for robbery and burglary and assault with a deadly weapon; this is what they're in jail for.

Changes in the Prison Population

Brower: Drug-associated crimes were not a big thing when you and Walter Gordon were in correction?

Moore: Oh sure. But not to the extent that is now. I would say that when I first went to San Quentin there were probably 25 percent of the people there for crimes of violence. And now it's 60 percent there for crimes of violence. In other words, the prisons are dealing with an entirely different kind of population now than they were thirty years ago. I could go through San Quentin prison in 1940 and pick out a thousand guys that you could take home with you. I wouldn't take any of them out of there right now without a police escort.

It's an entirely different population. Oh, we had guys in there for stealing a horse and stealing cows. They'd come down from Mariposa County by the dozen. Writing these ten-dollar checks--you don't get these people in prison any more. People in prison are, for the most part, hard-core, aggressive, violent, acting-out types of guys. Now this raises hell with your percentages--I mean, when you're in the rehabilitation business.

During World War II my parole-violation rate ran about 10 percent. Now it runs really about 40 percent.

Brower: And of course the World War II period was different for other reasons, because of the full employment, for example.

Moore: Employment was most of it.

Brower: And we were more homogeneous then.

Moore: Plus the fact that I was dealing with a group of people who--a large percentage of them or a goodly percentage of the people we were dealing with--were not hard-shell, hard-rock criminals. They were crazy kids. I mean, horse-stealing and alcoholics writing ten-dollar checks and Okies committing statutory rape. Those people don't go to prison anymore. In a population like we had at San Quentin in 1940, hell, you should rehabilitate half of them because half of them didn't belong there anyhow, basically. But these small, cow counties, they didn't have any jails; they had no probation department. What are they going to do with the guy who committed a felony? They send him to San Quentin.

Moore: I've seen guy after guy come before the parole board and the parole board'd say, "Oh my God! Why did that crazy judge send this kid here? He doesn't belong in San Quentin Prison. Mr. parole officer, [shouting] how long will it take you to get this guy out?" "Twenty-four hours soon enough?" [Laughter]

But you know, that isn't the case now. The vast majority of the people in prison are professionals.

Brower: Well, when those young people who didn't belong there went to prison, was it a radicalizing experience as it is now? That isn't the word I guess; did they come out real criminals?

Moore: Look, when you went to prison in 1950, when you were convicted of a felony and sent to prison you were civilly dead and you remained that way until my friends Federal Judges Al Zirpoli and Bob Peckham started running the prisons of California. I succeeded Al Zirpoli as state president of the Young Democrats. And Bob Peckham was the California State Democratic Club national committeeman when I was state president. These two guys, they're outstanding people, but their rulings on the rights of inmates created problems for prison administrations. A warden has to be first of all concerned about the safety of his institution--its staff and its inmates.

Brower: But prisons then weren't educational institutions for crime as they presumably are now?

Moore: Well, sure. The guy that wants to--you're going to get that information, you don't have to go to prison to get that information. You can go to any bar. Look, I'd rather have a kid of mine, as bad as it is, spend a year in a place like San Quentin was under Duffy than ninety days in the best county jail in the world. Your county jails are the crime schools.

You know, it's the funny thing about it. They have a caste system in the prison. Nobody sets it up but people who think alike and have some of the same set of values, they sort of become a little clique. You don't have to associate with Manson.

Brower: Was the racial antagonism as severe in those days?

Moore: No, probably for a variety of reasons. It wasn't on the outside either.

Brower: No, no. That's perfectly true.

Moore: The things that happen in a prison--

Brower: are reflections--

Moore: are the same things that happen in the community only they exaggerate everything.

Brower: Was the Adult Authority in charge of both men and women?

Moore: Not then, but they are now. They still are in charge of parole. The department of corrections now runs the men's paroles under some agency in the division of paroles under the director of corrections. And the director of corrections runs the women's prisons.

Brower: And that was not true in your time?

Moore: No. But they still have a five-man board, a separate board that has three women on it and two men, that handle just the women's parole cases.

Brower: Do you think of further things about Walter Gordon that you would like to talk about?

Moore: No. I think I have just about covered most of my recollections.

Brower: Thank you very much, Mr. Moore. You have added a great deal to an understanding of the background in corrections when Walter Gordon served on the Adult Authority.

Transcriber: Michelle Guilbeault

Final Typist: Teresa Allen

The following excerpt from Lee Edson, "Tales of a Parole-Board Chief," Saturday Evening Post, June 30, 1951, summarizes, in his own words, Walter Gordon's approach to his duties as chairman of the California Adult Authority. [Ed.]

"Many people want to know what I think when a criminal tells me his story," says Gordon. "Human behavior being what it is, they ask me how I can figure a prisoner's future action on the outside. Well, you can't always do it. A doctor doesn't expect a cure in every case, and he always faces the possibility of a relapse. Like a medical man, I look for certain symptoms. Is the prisoner a menace or is he merely a nuisance? Is he an accidental offender or does he have a criminal pattern? Men who steal cars or pass bad checks, for example, are the most frequent repeaters, whereas certain sex offenders and murderers make the best parole risks because they rarely repeat.

"Each prisoner presents a different problem. I want to know whether an inmate has made his plans in keeping with his ability. Does he understand himself? Will the environment he chooses be favorable to his rehabilitation? How much supervision will he need? There are dozens of other questions to fit the individual. In every case we try to do the best we can both for the man and for society."



George McDaniel
ca. 1956

Interview with George McDaniel

Interview History	269
Early Contacts with Walter Gordon	270
The Work Furlough Program	272
Work on Condemned Row	275

INTERVIEW HISTORY

George McDaniel was the first black guard at San Quentin prison. Indeed, according to Clinton Duffy, former warden of San Quentin, he was the first black man to be employed "in the history of the California prison system." Warden Duffy reports that Mr. McDaniel was hired at the suggestion of Walter Gordon. No one ever regretted the decision. George McDaniel served within the correctional system until this year (1977), when he retired from the Work-Furlough Program.

His acquaintance with Walter Gordon began during World War II, when Mr. McDaniel served in the Oakland police reserves, and the two men came to know each other better when they met frequently on the Richmond-San Rafael ferry, bound for San Quentin. George McDaniel's memories of Walter Gordon are not numerous or detailed, but his vantage point--that of a black man long employed in the prison system--is a somewhat special one.

A single interview took place on a bright windy day in Mr. McDaniel's large house on an El Cerrito hilltop, commanding a superb view of the North Bay and Mount Tamalpais. George McDaniel is a large and genial man, relaxed and amiable. He looks considerably younger than his recent retirement would suggest. Perhaps the moonlighting work he has done for many years, as a salesman for a very handsome--and very expensive--line of stainless steel cookware, combined with vacations spent in traveling with his wife to all parts of the world have helped to keep him young. He spoke with admiration and affection of Walter Gordon and I think perhaps George McDaniel more or less consciously has modeled himself on the older man.

Anne Brower

July, 1977
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: August 30, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE McDANIEL

Early Contacts with Walter Gordon

Brower: Mr. McDaniel, I wanted to ask you how you happened to meet Walter Gordon.

McDaniel: I met Mr. Gordon when we were riding on the ferry on the way to San Quentin prison. I knew him before then. I hadn't met him, but I knew him when I was in the police reserve in Oakland. He had spoken to several of our affairs.

Brower: What exactly is the police reserve?

McDaniel: The police reserve was started during the war. They were short of policemen, and many people had other jobs. I was a journeyman welder but I volunteered to do this work in the police reserve to help because they were short of policemen.

Brower: I see. You were a welder in the shipyards here?

McDaniel: In Richmond, California, yes.

Brower: So he'd come to talk to the group from time to time.

McDaniel: Right, on police matters.

Brower: Did you think he was an interesting speaker?

McDaniel: He was very interesting. I could listen for hours and it would never be boring.

Brower: Was he funny? Did he tell funny stories?

McDaniel: Sometimes. He was just down to earth, but it was things that really happened. I can't remember some of the things but you never wanted it to end. At least I didn't.

Brower: He talked about his own police experience then?

McDaniel: Yes, that, and others' too. He was the chairman of the Adult Authority, which is quite interesting.

Brower: Did he talk about that to the same police crew?

McDaniel: Yes, he would talk about it because he happened to be a Negro--at that time they were saying "Negro"--and he'd have different people coming in and, of course, some of them would come in and they didn't quite understand that. But he would talk about that work also. The reason I thought so much of him was that he was one of the first, or the first, black policemen in Berkeley, I understand. He went, as you probably know, to Cal and he was quite a football player before he became a policeman.

Then the Adult Authority and then I think he became the governor of the Virgin Islands, and then a federal judge. His experience--I could have learned a lot if I'd have met him much earlier.

Brower: Did you have any opportunity to see him later on when he came back to Berkeley from the Virgin Islands?

McDaniel: I saw him once at Allen Moore's retirement dinner, and that was the last time I had a talk with him.

Brower: Well, I didn't want to move ahead so fast through that. You met him on the ferry going to San Quentin because you were both going there?

McDaniel: I have to back up. Really, I think I met him in the reserve because he came and spoke and we met him and talked after. This was before I started at San Quentin.

Brower: And then you got to know him better in going back and forth?

McDaniel: Yes, from time to time we'd be riding the ferry before they built the Richmond-San Rafael bridge. We would ride and have quite a chat.

Brower: That was a nice, leisurely ride.

McDaniel: Right. It was about a twenty-minute ride.

Brower: He would be going over on Adult Authority business?

McDaniel: Yes.

Brower: And you were going over as an officer?

McDaniel: As an officer, yes. I had started.

Brower: You were the first black officer in San Quentin, weren't you?

McDaniel: Yes, I was the first black officer in San Quentin. This was in 1949.

Brower: I think we forget how recent that is.

McDaniel: Right. We've had several very good officers come since then who have really done well, and some left and went into other positions.

The Work-Furlough Program

Brower: What about yourself? Did you stay in that kind of work?

McDaniel: I stayed in that, but I've been a part-time salesman for twenty years, and still am. I left there after twenty-three years and worked in the work-furlough program.

Brower: Was that the Crittenden Center?

McDaniel: Crittenden Center, right. It was very interesting. I enjoyed that the best of all.

Brower: It was a very positive thing, wasn't it? I understand they don't have that anymore.

McDaniel: They are contracted out to Volunteers of America now. It's doing something similar. I think it's done a very good job. It's just a smaller number of people.

Brower: Was the Crittenden Center financed by the state?

McDaniel: Yes. It was run by the state. Correctional officers and parole agents.

Brower: And then they withdrew their support, I guess? Or at least they farmed it out to Volunteers of America?

McDaniel: They pay Volunteers of America so much money for each prisoner. My job there before I left was transportation officer. I would pick men up from San Quentin and bring them to Volunteers of America, which is a work furlough program. Unfortunately, sometimes we had to also take them back.

Brower: I suppose. That must have been sort of sad.

- McDaniel: It was, because sometimes they would have good jobs. There was a certain amount of rules they'd have to live up to. They couldn't let them do certain things. If they didn't follow those rules, it was necessary to take them back--especially some of them.
- Brower: These were the terms of their parole?
- McDaniel: They really weren't on parole. They were within sixty to ninety days of going on parole. They would come out and live and...
- Brower: Oh, it was pre-parole? The period before their parole?
- McDaniel: Right. These people would come out and the Volunteers of America would help them get jobs and in some cases go to school.
- Brower: So, by the time their parole came up they had a niche already established?
- McDaniel: Oh, yes. They had a place to stay, a job, and a pretty good start.
- Brower: It would make their chances of making it much, much better, wouldn't it?
- McDaniel: Yes. It's too bad, I think, that you can't have more programs like this. It's very expensive but you do really give the people a chance.
- Brower: And in the long run, I wouldn't think that would be expensive because it must keep so many more out of prison.
- McDaniel: Many of the fellows that come out of prison are afraid. They really are afraid. We've had some that didn't know how to catch a bus or didn't know how to go to apply for a job. The Volunteers of America have meetings on Thursday, and those that aren't working have to go to the meeting and they explain to them how to apply for a job. Some don't even know how to dress for a job. They'll go all dressed up to do some labor work like in a lumber yard, and the man looks at him and doesn't even want to fool with him because he figures he doesn't want to work. If you're going for an office job then you should dress a little different.
- Brower: What about filling out forms? Can they write, most of them?
- McDaniel: Some can, but some of them have quite a few problems. The Volunteers of America have these young girls there--some of them are college students and some are paid by the staff. They are quite helpful in showing them how to fill out the forms. Many of them do not know how to fill out forms.
- Brower: And nothing much any more is done, I guess, in San Quentin itself to teach people reading and writing?

McDaniel: Well, I've been away from there for five and a half years but I think they still have schools. And they did have a program out there but I don't know to what extent it is now.

Brower: In the time that you were there, what would you say the general trend was? You were there over a period when the prison population increased very, very much and the problems must have increased a lot.

McDaniel: We've seen almost 6,000 people there, I believe some time in the '50s. Of course, it's down now but they have a different type of people coming into prison now. We had trouble in those days but I don't think it's as bad as it is now.

Brower: I just wondered if you felt there were changes in the attitudes of the administration of the prison. I guess there would have to be, really, with that many more people. They'd have to be tougher.

McDaniel: I think so. But in some cases I think the courts, the law, is too soft. I may be wrong about it but this is my feeling. I think you should be strict. You don't have to overdo it but they have to be told and let know what they can do and what they can't do and what they can get by with. They will try you just like children sometimes. This is my feeling.

Brower: What they can get away with?

McDaniel: Oh yes. If they know they can get away with it they'll do a little more and more.

Brower: How do you feel about the indeterminate sentence?

McDaniel: I really am in favor of the indeterminate sentence more than the new law, I think, because I have known cases--for instance, this man didn't have very much education and he came to work, and he worked for me in the dining room but he'd go to school at night. He learned to be a butcher. I read his case history and he was in for selling dope. The judge recommended that this man spend the maximum amount of time in prison. I don't think this man should have spent that amount of time. He didn't, because of the indeterminate sentence. This has been ten or fifteen years ago and he's out and working, is married, bought a home and is doing fine. There's probably other cases that I don't even know about.

Brower: And people like that, under the new law, would just never get out?

McDaniel: Right. I think you have to study the cases and figure each individually. Everyone's different.

Brower: And the judge really doesn't have that opportunity at the time of sentencing?

McDaniel: People change. And especially if a person is not in there for some brutal crime. I'm very much against dope. Of course, we all are. But I'm saying that in a case like that a man should not have to spend fifteen or twenty years.

Brower: No. That's awfully interesting. What kinds of things would you talk with Walter Gordon about?

McDaniel: We talked about so many things. I worked condemned row for six years.

Brower: That must be a tough assignment.

McDaniel: Some of the funnier things--they made a movie there one time, My Six Convicts, and Mr. Gordon had worked with one of the actors as a policeman in Berkeley when he was on the force. This fellow was dressed in convict clothes because they were making the movie, and when he walked in he said, "Hello, Walt!" At that time there were only three men on the Adult Authority, Gordon, Dullea, and Lester. So they didn't know what to think of this inmate coming in and calling him by his first name. But this fellow was actually an actor and had worked with Walter a long time ago.

Brower: When you say they worked together, you mean the actor was a policeman himself?

McDaniel: Right. They both were policemen in Berkeley.

Brower: That must have been funny.

McDaniel: This had been maybe twenty years or more.

Brower: Did Walt recognize him immediately?

McDaniel: I don't know if he did right away, but I guess then as they got to talking there was no question.

Work on Condemned Row

Brower: I should think condemned row would be a pretty rough assignment.

McDaniel: Well, it was. It was sad. I've seen some pretty sad things. I met some men on condemned row that I had a lot of respect for, too. Some unfortunate thing happened. Everyone up there was not really as bad as his brother. But then there were some who were pretty bad. Some didn't really think much of taking a life. They'd even try it up there.

Brower: I guess all of us have the potential for doing something like that if everything just goes right--or wrong.

McDaniel: Well, I think we could kill someone if certain things should come up, but most of us wouldn't be like some cases. Some people go in and rob where they really don't have to kill anyone. And I've heard some men on the row say if they were out, what they would do. But most of them aren't like that.

I never heard too many people brag about it. One fellow named Nash was supposed to have killed eleven people. He would brag about it and tell where the bodies were. He was mad because the newspaper wouldn't pay him \$75 for a body. But that was an exception. He's the only one that I heard brag. The other inmates didn't like him. We had to separate him from the other prisoners. He didn't even seem to mind dying. I didn't see his execution but they tell me he looked around and smiled and said, "Well, I didn't live like a man; I'll die like one." It didn't bother him at all. Some senators came down once from Sacramento and I had to take them down the row. They asked each man what they thought of the death penalty. Naturally, most of them said no. But when they got to Nash, he said, "Yeah, yeah, I believe in it."

Brower: I understand that Warden Duffy didn't like having to be the one to--I guess he was the one to drop the pellet?

McDaniel: No, they usually have an officer and a sergeant, and the warden or associate warden would give the order when to do this. But they didn't actually do it themselves, at least when I was there they didn't.

Brower: They had to witness it, though? Legally they were required to?

McDaniel: Yes.

Brower: I guess he didn't like to very well because I know Allen Moore said he'd go down with him.

McDaniel: No, I'm sure he didn't [like it].

Brower: Was Warden Duffy helpful to you when you came?

McDaniel: Yes, I think he was. I worked more with Mr. Teets, the associate warden, but I think Duffy had to be helpful to me. I really had no big problem. When other people in the prison got to know me they were willing to help me and did help me. I wasn't a total stranger. I had done about ten years' police work in Oakland as a reserve and I wasn't a stranger, but there were still certain things I didn't know about the prison. I had a lot of help from many people--I couldn't name all of them.

- Brower: Did you have any opportunity to observe Walter Gordon's Adult Authority business in action?
- McDaniel: Yes. I was fortunate enough, once or twice, to sit in on a board meeting. It was quite interesting.
- Brower: How did he impress you? Did you think he was a fair kind of man?
- McDaniel: Oh, I thought he was very fair, and yet if it was necessary to be tough he could do that too. He had a very good understanding. I would have liked to have had a teacher like him.
- Brower: One of the things I wondered about was if, because he was black, he leaned over backwards not to seem to favor blacks, and maybe was harsher than he would have been otherwise.
- McDaniel: I don't know about all of his cases but sometimes blacks think that one is harder because he doesn't want to show favoritism. But I think he was the type of person who would take it just for what it was.
- Brower: That's what I heard. I was just interested in what your thinking on it was.
- McDaniel: This is what I feel.

The Crittenden Center

- Brower: How did you happen to move from San Quentin to the Crittenden Center?
- McDaniel: One of my used-to-be co-workers told me there was an opening and why didn't I come over. I had Saturdays and Sundays off and no night work--I wasn't particular about going over. But after talking to Lieutenant Nichols, who was in charge of the work furlough, he told me that I would not have to work at night--that is, the midnight shift--so I decided to go over. I think it's one of the best things. I wish I had gone earlier now because it was really a pleasure working with Lieutenant Nichols and the group. Allen Moore was the head of the work-furlough program and Lieutenant Nichols was under him. I wouldn't want to work under any better people. I got a chance to learn a lot. We were able to work more with the inmates than you are in the prison because you really, in some cases, help them get jobs and take them to a job and a lot of things that you could not do inside the prison. The work was much more satisfying.
- Brower: I would think so. You must have felt that you were really accomplishing something whereas the other is more or less...

- McDaniel: Routine. One thing I'd like to say is that working inside San Quentin, many mornings I would go and feel real good when I got there and in fifteen minutes I was ready to kill up somebody. Somebody would make you mad. And yet, after I came out here for five and a half years, I never went to work or came home really mad.
- Brower: That's pretty good.
- McDaniel: We had problems, of course; but it wasn't anything that you couldn't work out. It was really a pleasure.
- Brower: It sounds like an awfully good program and I just hope it's being as well served now.
- McDaniel: Yeah, I hope they can keep it going because they really do help the men. It doesn't help all, but it does help a lot of them.
- Brower: I can believe that. You can't just put people back into the mainstream again and expect them, with no job and no place to stay, to make it. They'll just be back again.
- McDaniel: They need a lot of training. We've had some fellows go out and go to the skills bank to learn how to weld and do other trades, and this is quite helpful because welding and machinists are trades that there are demands for right now. A lot of people aren't working, but those people can usually get jobs. We've had fellows make real good money coming out of this program.
- Brower: It seems to me so sensible. But according to Allen Moore, the whole trend has just been more and more punitive--the idea of punishing people and not worrying about what happens to them.
- McDaniel: We have to worry, because that same person coming right back out may be your neighbor or my neighbor. And if he doesn't have any way to make a living...I don't believe in just giving somebody something but to help them learn to be able to do for himself.
- Brower: Did Walter Gordon know about the Crittenden Center? Did he have any contact with it?
- McDaniel: I don't think he had much contact, but he knew about it, definitely. The Crittenden Center is about ten years old, so when Mr. Gordon left it may not have started yet.
- Brower: I don't think so.
- McDaniel: But the Adult Authority knew about it because there were some cases that they recommended men to come to the program before they went on parole, which was a good idea because they had a little more control over the man.

Brower: Right, even more than you would have had if he'd been on parole.

McDaniel: He has to check in and out. Someone has to see him every day.

Brower: And, of course, he has a real incentive to do well...

McDaniel: ...otherwise, he'll go back.

Brower: And his parole, I suppose, is deferred if he louses up?

McDaniel: He won't even get to parole if he messes up on the work furlough.

Brower: So there's a real incentive for them to get in there and...

McDaniel: ...try to make it.

Brower: In World War II, you were in defense work in Richmond?

McDaniel: And the reserve.

Brower: That must have kept you pretty busy.

McDaniel: Oh yes. The reserve was quite helpful to me. It helped me learn a lot about law enforcement. And, of course, I went to San Quentin. I was there twenty-three years. And then I started selling about twenty years ago. I still plan on doing that now. I've never quit.

Brower: What do you sell?

McDaniel: Household appliances, like stainless steel cookware. I like selling. I like meeting people. It's really interesting.

Brower: I bet you're good at it.

McDaniel: Well, one time I had nineteen people under me while I was working at San Quentin.

Brower: You were selling and you were still working a full day over there? It must have helped though, in a way, to have something that took you out.

McDaniel: Something different. You need a change.

Friendship with Walter Gordon's Family

Brower: You said that your daughter and Walter Gordon's are...

McDaniel: ...are very good friends. She and my youngest daughter, Gwendolyn.

Brower: That would be Walter Gordon's granddaughter? Would she be Ed's child?

McDaniel: Walt, Jr.'s.

Brower: That's pleasant.

McDaniel: They were at my retirement dinner, too. Judy, and Walt and his wife.

Brower: That was nice. When you say Walt you mean Walt Jr.?

McDaniel: Yes.

Brower: What do you remember best about Walter Gordon?

McDaniel: Oh, there's so many things. We'd get to talking. I can't remember any particular thing. We'd talk about the Virgin Islands. And he told me that he wished he'd known I was going over there. I had gone to the Virgin Islands on a cruise. I told him that I had been there and he wanted to know where I'd been and he wished he'd known. You could just talk about anything--sports. He's a brilliant person. Sports and world affairs--you name it and he was right there.

Brower: It's a shame you didn't look him up because apparently people who came from Berkeley and around here and visited him and Mrs. Gordon in the Virgin Islands had a marvelous time.

McDaniel: Right. When he was sick I was so sorry I didn't get a chance to get over, but you get tied up with so many things, you can only do so many things. But I enjoyed talking with him.

Brower: But you weren't very much in touch with him after he came back to Berkeley.

McDaniel: No.

Brower: Did you go to his funeral?

McDaniel: No, I wasn't able to go to his funeral, either. I see his son, Walt, every once in a while and I see Judy.

Brower: Well, if you see Walt, give him a pitch for giving us an interview.

McDaniel: I'll be glad to.

Brower: We're completing the second volume now.

McDaniel: In fact, I will call him.

Brower: Thank you. I haven't really talked to him very much about it lately because what we decided to do was make one volume of colleagues and friends and another volume of family. So I haven't really bugged him about it, but I just hope he'll be receptive when the time comes.

McDaniel: Oh, if he gets a chance, I think he will. He's a wonderful person. I think a lot of him. I don't get to see much of him, either. He's really on the go.

Brower: I understand he's terribly busy. He was on the Adult Authority?

McDaniel: Right. He's a board representative, I think it is, now.

Brower: You mean he represents the board of the Adult Authority.

McDaniel: Right. It's practically the same work, I would think...

Brower: ...as his father did?

McDaniel: More or less, yes. They see the fellows before they go to the board and in some cases I think they handle it. I think that's correct.

Brower: Walter Gordon's daughter, Betty, is also in law enforcement, isn't she?

McDaniel: I don't know. I met her once but I really don't know. I think she is.

Brower: I think she's in the probation department.

McDaniel: Right, I think so.

Brower: So Ed, who's a dentist, is the only one who isn't doing...

McDaniel: ...law enforcement.

Brower: What do you think of law enforcement work as a career?

McDaniel: It's quite interesting. It's very interesting. It's good and bad. There's times I would like to be public accountant--that's what my brother is. But it has its good and bad. I think it's getting better in some ways. The pay is one of the main things. They've lost a lot of good men by not being able to pay. I know many fellows who went into other departments or into something else.

Brower: Is that still true?

McDaniel: Well, the pay's come up a lot. It's getting much better now. I think now, if they keep going, they'll be able to get better men.

Brower: It's even good relative to other professions?

McDaniel: It is, I think so, yes.

Brower: Do you have one last anecdote or recollection of Walter Gordon that you could think of?

McDaniel: Gee, it's been so long. I can't offhand.

Brower: That was a wonderful story about the man in prison who went up and called him Walt.

McDaniel: Yes, he got quite a kick out of that. He's told us so many stories and I just wish I could remember--like when he was on the police department. I can't get it together.

Brower: I know. Those things come and go, and when you have to remember them, it's hard to.

McDaniel: Well, to close it off I'd like to say I'm glad to have known him and all of his family. I've met all of his family except Ed. I haven't met him, yet he's my daughter's dentist.

Brower: I have met Ed, and he's a very, very nice man. So you apparently enjoyed your acquaintance with Walter Gordon?

McDaniel: Very much. I wish we had more Walt Gordons.

Brower: Yes, the world could use some!

McDaniel: Yes, very much so. He'd be a good teacher.

Brower: I would think he would. Thank you very much, Mr. McDaniel.

McDaniel: You're quite welcome.

Transcriber: Marilyn Ham
Final Typist: Teresa Allen

IV. FEDERAL SERVICE: Governor and District Judge, Virgin Islands

Interviews with:

Meldrim Thomson

John D. Merwin

Charles I. Schottland



Meldrim Thomson, Jr.

Interview with Meldrim Thomson, Jr.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Date of
Interview: Mid-afternoon, July 6, 1977

Place: The living room of the governor's residence, the historic
Styles Bridges House, Concord, New Hampshire

Those Present: The governor and the interviewer

In this interview, Governor Meldrim Thomson of New Hampshire remembers his client and friend, Governor Walter Gordon of the United States Virgin Islands.

It was not a very convenient day for Governor Thomson to tape record. The legislature had failed to enact a budget by the start of the fiscal year six days before, the government services were expected to be at a complete standstill in a week and, as if a fiscal crisis were not enough, the construction of the nuclear power plant in Seabrook, N.H., was the object of a \$40 million law suit by environmentalists who had been arrested during their protest demonstrations. But the governor stuck to his interview appointment in spite of it all, and shortly after the agreed-upon hour his car rounded the driveway at Bridges House. With his aide, Marshall Cobleigh, taking calls in an adjoining room, the governor took two calls then said, "I think that will be all," and settled into the interview. It was all--until Cobleigh appeared a few minutes later and gleefully announced that the Seabrook case had just been dropped by the courts. A few minutes after that, the governor was called to an urgent meeting with his council, and he was off. He expected to return to finish the interview before his evening calendar began, but the hectic events of the day kept him at the State House too long and we never finished.

However, his wife came in the meantime, and before the two of them had to leave for a dinner engagement, they graciously set up a hasty telephone conference with Dadja Childs Merwin that resulted in plans to flesh out the project with answers to questions I would send to Mrs. Merwin, her husband John (Gordon's secretary, and later governor himself), and Governor Thomson. A steady succession of crises prevented Thomson from ever answering further questions, but John Merwin did send a tape of his own commentary, which became a part of this project.

The interview deals as much as possible with views of Gordon's fiscal and social policies. Thomson's state at the time of the interview was a contrast to the Virgin Islands of the 1950s: it was the only state without a general sales or income tax, and the new taxes that the legislature was

proposing (an individual capital gains tax, a tax on soft drinks, an automobile excise tax, and so on) were doomed because the governor had won three terms with the promise to veto new taxes. In addition, there was already a law against budget deficits. As the press noted, both houses were controlled by Republicans, but they generally had "a more liberal outlook than Thomson."* Thomson himself commented wryly at the beginning of our session that although he was for fiscal conservatism, the present no-budget crisis was "carrying economy a bit too far."

The Styles Bridges House is a historic showplace cherished by New Englanders. Inside, the rich, reddish-brown early American furniture contrasted with the pale oyster-toned carpet. A settee had matching brocade, and the table on which the aide served us iced tea and cookies was round with a black and white marble top. On the walls were some contemporary water colors. A framed Hebrew scroll--Leviticus--temporarily rested sideways against one wall, with the inscription "To the People of New Hampshire from the People of Israel." The dominant wall hanging was a large color graphic of "The Fireman's Muster, Merrimack Square, Manchester, New Hampshire, September 15, 1859," dedicated to the "intrepid fireman of the United States." On the grand piano were a few sheets and books of patriotic and popular songs, and on the lid a small, exquisite four-panel Chinese jade screen. The books lying casually on a side commode denoted the events of the day: the New Hampshire Manual for the General Court; the Canal Zone Code; Atomic Suicide by Walter and Lao Russell. Nearby lay two Bibles, signs of his membership in the Baptist Church.

Although the press referred to him as "an arch conservative known for his flamboyant style," he was quiet, calm-spoken, and without the hail-fellow-well-met bluster of the overly affable politician. He was gracious and at ease. A touch of Florida and Georgia (where he had gone to college and law school and taught political science) was in his speech.

He wanted very much to go on record more fully about his old friend with whom he had had so many philosophical dialogues above the blue waters of the Charlotte Amalie harbor. After he received the transcript, the crisis of his re-election in 1978 prevailed over all. The Seabrook nuclear power plant, whose court victory we had exulted over during our interview, had changed into an albatross of construction expense. The threatened increases in consumer rates for electric service probably, as Newsweek put it, cost Thomson his job.** Ironically, Democrat Hugh Gallen won that election by one-upping Thomson's fiscal conservatism; Gallen opposed the surcharge already instituted.

* Rutland, Vermont Herald, July 8, 1977, p. 1.

** Newsweek, January 1, 1979, p. 41.

After some negotiations for either his review of the transcript or his permission to go ahead and deposit it, aide Marshall Cobleigh conveyed the message that if we did not hear further in two weeks, we were to go ahead with the governor's permission. And that we have done.

It is at least a testament to his friendship with his old friend that he tried heroically to produce a complete interview even though caught in the maelstrom of very trying circumstances.

Amelia R. Fry

January, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: July 6, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH MELDRIM THOMSON, JR.

Fry: 1955 was when Walter Gordon became governor, and I ran over to the library today to see when you were in the Virgin Islands and I couldn't find out.

Thomson: I don't think you would from the library. I started the printing company in 1952 and signed a contract with Puerto Rico that year. I first went to the Virgin Islands in the fall of 1952. I made a survey for the Virgin Islands code then, as I recall.

Fry: That was the Virgin Islands legal code?

Thomson: Yes. The Virgin Islands Code Annotated became the official title.

Fry: Was this your Equity Publishing Corporation?

Thomson: Equity Publishing Corporation. I organized it in 1952. I'd been with the West Publishing Company--law book publishers out of St. Paul, Minnesota, the largest in the world--for sixteen years. I had charge of all their work for the United States code.

Fry: I see. I was wondering how you got down into Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands part of the world.

Thomson: Well, that's it. The first contract I signed after I organized Equity was with Puerto Rico to do a code of laws in Spanish and one in English. The Laws of Puerto Rico Annotated; in Spanish, Leyes de Puerto Rico Anotadas. While we were working on that, I then went over and offered to make a survey and show the people in the Virgin Islands how they could develop a code. That was in terms of a contract with the Interior Department. We were one

Thomson: of several bidders; we were the low bidder. However, one company-- Michie Company out of Charlottesville--had bid cost-plus. So they threw all the bids out and started over again, and on the second bid we continued to be low bidder. We had just started the work on the Virgin Islands code, and it was in that capacity as president of the company, with the contract with the Department of the Interior to do the code of laws for the Virgin Islands, that I first met Governor Gordon. This was at a meeting of an advisory committee of local judges and lawyers and political leaders who were to look over our work as it progressed. I remember this meeting was in Government House in the conference room on the second floor.

Fry: Is this in Charlotte Amalie?

Thomson: Yes. I can see Walt (as I later came to call him) sitting at the end presiding over the meeting.

Fry: Was he governor then?

Thomson: Yes. He had been appointed governor by President Eisenhower, and he remained governor for--I'm not sure of the number of years.

Fry: He was appointed governor in 1955, and he became judge in 1958.

Thomson: 1958, okay. It would be about four years. I would see him almost every time I went to the Virgin Islands after that. My trips were approximately four a year. As we came to know one another, when I was there he and Elizabeth would invite me to go out or I would invite them to Hotel 1829 where I resided.

[PAUSE]

Fry: What's really interesting to me here is how this fits into the very big Organic Act revision in 1954. That must have affected you in your business a lot.

Thomson: Well, not really. They were making basic changes in government, and of course we published it. That's carried in the front part of our code. But our work was with the legislature, with the executive, and at that time only incidentally with the judiciary because the judiciary was a rather small operation. They had one federal district judge, Moore, and they had, as I recall, one municipal judge in each of the Islands--meaning St. Thomas and St. Croix; no one on St. John. But under the [1954 Revised] Organic Act, yes, they did expand the judiciary after that.

- Fry: It looks like Walter Gordon stepped in just as the new government reorganization was getting underway.
- Thomson: That's right.
- Fry: And while he was still serving, for the first time since the United States had taken it over in 1917 there was an elected legislature, unicameral.
- Thomson: No, the legislature was changed, but there hadn't been legislative bodies before that--not an island-wide one, at least. There were municipal councils and before them colonial councils
- Fry: Were they elected?*
- Thomson: The [council members] were elected, yes. The St. Thomas and St. John [councils] were together, as I recall, and St. Croix was the other council district. Before that they had been known as colonial councils.
- Fry: The brief article I read said that in the 1954 Revised Organic Act the powers of the legislature--what was it called, the assembly?--were limited, and there were only fifteen members. So I wondered if this meant Walter Gordon had more power than, say, you or a typical governor in the United States.
- Thomson: No, I wouldn't say that he had more power. He may have had more troubles. He represented the United States; that's what he did as governor. Of course, to begin with, they had several naval captains as their governors. They were moving more toward what we have in the states; under the [1954] Organic Act-- [they instituted] a clearer definition of the three branches of government.
- Fry: Yes, that was what I understood from this article in the Britannica.
- Thomson: But I wouldn't say he had more power; if anything, the governors of the territories had less power than a governor of a sovereign state.
- Fry: Because he was under the Department of the Interior?
- Thomson: Yes. Even the enactments by the legislature, up until the Organic Act, were subject to review in the Interior Department. I think they still have some check on them that way, but it's rather minor.

* The positions of governor and lieutenant governor were not elective offices until a 1968 law.

- Fry: You said he had more troubles than most. What were you referring to?
- Thomson: Well, I think it was not because it was Governor Gordon but because of the politics of the situation.
- Fry: That's what I'm interested in finding out about.
- Thomson: When I first came there, as I recall, the population was about 65,000;* it's now about 100,000. Part of the problem was that he had to work with a native legislature that was very anxious to have its own political way. In making his appointments he'd have to have confirmation by the unicameral legislature; he'd have to have his budgets approved and work with them. He did have some line-item veto powers, but they too were rather limited. There was always a crying need for money. I talked with him, not once but a number of times, as the budget grew and developed. To give you an idea of what's happened, in the Virgin Islands they have close to 12,000 employees in a jurisdiction with 100,000 people.
- Fry: This is government employees?
- Thomson: Yes. It became a political pay-off weapon to control the number of employees, which the legislative leadership managed to do one way or another.
- Fry: The legislature wanting more and more, I guess?
- Thomson: Oh yes, sure. For patronage purposes.
- Fry: What kind of jobs were these? So many people were unskilled, and there wasn't a college there then, was there?
- Thomson: No, when he first went there, there wasn't.
- Fry: So I wondered what kind of jobs the government could provide.
- Thomson: There was a lot of road work, much of it done by hand; a lot of office work, much of it done by those who were unskilled. It was a transitional period for the people. Many of them were limited in their educational opportunities to begin with. There were not many college graduates in those days. That had to come later. So all of these conditions really made problems for the governor. He had problems, too, with crime. I remember talking

*The Encyclopedia Britannica gives population figures for the United States Virgin Islands as 26,000 in 1950; 33,000 in 1960. Black population was 85%.

- Thomson: with him and his being upset with the failure of the Safety Department to really operate a good police force. Of course, he had had experience back in California as a patrolman. He went to that while he was still in college.
- Fry: A Berkeley policeman. I wondered if this helped him at all in dealing with the problem of crime.
- Thomson: It certainly helped him to understand it. He tried as best he could to improve the law-enforcement element in the Virgin Islands.

One of the things he was criticized for was getting a pink Cadillac. They had a calypso about it, the governor and his pink Cadillac.

Fry: A song? [laughter]

Thomson: Yes, it was very interesting. I don't know whether you could get a copy of that or not. The library in Charlotte Amalie might have one. That was very interesting. It was poking fun at him because of his budget and problems of the budget and that sort of thing. I guess he had spoken to some tourist who was there on the main street who was in short pants, some woman. [The song] made some comment that if he didn't speak to them, he had someone in government speak to them; he was opposed to their wearing short pants on the street. This was all woven into the calypso, too.*

He was, I felt, a very well educated man, a fine gentleman, just as I felt his wife, Elizabeth, was a wonderful lady. They came to know some of our children. As I made my trips, I would try to take one of my boys or girls as they approached the age of twelve. Sometimes I'd be gone as long as a week. It was a great experience for our children.

I remember the last one I took was my youngest son, Robb. We have six children, four boys and two girls. Robb was an enthusiastic baseball fan at that time and, as I say, he was about eleven or twelve. Walt had us out to dinner at the Bluebeard Hotel, and he and Robb got into the most animated conversation, just having a wonderful time, about the Dodgers and Jackie Robinson and all the baseball players. Robb knew them all by name and what team they were on and their batting averages, and so did Walt. They were just having a great time. He showed his love for athletics--he was always enthusiastic about athletics--and his ability to mingle in thought with someone much younger than he was characteristic.

*According to Mrs. Walter Gordon, a woman in tennis shorts was rudely reprimanded by a policeman in the streets of Charlotte Amalie. She appealed to the governor, who gave instructions that she was not to be harassed. A law regarding suitable street dress existed and the governor was accused in the calypso of "changing the law for a lydy."

Fry: He must have missed those games.

Thomson: I'm sure he did. At times the whole thing would fall on him, being far from his friends and that sort of thing.

Fry: The island syndrome. Did that seem to sort of get to him occasionally?

Thomson: Yes, I think it did.

Fry: From what you said it sounds like, too, that he was perhaps forced into a position where he would find himself in opposition to the masses on the Island, both in terms of trying to hold the budget down, which meant cutting out jobs or preventing the growth of new jobs, and also in representing the big white government in Washington.

Thomson: Yes. I always had the feeling that the local politicians, or many of them, looked upon him as the "Uncle Tom" prototype from the States. If I recall, he was the second black to be appointed. A gentleman by the name of Alexander, who was a building contractor from some state in the Midwest, preceded Walt. He was there, I guess, less than a year and then left. I think Walt was the second black that they had as governor.

Fry: Did you have to renew your contract every year?

Thomson: We had what we call pocket supplements to the books; at first we had a contract with the Interior Department but then we began to contract with the government of the Virgin Islands.

I also showed them how to print the session laws, and we had a contract to do that for them every year--these are laws enacted by the legislature. That was a service I developed for them. We still carry that on.

Fry: You showed them how to print it?

Thomson: Well, they didn't know how to edit a session law volume.

Fry: Or even how to set it up, you mean?

Thomson: Yes. They had no reporting of their cases, so we started a series of law reports. I guess we've done about twelve volumes now of all of their cases as they have come out. Also we prepared for them other publications, [such as] the opinions of the attorney general and rules and regulations. We've done quite a bit of lawbook work and we continue it year after year now.

Fry: Did this give any jobs to the natives?

Thomson: The publication of the laws? No. We did the editing and the printing in New Hampshire. It was a technical service which, at that time, they had no one skilled and competent to do. It provided them with a series of tools that made the laws readily available to them in understandable form.

Fry: Something like that never creates many jobs anyway.

Thomson: Well, it has with our company.

Fry: [laughter] Yes, I mean the gathering up of the law cases and the session laws isn't a massive operation employing hundreds of people.

Thomson: No. It's not like building a new courthouse.

Fry: Or the roads.

Thomson: That's right.

Fry: Would the session laws require your working along with the legislature? I'm trying to equate this with what I know of California where they do have to print up a lot of bills instantly and continue to reprint the bills as they come through. Did you do anything like that?

Thomson: No, we didn't do that. After they had enacted the law, then we would set them up in chapter form, index them, prepare tables, all of the editorial aids that went with that, and print them. Occasionally we would have a contract to do a new election law for them or to prepare a banking law, and that would be a separate contract just to do the research and present it and go down and hold meetings with their people and discuss it.

Fry: Is this what you did, personally?

Thomson: Yes.

Fry: Is this where you first got interested in government?

Thomson: No, I graduated as a lawyer. I taught political science at the University of Georgia. I have always been interested in politics.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Thomson: You were asking me about government. At that time I was not in government. I was simply serving as a lawbook publisher. I had been a lawbook editor with the West Publishing Company, as I said, for sixteen years and then decided to establish my own company. I did not get into politics until 1964, when I became a member of the constitutional convention. I used to talk politics with Walt when we were down there because he was a Republican and so was I. We had a lot of good talks that way.

I remember, too, a dessert that he taught my wife and I about that we've always enjoyed since then. He loved chocolate ice cream with Tia Maria on it.

Fry: Wow!

Thomson: That's quite a nice dessert.

Fry: I'm glad to pick up that little goodie.

If you talked politics with him, maybe you could give us some idea then of his brand of Republicanism.

Thomson: It's very difficult to use general terms, but on the whole I think he was a conservative, and a rather strong conservative. I know he was very fond of Chief Justice Warren, and he felt that Warren had brought him along in his appointments in California and was probably responsible for his appointment to the governorship in the Virgin Islands.

Fry: How did he feel about the Warren court at that point?

Thomson: I don't think he was really into it too much as governor, and I think his loyalty for Warren was such that--let's see, the Brown* case came along in 1954, and I don't recall hearing any criticism by Walt of that opinion. I think he felt that was all right. Some of the opinions on things like the Miranda case--

Fry: In the civil liberties area, on the rights of the accused?

Thomson: [On] some of those I think he was more sympathetic to the police because of his training. I was just trying to recall any specifics that we talked about at the time.

* Brown v. Board of Education.

- Fry: One thing that Earl Warren did in California was to attempt, partially unsuccessfully, to put in a state health insurance plan. Would Walter Gordon have done anything like that in the Virgin Islands?
- Thomson: No, I don't think he would have. He was very much of a fiscal conservative in the Islands, as I knew him. You see, he had to get part of his money from the Interior and part of it from the federal income tax which was collected in the Virgin Islands and retained by the government of the Virgin Islands. American citizens--well, the Virgin Islanders were citizens, too, but in making out their federal income tax return, they didn't send it to Washington. It was filed with the comptroller in the Virgin Islands. This is still the case. It's also the case in Puerto Rico and in Guam. The citizens in those areas pay their federal income taxes--it's the same law and all--but it goes into the local treasury. That's why Puerto Rico, for example, or the Virgin Islands, are better off financially not being a state because they get to keep that, plus they get all of the grants and aids from Washington. In the case of the Virgin Islands and Guam, both were receiving gratuities from the Department of Interior. I don't know what they do now.
- Fry: But even if he had this revenue, I assume that there wasn't a great deal because of the problem of low incomes or nonexistent incomes for a lot of the population.
- Thomson: Well, that's true, but you must remember that the merchants did have quite a thriving import business. They were doing quite well. There was substantial income. I think he was upset because he felt it was a growing welfare state. Not so much that there were direct handouts, but they were providing all these jobs for people, many of whom were incompetent. You'd have three people to do what one competent person could do. But part of it was to provide an outlet for the money, to keep the economy going. He did improve the roads greatly while he was there.
- Fry: How about the problem of communication and transportation between the Islands? In other words, did he attempt to have direct government boat lines and shipping lines?
- Thomson: There was an almost constant ferry operation between St. Thomas and St. John. It took off at Red Hook at the harbor there. About that time, flying boats came in. I think they called it the Grey Goose. This was between St. Croix and St. Thomas. So, a lot of government officials would fly back and forth that way. Also in those days they had a line that grew and expanded rapidly known as Caribe Air, and they flew between the islands.

Fry: Were these all private?

Thomson: No, they were commercial lines.

Fry: I'm sorry, I meant private commercial as opposed to government owned.

Thomson: No, there were no government-owned lines. As far as I know there are none today either.

Fry: What about schools and hospitals?

Thomson: The hospital, I know, was a real problem to him, and the need for doctors, the need for good nurses. It was much like the schools. The school system was growing and expanding. I forget the exact time they built several of the new schools. They named one after Congressman [Wayne] Aspinall, who was quite a champion of the Virgin Islands. He was on the House Interior Committee. I don't know whether that was completed during Walt's time or John Merwin's time.

Fry: These were secondary schools?

Thomson: Yes, that one was. It was a big one. They've built a number since then.

Let me see, there was Walt, then there was John Merwin, and then Paiwonsky. John Merwin's wife's name was Dadja [Childs]. Her husband had died. He was in World War II, as I recall. Dadja had escaped from Czechoslovakia and come over, and had been secretary to Joe Martin, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1948. She came from there to the Virgin Islands and became Walt's secretary. She was a very competent person. My wife and I have kept in touch with her and John. John Merwin was a lawyer in St. Croix. His family was at Frederiksted, St. Croix, and held extensive commercial interests. John was in the senate, as the Island legislature is known. He became government secretary and then was appointed governor, following Walt Gordon. He married Dadja Childs.

Fry: After she was Walt's secretary?

Thomson: After that time, yes.

Fry: I see. That's getting a well-qualified wife, isn't it?

- Thomson: Yes. She commented to us afterward how when I would come, Walt would have me in and we'd sit there sometimes for three-quarters of an hour or an hour talking philosophy and all kinds of things, history, and just having a wonderful time; and he'd have a big back-up of appointments outside there.
- Fry: I wish you could just reel off all of those talks that you had so we could really get a picture of Walt Gordon's whole philosophy.
- Thomson: Yes, I guess they're kind of gone. But a lot of it was political. He would explain the problems he was having and would be upset with the various members of the legislature. I was trying to think of the president of the senate at the time who was always causing Walt trouble. He led a march at one point on the Government House. Oh, dear. Well, his name may come to me.
- Fry: It was Earl Ottley. He led a march on the what?
- Thomson: He led a march on Government House. This was the official office and residence of the governor.
- Fry: Like the White House.
- Thomson: Yes. And it was a white house.
- Fry: What about?
- Thomson: Oh, they were protesting, I don't know if it was a cut in money for welfare or just what it was. It was all the government employees. They would have that from time to time.
- Fry: Was that a scary, violent-prone march or just an orderly protest?
- Thomson: No, I don't think there was anything violent. I don't recall in the years that I was there anything violent other than an occasional violent crime. There were one or two murders, and things like that. Nothing that was out of the ordinary in a community. We hadn't reached the stage in the sixties when they were having all that violence.

Earl Ottley was the man's name who was president. He was a very competent man and a very dedicated man. He was head of the labor movement; he ran a newspaper, the Home Journal.

Meldrim Thomson, after his interview of July 6, 1977 had been transcribed, was asked five questions about Walter Gordon by mail. Those questions and Governor Thomson's responses follow.

- I. Do you remember how aggressively Walter Gordon tried to build up tourism?

Thomson: I cannot recall specifically how aggressive Governor Gordon was about tourism. I do remember that during his tenure there were some attractive ads in leading magazines and papers describing the advantages of visiting in the Virgin Islands. I also met some of the people working for him on tourism.

- II. What did he see as the most hopeful remedy to the Islands' lack of fresh water?

Thomson: I'm not sure what Governor Gordon thought was the answer to the Islands' fresh water problem. I do recall that they were hauling water by ship from Puerto Rico, and that one time the captain of the vessel got drunk and went swimming in the water. I know the senators were up in arms about this issue, and I believe the captain was fired.

- III. Did he want to continue as governor? Why did he quit in 1958?

Thomson: I do not know whether the Governor wanted to continue in office, nor do I know why it was he left office.

- IV. What were his major challenges on the bench?

Thomson: Probably one of his greatest challenges while on the bench was the need to upgrade the legal knowledge of members of the bar, and the lack of courtroom decorum on the part of many. At the time that he served on the bench, the bar was small in numbers, and made up of quite a few members who had become lawyers by passing correspondence courses. There have been vast improvements in the efficiency of the judicial system and the qualifications of the attorneys since the days when Judge Gordon served on the bench.

- V. Besides having dinner with friends like you, what did he enjoy? Calypso music? Swimming and snorkeling?

Thomson: I am not sure what his pleasures might have been. I recall that he spoke affectionately and often about the members of his family. I recall also that there was a calypso piece written about him and his pink Cadillac. On more than one occasion he drove me with Mrs. Gordon around the Island. I think he enjoyed riding around the countryside.

Transcriber: Marilyn Ham
Final Typist: Teresa Allen



John David Merwin
circa 1970

John D. Merwin: Self-recorded interview

Questions prepared by Amelia R. Fry

INTERVIEW HISTORY

At the suggestion of Mrs. Walter Gordon, and with the assistance of Governor Meldrim Thomson, John David Merwin was asked to contribute his recollections of Walter Gordon in the Virgin Islands. Mr. Merwin is eminently qualified to do this. He was number-two man in the government of the Virgin Islands while Walter Gordon was serving as governor; his post was government secretary from 1957 to 1958. He then succeeded Walter Gordon as governor of the Virgin Islands, and in turn served in that position until 1961.

The following interview was self-recorded by Mr. Merwin in response to suggested questions about Walter Gordon submitted to him by Amelia R. Fry. These questions are listed below.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: August 15, 1977]

SELF-RECORDED INTERVIEW BY JOHN D. MERWIN

[Questions Prepared by Amelia Fry]

I. How did Walter Gordon organize his office in the beginning?

Is there anything relevant in the fact that the Organic Act had just been revised, making a central legislative body? Did it give more powers to the governor or less? Was he the first governor to function in the new system? Also, please explain to us mainlanders what it means when a governor shares power with an executive agency (Interior) in Washington. How did Governor Gordon get along with Interior?

As a bit of Virgin Island history, it would be interesting to know why it got a unicameral legislature rather than a bicameral.

II. What did he plan or do about the problem of:

- crime
- need for fresh water sources
- too many unskilled - an unemployment problem - (and a welfare system?)
- immigration of the less fortunate to the U.S. Virgin Islands

III. True that, with 85 percent of the population black, there was no tradition of racial discrimination? One source notes the only group that remained aloof was the Chachas of St. Thomas, who were "aloof" (formerly French Huguenots). Were there ethnic divisions on political issues? Was Governor Gordon's color an asset or a liability--and how?

IV. Along what lines did opinion divide on public issues? What comprised Governor Gordon's support--and who led it? His opposition? (Earl Ottley?) Press relations?

- V. Was housing a problem? Education? (Were there quite a few private schools?)
- VI. What sort of cases were his major ones, as judge?
- VII. Please make Walter Gordon come to life for us. You might address such aspects of him as:
- What did he do to relax? "To blow off steam"?
 - What sort of entertainment did he prefer?
 - What kind of people did he prefer for his real friends?
 - As an administrator, what were his outstanding characteristics (such as delegator--with sufficient aides--or a more personal type of executive)?
 - Did he identify strongly with his race?
 - How did he combine his family life with his public life--or did he? (Any anecdotes about this?)
 - Can you give us an idea of his political philosophy?
 - Religion--church?
- VIII. Why the change from governor to judge?

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

Merwin: I will dictate answers to certain questions relating to the late Governor Walter A. Gordon who served as governor of the Virgin Islands from 1955 to 1958 and later as judge of the District Court of the Virgin Islands from 1958 to 1968. These recollections are being put on this tape in response to a request from Ms. Amelia R. Fry, interviewer-editor, Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley, California. Ms. Fry wrote to me on July 14, 1977, requesting that these recollections be placed on tape for the Walter Gordon project of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

John David Merwin served as number-two man in the government of the Virgin Islands. His post was government secretary from 1957-1958 while Walter Gordon was serving as governor, and then he succeeded Walter Gordon as governor of the Virgin Islands in 1958, and in turn served in that position until 1961.

I will first of all respond to the suggested questions concerning Walter A. Gordon as proposed in a paper attached to Ms. Fry's letter of July 14, 1977. The questionnaire contains eight basic questions relating to the major ones.

Merwin: The first question asked in the questionnaire was, "How did Walter A. Gordon organize his office in the beginning?" Well, Governor Gordon took over the office of governor late in 1955, as I recall, from Archie Alfonso Alexander. Governor Alexander was appointed to the post in 1955, and did not serve for very long because of ill health. He had to resign the office after just over a year in office. The difficult transition from the Organic Act of 1936 to that of 1954 took place for the most part during the tenure of Archie Alexander. Archie Alexander, the predecessor to Walter Gordon, was the first Republican appointee of General Eisenhower to be governor of the Islands. He in turn took over from Morris F. de Castro, who had been appointed by President Harry Truman back in 1950 and had carried over his term into the first couple of years of General Eisenhower's term as president.

The 1954 Organic Act was implemented by a task force which worked closely with Governor Alexander in 1955. It was a very difficult time because the unified legislature was meeting for the first time and was getting adjusted to the new Organic Act, and all of the government departments, commissions, and boards were being reorganized and consolidated in accordance with the requirements of the 1954 Organic Act. This task took a lot out of former governor Archie Alexander and, I think, contributed to a great extent to his decline in health after just over a year or so in office and his being obliged to leave the Islands and retire from federal office.

Walter Gordon came along in October 1955 and picked up where Governor Alexander had left off. It was not an easy task but he went at it in a very calm and careful manner and, for the most part, was a great stabilizing factor in the government. The new Organic Act of 1954 did not materially affect the powers of the governor. When we speak of the question of the governor sharing power with the executive agency in Washington--the Department of Interior--that was a fact that existed at the time. The governor was appointed by the president and subject to the advice and consent of the United States Senate.

However, he did have to work under the general supervision and jurisdiction of the secretary of the interior and, in that position, the governor reported to the director of the Office of Territories, who was the individual in the executive branch of the federal government who directly supervised the activities of the various territorial governments. It was team work that had to be closely adhered to because under the 1954 Organic Act substantial sums of revenue were returned to the government of the Islands from the federal government, but could be spent only with the prior approval and concurrence of the secretary of the interior. For that reason a close working relationship had to be developed between the Department of the Interior--working through the Office of Territories--and the governor, who was the main contact and the head of the entire insular government, responsible to the federal government in Washington.

Merwin: The question is asked, "How did Governor Gordon get along with the Department of the Interior?" and my recollection is that his working relationship was a very warm and smooth one. Governor Gordon was not a person who looked for controversies but rather sought for solutions to problems and was easy to get along with. I do not recall any special difficulties that arose during his term of office between him and the Office of Territories or the Department of the Interior.

A side line to this first question is my attempt to answer the question raised in the paper submitted to me as to why the Virgin Islands got a unicameral legislature rather than a bicameral legislature. It just happens that there was, at the head of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, a senator from Nebraska by the name of Senator [Hugh A.] Butler. Senator Butler represented in the Senate of the United States the state of Nebraska which is one state of the union that has always had a unicameral legislature. It was from his vantage point as a representative of the state of Nebraska in Washington and chairman of the Senate committee which had direct responsibility for the passing of the 1954 Organic Act, that he saw fit to suggest and to push the idea of a unicameral legislature for the Virgin Islands. This also was done, keeping in mind the demographic factors involved--because when the act was passed in 1954 the population of the Virgin Islands was at its lowest point in many, many years.

From the time that the Islands were acquired in 1917 by the United States from Denmark, when the population was over 40,000, or rather, closer to 50,000 inhabitants, it dropped to somewhere in the low forty thousands by 1930; it had dropped into the thirty thousand area by 1940; and by 1954 the population of all the Virgin Islands was down to just a bit over 24,000 persons. With this trend before the Senate, it did not seem that there would be any need for a large number of representatives to be elected to a legislature; it did not seem to Senator Butler and other members of the House and Senate committees at that time that, with a declining population, anything would be gained by burdening the small group of taxpayers involved with two houses in their legislature and with many more persons to be paid and provided for in the legislative process than was absolutely necessary. For that reason, the 1954 Organic Act provided for a unicameral legislature of only eleven members.

I, the speaker, served as a member of the first legislature and also as a member of the second legislature, the first legislature being elected in November of 1954 and the second legislature being elected in 1956. Just as a side note, I resigned from the second legislature in December of 1957 in order to assume the office of government secretary, which had been vacated several months before when Charles Claunch resigned that office. So, having served in the

Merwin: first and second legislatures of the Virgin Islands, I am very much aware of the fact that it was thought that eleven representatives would be quite sufficient to take care of the needs of the people of the Islands.

I move on now to question number two. You ask, "What did Governor Gordon plan or do about the problem of crime?" In the late 1950s there was very little crime in the Virgin Islands. The television industry had not extended its tentacles to the territory and the people were generally contented and well disciplined and peaceful, apart from the normal Saturday-night drinking problems or occasional burglaries. The Virgin Islands in the late 1950s was very quiet. Crime was not a real problem to the government.

On the question of fresh-water sources, Governor Gordon didn't face any vast water problems. The population was still small. Probably during his time in office it had reached 27,000 or 28,000 people. The tourist industry was not large at the time. It had gone from 16,000 tourists in 1950 to maybe 120,000 to 150,000 by 1958. But that was still not a large tourist population. So we were able to meet most of our fresh-water needs by barging in fresh water from the navy base at the eastern end of Puerto Rico into St. Thomas. St. Croix, the larger of the three Islands, did not have a water problem at that time, and the St. Thomas water problem was fairly well taken care of by a barge and tug which shuttled back and forth between the naval base in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas a couple of times a week.

On the matter of the unskilled, or unemployment problem and the welfare problem, these were not of any significance during the late 1950s. There were always efforts being made to develop trade schools. Walter Gordon was interested in improving a small trade school in St. Thomas and also one in St. Croix. But it was not a major project and did not constitute a major problem. The unemployment problem was not a great one at the time. Up until the late 1950s there was no unemployment insurance program and therefore there wasn't the inclination of people to seek the status of unemployment. There were no benefits to be gained from it. So there was relatively little unemployment.

The welfare program was not a major problem at the time. It was pretty well contained and limited to the older part of the population and some of the dependent children whose fathers had run off and left their mothers with no visible means of support. But there again, it was not at that time a major problem.

The immigration of large numbers of people from the other islands to the south, less fortunate, had not developed any significant size or proportions by 1958, and it was pretty well contained and under control. By 1958 the standard of living and the wages in the Virgin

Merwin: Islands had not increased as they did in the 1960s after heavy industry moved into the territory, and therefore there wasn't the large disparity between the wages down in the British Islands and French islands and those in the U.S. Virgin Islands, as now exists, for example, twenty years later. So I don't think Governor Gordon really had an awful lot of problems to deal with there.

Moving on to question number three. There was no tradition of racial discrimination. That is true. The different racial groups in the Virgin Islands traditionally got along very well, and it continued that way through the 1950s. The French Chachas of St. Thomas remained pretty much to themselves. They came from France originally and attempted to retain some degree of racial purity by having strict rules for marrying within the community and what-have-you. That had gone on for many, many long years and was just a fact that was recognized in St. Thomas where the Chachas live. There again, they only constituted 6 or 8 percent of the St. Thomas population and that would make the Chacha population probably 4 percent of the overall Virgin Islands population. Even though they maintained this sort of aloofness, there were never any racial overtones to the problem, and they got along fairly well with the other members of the St. Thomas society.

You ask a question whether there were ethnic divisions on political issues. The answer to that is that I don't think that in the Virgin Islands very much attention was given to the color of a man's skin. The people were more interested in what type of man he was, whether he was honest and sincere and willing to govern honestly. Walter Gordon was not a flamboyant person. He was a very humble, sort of withdrawn person. Being a non-native, having grown up and spent most of his adult life until he came to the Virgin Islands in the far-away state of California, the language which Governor and Mrs. Gordon spoke back home was somewhat different than the language of the locals in the Virgin Islands. There was a problem of communication, of understanding the people, which existed all the time that he was governor, and perhaps to some extent during his later years as judge. But this didn't relate to the question of what color his skin was. It was related to the fact that he came from a different culture to the Virgin Islands and never quite got to understand what made the local islanders tick.

This would have been a problem for a white continental just as it was for him as a colored continental. But I don't think it was either increased or decreased because of his color. The speaker happens to be a member of the white community. Walter Gordon was a colored governor who followed Archie Alfonso Alexander, a colored governor; and Archie Alexander followed a local "boy," Morris F. de Castro, who was of Jewish extraction and who had worked all his life in the government of the Virgin Islands from a messenger boy

Merwin: on up. Therefore, both Archie Alexander and Walter Gordon, being from away, experienced problems in communicating with the people. They were not the first colored men to serve as governor of the Islands. Prior to Morris de Castro, the first colored governor was William Henry Hastie, who was appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt to be governor in 1946 and who resigned in 1949 and was succeeded by Morris de Castro in 1950. So governors Alexander and Gordon were the second and third colored men respectively to serve as governor. And then your speaker was a white governor who followed the two colored governors, and the question of the race or color was never a great matter of concern to the people one way or the other during these periods. I think that probably is the only way the question can be answered in light of the situation in the Virgin Islands where the different races and people of different complexions and what-have-you have traditionally gotten along very well.

On your fourth question, "Along what lines did [public] opinion divide on public issues? What comprised Governor Gordon's support--and who led it? His opposition? And his press relations?" To answer the first part of that question, public opinion divided on issues, as I said earlier, perhaps most glaringly as the different attitudes of the separate Islands were concerned. I think that for the most part the people of St. Croix supported Walter Gordon. He was a Republican appointee. Your speaker was the only Republican elected in the first legislature.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Merwin: This is the second side of the tape on Walter A. Gordon, describing his service as governor of the Virgin Islands from 1955 to 1958. The speaker is John David Merwin, who served as governor immediately following Walter Gordon, from 1958 to 1961.

At the end of the first side of the tape I was discussing along what lines public opinion might have been divided [in the Virgin Islands], and I was stating that it probably divided more on an insular basis than any other, with many people from St. Croix supporting the governor, and the St. Thomas politicians led by Earl B. Ottley, who was then a very powerful labor union leader and majority leader of the legislature, who opposed Walter Gordon. Senator Ottley's group, called the Unity Party, had traditionally fought governors because that group in the legislature resented any attempt by the executive branch to impinge upon their prerogatives as legislators. To that group, led by Mr. Ottley at the time, I think the general impression was that they wanted to exercise as many of the executive powers as possible. They wanted to control the wages that the government employees would receive, determine who would be hired, and who would be fired and how things would generally be done.

Merwin: Governor Gordon and his predecessor and those who succeeded him have spent a lot of their time fighting the members of the legislature and the group generally controlled by senators Ottley and Maduro and others in St. Thomas who have fought the governors on the question as to who would actually exercise the greatest amount of authority in administering the executive branch of government. It is a fight that is normal to most governments where you have a separation of the powers.

The governor's support in the first legislature was given by a group of four legislators, including the speaker, who formed sort of a loyal minority with just sufficient number of votes to uphold Governor Gordon's vetoes of legislation that he felt was not in the interest of the people. The threat of upholding his vetoes gave that small group of four senators a lot of opportunity to affect legislation proposed and backed by the majority in the legislature.

On the question of his press relations. Walter Gordon was not press oriented. He wasn't politically oriented and never gave a great deal of attention to his public relations from that standpoint. He never had a full-fledged press officer, but occasionally would meet with members of the press or members of the radio establishment and give them interviews. But it was very much a hit-or-miss method.

Question five relates to housing and education. Housing was always a problem in the Virgin Islands as there were attempts being made by the Federal Housing Administration to build large projects to provide better accommodations for the population. Some of these projects did create some problem for the governor. There was a young administrator by the name of Henry A. Milne, the executive director of the Federal Housing Authority, who did a magnificent job through these years and, I believe, kept many problems away from the governor.

Education was always a problem but it was just a continuing matter of finding the right teachers and the right people to head the departments. I wouldn't say that there was a tremendous amount of effort given to this by the governor because it wasn't in a crisis situation at the time. In the late fifties I think there was only one private school in St. Thomas, in addition to the parochial schools which were operated in all big population centers by the Roman Catholic church. The parochial schools of the Catholic church have traditionally turned out most of the best leaders in the local community, and they have continued to do so through the sixties and even into the seventies. Of course, today the population of the schools has grown probably four or five times from what it was in the late fifties and, therefore, the percentage of students attending the parochial and private schools is perhaps smaller today than what it was twenty years ago.

Merwin: Insofar as question six is concerned, the question is asked, "What sort of cases were his major ones as judge?" The speaker, unfortunately, cannot shed much light on this subject. I suggest you turn to others such as attorney William W. Bayley of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, or perhaps Alrich L. Christian who is now the chief judge of the U.S. District Court of the Virgin Islands, both of whom would have practiced law before the district court while Judge Gordon was sitting. Unfortunately, your speaker was in the Government House from 1958-1961, and from 1961-1967 I was serving in banking and law publishing outside of the Virgin Islands and thus did not resume my law practice until 1967--just a year or so before Judge Gordon retired as federal judge. I therefore cannot help you much on that subject.

On question seven, in an effort to make Walter Gordon come to life you ask that I address some aspects of his career such as "What did he do to relax or to blow off steam?" Walt Gordon didn't have much in the way of recreation as governor. He put in long hours. To get away from it all he would sometimes take Mrs. Gordon and just go for a drive in his official car around the Island, get some fresh air, go off to a quiet place and just get away from the hubbub.

One of his favorite relaxations was telling of his early days as a football player in California, and he also used to like to tell stories about his life as a police officer and later when he served on the Adult Authority, to which he was appointed by Governor Earl Warren. He liked to reminisce a lot about his early life because he was in his sixties when he was appointed governor of the Islands and had had quite a career behind him. Apart from that, he really didn't participate in much in the way of entertainment as governor. Later as judge, when he was off the bench he went home and he and Mrs. Gordon were very close to each other, and they spent most of their evenings quietly at home. He was not a social butterfly and would only go out when he had to in an official capacity. As to what kind of entertainment he preferred, I think a ball game, looking at the TV if he could get a good professional football game or a baseball game. That was probably as much as he looked for in the field of entertainment.

Apart from the speaker and one or two others, I don't think that the Gordons had many real friends in St. Croix or St. Thomas. They led a sort of a very private, secluded life. So I would say that the number of friends he had could probably be numbered on the fingers of one hand.

As an administrator, he wasn't a strong administrator. He liked to delegate most of the details of his office to his assistants. While I served under him as government secretary, or number-two man

Merwin: in the government, he used to call me in, present me with a problem, and let me take the ball and run with it. He would only be interested to know that sometime down the line I would let him know that the matter was taken care of. The people around him would write his letters. He would often sign them without really reading what was in them, apart from the fact that he would know the gist of a letter. He wasn't very concerned with the format or the content.

"Did he identify strongly with his race?" Yes and no. He did identify himself as the first colored All-American* football player in America and also as a pioneer in public service. He was ahead of his time in many of the jobs that he served in. He was proud of that. He was proud of being a leader of the colored population of the United States and of having accomplished as much as he did. He had to overcome a lot of handicaps since he was working in his prime in times that were quite different from those we know today. Yet, although he identified strongly with his race, he didn't seem to have too many friends among the colored people of the Virgin Islands. He naturally seemed to seek out a friend who seemed to be more from the white population or white continentals who had something in common with him.

He did not combine his family life with his public life at all. He and Elizabeth Gordon led a very private life when they were not actually on duty.

I think his political philosophy followed pretty much that of his mentor and idol, Earl Warren. He was a Republican at heart. He didn't want to get the government messing around in areas that it didn't have to, and yet he had a very big heart and he wanted to do as much as he could for the unfortunate and the oppressed and help those that he felt the government should reach out and help.

He was never a church man that I know of. But I think that basically Walt Gordon was a deeply religious man in his own way. He had very high principles and high scruples, and he lived by them. He was a great person and a fine character in every way.

In regard to the eighth question, "Why the change from governor to judge?" Mrs. Gordon was never happy as wife of the governor. Walter Gordon was never content with his job as governor. He took it very seriously. He took the responsibilities of office seriously.

*Walter Gordon and Paul Robeson were both named to All-American teams in 1918.

Merwin: He fussed a lot about all that was happening. And I think he did not react well to the criticism that was leveled at him. He wasn't a hardened politician. I think a lot of the criticism that was leveled at him was unjustified, but especially Mrs. Gordon took it to heart. I think that he was a very unhappy man during the last few months in office, and I don't think that his health would have held up very much longer as governor because the strain and responsibility was probably too much for him.

When it was decided that he should relinquish the governorship because of personal and health reasons, his friends in Washington, including I'm sure Chief Justice Warren and others who were very fond of him and believed in him, took it upon themselves to have him appointed to take the place of Judge Herman E. Moore, who had retired, I think, in 1957 or early 1958, as judge of the district court. I was then asked to take over the governorship from Walt Gordon, and we did so on a very warm, personal basis. He insisted that he had to be the judge to swear me in as governor, and so he was sworn in as judge on the morning of the 25th of September, 1958, at around 9:30 or 9:45. Then he donned his robes as judge and came over to the inaugural ceremonies where he very graciously swore me in as governor and as his successor in office as governor of the Virgin Islands.

As judge he seemed to acquit himself very well over a period of ten years until his retirement. He was never rated a brilliant jurist. His grasp of the law was probably sound. Many of his decisions were upheld by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia; some of them were overturned. But I think he applied his best judgment to every case. He was always honest, sincere, and gave of himself and of his abilities to the job of being a well-respected federal district court judge.

I think that about concludes my remarks on Walter Gordon. He was a very dear friend of mine, and I think he and his wife were fond of my wife and me and vice versa. We had a very close working relationship all the time that we served together in the executive branch of the government. We were sorry to see him leave the territory, but he served very well for the better part of twelve years, almost thirteen years, and left his mark in the Islands. We felt that when he did retire in 1968 he was ready for a well-earned retirement and rest and the enjoyment of his twilight years with his lovely family--children, grandchildren, and perhaps by then great-grandchildren in California. As soon as he retired as judge he returned to California and spent the rest of his life there, as you are very well aware.

Transcriber: Marilyn Ham
Final Typist: Lee Steinback



Charles Schottland

Interview with Charles I. Schottland

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Charles I. Schottland was tapped for his memories of Walter Gordon as the result of a series of serendipitous events. While president of Brandeis University he contributed two valuable interviews to the Regional Oral History Office's Earl Warren Era Project on his years in California as director of Social Welfare, to appear in the volume entitled "Social Welfare and State Parks." In the course of those interviews he had informally made generous and affectionate comments about his old friend and colleague, Walter Gordon. So, when the Walter Gordon project was initiated, he was a natural to be invited to contribute his memories when the interviewer was once again in the Boston area.

The interview took place in Professor Schottland's spacious office in the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare overlooking Brandeis's green and glowing campus. Mr. Schottland talked primarily about the years Walter Gordon spent as governor and federal judge in the Virgin Islands when Schottland was commissioner of Social Security in Washington. He discussed some of the difficulties that Gordon encountered as a black from the mainland, incurring the hostility of both the black and white establishments of the Islands. Mr. Schottland also recalled conversations with Walter Gordon on anti-Semitism, prejudice in general, and the value of education. He concluded by describing Gordon as an engaging man with a good sense of humor. "When I met him in the Virgin Islands, he'd always hug me, a very jovial person."

Rosemary Levenson
Interviewer-Editor

11 November 1977
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: May 27, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES SCHOTTLAND

Levenson: Thank you, Mr. Schottland, for seeing me today.

Schottland: Well, it's a pleasure, particularly to talk about Walter Gordon. My relationship with Walter Gordon was quite limited. I knew him first when I was director of Welfare for the state of California, 1950 to 1954. He was chairman of the Adult Authority. I had a feeling at the time that he was very, very close to Warren.

He was considered a good chairman of the Adult Authority.

Levenson: Good on what criteria?

Schottland: I really don't know. He certainly received no attacks from social workers and liberals at the time, so I would assume that his decisions on parole were clearly well received.

I knew very little more about him, although meeting him at so many meetings we got to know each other fairly well, but it was not either a personal or a professional relationship.

When we moved to Washington, between 1954 and 1959, he was in Washington frequently; at that time he was governor of the Virgin Islands.

Levenson: Do you know anything about how he was selected for governor?

Schottland: I assume that Earl Warren recommended him to [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower. I assume that that was the relationship, that Earl Warren recommended him to Eisenhower. I went down to the Virgin Islands once while he was governor, and then after that, while he was on the federal bench, a federal judge. And I spent a lot of time with him both times.

*See interview with Charles Irwin Schottland, "Charles Irwin Schottland: State Director of Social Welfare, 1950-54," in Earl Warren As Executive: Social Welfare and State Parks, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977.

Schottland: First, as governor, he was very much resented in the Islands; part of that had to do with his being an American black. My understanding of the Islands is that they prefer, if a black person is to be appointed, that it be a Virgin Islander. If it's not a Virgin Islander they could tolerate a white person from the continent, but not a black person. They hated other people who were down there previously who were black.

Levenson: How was this resentment expressed? Do you have any idea?

Schottland: Yes. I have a little clearer idea about it when he became judge. Let me go to that and answer your question and come back to his period as governor.

When he became judge the Bar Association never even invited him to make a talk, or even to attend their meetings. And he was the judge there. Until one time for some reason--it's vague in my mind now--he had to be invited; there was something that related to the office. And he made a very good impression and after that was invited again. But initially they wouldn't even invite him. He was sort of socially ostracized, too.

As governor, he tried to do a lot of things. The Islands were probably, at least according to him, not very well run, full of politics, controlled by just a few families; the Paiwonsky family, white, Jewish; the Borne family, black; and a few others. They sort of divided all the profitable business among them--hotels and banks and everything else. Walter Gordon tried to bring some order into the governmental operations, and it was very much resented--the change was resented, or his proposals for change.

I don't think he resented the resentment as governor as much as he did as judge. When he became judge, he felt that certainly the Bar Association ought to accept him on his merits as a lawyer and judge rather than as an American black. He felt that was not a situation in which they ought to hold a personal grudge. So he was very unhappy in the Virgin Islands. I know when I visited him as judge he took me to the governor's mansion.

Levenson: Who was governor then?

Schottland: I think it was one of the Paiwonskys. I'm not sure; I think so. So that would be a Virgin Islander. But I could tell from the attitude of the people we met in the governor's mansion that they were not enthusiastic. They nodded and called him "governor" but you could just see that he wasn't their favorite.

Schottland: He was a charming person, being a husky fellow, good looking.

That in general sums up my contacts with him. As I say, they were limited.

Levenson: You said that the Virgin Islands were not well run; was there a lot of corruption?

Schottland: He felt that there was. I don't think that he uncovered--or had--specific evidence. He wanted to tighten up the administrative and accounting, purchasing, and other procedures, to avoid it, and found a great deal of difficulty. Now, I don't know whether the difficulty was the usual bureaucratic difficulty of opposition to just any change or whether there was anything more fundamental.

Levenson: Do you know how much he was actually able to accomplish in those difficult circumstances?

Schottland: No, I really don't. His evaluation was that he accomplished a great deal, but I don't know whether this is correct or not.

Levenson: Was he at all specific? Were there any particular areas of his governorship that he was proud of?

Schottland: If he told me, I don't remember.

Levenson: I'd like to ask a question in two parts: When he was made a federal judge after being governor, was this regarded as a demotion by people in general; and was it regarded as a demotion by Walter Gordon?

Schottland: No, I think not. I think it's what he wanted because it would take him out of the political area, and he may have had in mind that if successful there he might get a regular federal appointment, which would be a life appointment. I think this is what he was playing for.

Levenson: Do you think he was disappointed that he ended his career in the Virgin Islands?

Schottland: I think so, yes. I'm pretty sure that he was.

Levenson: Was the population predominantly white in the Virgin Islands?

Schottland: I think predominantly black, but I'm not sure of that. I think so; I think predominantly black.

Levenson: What took you down to the Virgin Islands?

Schottland: Well, once when I went down there, I was there representing the Children's Bureau, looking over their welfare setup.

The Virgin Islands had a very different kind of relationship, under the Social Security Act, to the federal government. They didn't get the same formula treatment in terms of reimbursement of funds expended that the states had. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands were sort of step-children, and the unstated excuse for a separate formula was that their standard of living was so low that to give the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico the same reimbursement formula would give them much more money than they could properly spend, would raise some of the people much above the average wage in the Islands.

Levenson: Was that invalid, do you think?

Schottland: Yes, I think the argument was invalid. You know, you can raise the same question about some states here--the wages are lower and you have a public program which has a policy of giving not enough to live on, not even enough to starve slowly on, just because other people are not earning more. So that to that extent I have never thought this was a valid argument. I don't think because we have one wrong--the low wages--that we can say, well anybody that doesn't work should get less, and therefore they can starve too. We have to solve that by taking care of people properly and then raising the wages. You don't take the worst solution to the problem.

That was the stated reason; I think that there was always a feeling on the part of some people, "Well, they're not exactly part of the United States; they don't pay taxes to the United States, and why should they get tax-fund money paid. They ought to supply a larger percentage of it themselves, because they don't pay federal income taxes.

I was down there investigating their welfare setup and working out some budgetary problems, and a chap by the name of Borne, one of the prominent families, was the head of the welfare department. He was a pretty able fellow and was doing a pretty good job. He was a member of one of the prominent black families.

And the second time I went down we had some social security problem, in bringing them under social security. Both in Puerto Rico and in the Virgin Islands, we felt there was a great deal of fraud of a very peculiar kind--not the kind we have here. When we brought the self-employed under social security, we found that a large number of persons both in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands had never filed any income tax. They now

Schottland: wanted to prove that they had made sufficient money each year to be included under social security and were willing to pay the tax, which would amount to nothing then--you know, a thousand dollars income. Because if they were sixty-five or close to it, they'd be getting monthly payments for life; within a couple of months they could make back all they paid in. So they would bring relatives and friends in to testify that they had made quite a bit of money. In Puerto Rico, we actually got--with the sort of implied consent of the administration down there--we got a very popular older man in one of the cities. There wasn't any question about his guilt. We prosecuted, and the judge understood, either directly or indirectly, I'm not sure, that the last thing in the world we wanted to do was to have this man go to jail. But we wanted a lot of publicity so that everyone recognized that they might go to jail. So he was found guilty and put on probation. Maybe it was technical probation; I don't think he had to report or anything. It was just with the idea of stopping this kind of chiseling. And I was down to talk to them about this in the Virgin Islands.

Levenson: Did you stay with the Gordons?

Schottland: No, but we were with them both times. The second time my wife was with me and we were with them all day, drinking daiquiris, banana daiquiris.

Levenson: How was it with the Gordons? Did you get the impression of people who were having a good time in spite of the difficult circumstances?

Schottland: Yes. They enjoyed it. They enjoyed the climate, the general community, and I felt that they were sort of happy with the situation. I think by the time we were down there the second time, Walter had reconciled himself to the fact that they weren't going to be received with open arms, and was just accepting it. He had a good job, and a good salary, and then Mrs. Gordon just didn't get involved too much in his personal problems that way, so I think she was enjoying it.

Levenson: Now, how would you feel--do you have anything to draw on in suggesting areas that are too touchy to discuss with people who knew him at various stages of his life--undergraduate life, civil rights, his athletic career, etc.?

Schottland: No, I can't think of anything where there would be a racial or white problem. He had a lot of white friends. I just don't know of anything.

Levenson: To go back to the days when you were in California state government together, did you ever have any personal contacts with him?

Schottland: No, not in California. You see, I was in Sacramento and he was, I think, in San Francisco. I think he worked out of San Francisco. I think so. At any rate, he wasn't around Sacramento much. He'd come to the governor's council meetings and then we'd have some strategy meetings, on budget or with the legislature.

Warren used to divide his cabinet into committees, and the welfare committee, or whatever it was called, included the Adult Authority, and Youth Authority, and Health and Welfare, and one or two other things, so I'd meet him there and every once in a while we'd have a strategy meeting with the governor, among ourselves, on some of the minor matters, such things as: Do you introduce all the bills of the administration at once, or who introduces the bills--the governor has ten or twelve favorites to introduce the bills; who approaches them first and which bills get priority; and you get the most prestigious legislator to introduce the priority bills. And so I'd meet him at those meetings.

Levenson: What was your impression of him as a negotiator and administrator?

Schottland: I had a very good impression of him. He certainly was thoughtful in connection with the matters we discussed. As an administrator, I never saw him in action, but in terms of analyzing some of the problems, his political sense--well, he was very good.

Levenson: What were his personal politics? Did you ever discuss them?

Schottland: No, but I assumed he was a conservative, that's just the impression I always had. He certainly was not a militant black. I think he was very middle class, very conservative; he dressed conservatively, always well, in the typical white middle-class mode. I never saw him in casual dress, not even in the Virgin Islands, when I was there. He was very well dressed.

Levenson: Now, what have I forgotten to ask you?

Schottland: Well, I don't know. One person that knew him very well was Pop [Merrell F.] Small.

Levenson: He's one of our consultants, a great friend to the office.

Schottland: Yes. Well, Pop had a lot to do with him, as he did with all of us. He was the secretary of the governor and he was the liaison with all of the departments. But he had a particular interest in a few departments, and the general welfare group were of more interest to him than others--health, welfare, prisons, and so forth. He had relationships with all departments, but I don't think he was very much interested in highways and forests and so forth.

Schottland: Pop was a very sharp secretary. As he's gotten older he's sort of slowed down a little. I met him a couple of years ago in Berkeley and he was quite a different person. He doesn't have that sharpness--maybe all of us as we get older lose something. But Pop was an extremely effective general secretary, a sort of general assistant to the governor. He had a terrific public relations sense, which came I guess from his career as a journalist.

Levenson: Did you ever meet the Gordons's children?

Schottland: No. They weren't in the Virgin Islands at the time we were there. I don't know where they were.

Levenson: I think Walter Gordon's retirement was a very sad period for him. Would you have predicted that?

Schottland: No. No. I never thought of him as a tense person. I remember once, someone saying he was tense. This was when he was still on the parole board. But he certainly didn't give that impression. He gave the impression of being a very relaxed, secure-type person, very sure of himself. But I remember someone saying that he was ready to explode. He was very tense. This was way back then. But I never saw that; he hid it certainly. No. I guess he just deteriorated when he retired.

Levenson: Well, times have changed, and as you commented, he was not a radical black; perhaps in the sixties he was not comfortable in the new climate. I don't know how you would explain the difficulties.

Schottland: Maybe he felt, you know, isolated. A lot of blacks had troubles during that period. Whitney Young, who is head of the Urban League, came here to lecture at one of our campuses. I had not known he was coming and I said to my wife, "Let's go. We haven't seen Whitney in a long time." We were very close friends. And there were about ten rows of black students sitting in the front of the auditorium. This was at the height of the antagonisms. Whitney started up the stage steps and as he looked around he saw us in the audience, so he excused himself and came down, everyone watching him, maybe six hundred people or so in the audience. And he shook hands and said hello to me and then leaned over and kissed my wife. Then, looking at the black students, he whispered to us, "I lost part of my audience." [laughter]

Levenson: Did they give him a bad time?

Schottland: No. He said the right things. But those were rough times for blacks. You take--what was his name?--he's a professor, a black leader, who takes the position that black prejudice is just as bad as white prejudice.

Levenson: Clark, do you mean?

Schottland: No, not Clark. He's a very prominent black leader. Yes, it was a rough time and even Whitney Young had a rough time for a period, because he wasn't understood, particularly when the Black Panthers were rampant. A lot of our blacks here had a rough time with Black Panthers, because they were displaying their literature and so forth. I got in on the end of this when I was president [of Brandeis University]. I told the black leaders that we would not permit Black Panther literature on the campus to be distributed. If they wanted to mail it to students' homes, well, that's their problem, but not to be distributed. It was full of anti-Semitic utterances and it was about as vicious as anything you could get in the early Nazi literature, maybe more so even. The early Nazi literature was much more subtle. This was rough and tough, in terms of real anti-Semitism.

So some of the black leaders here who agreed with this point of view--that this was just unconscionable--found themselves very unpopular with the more militant ones.

Levenson: Did you ever discuss anti-Semitism with Walter Gordon?

Schottland: Yes, I did, as a matter of fact. Not in terms of this Black Panther business, because that was later. But I did and his feeling was that it was just like prejudice of any kind, prejudice against blacks, or in those days we said Negro--which might be a more accurate description. This business of blacks, you know! Our kids here get so confused; at what point are they no longer blacks? a sixtieth? a thirty-second? We had a take-over of one of our buildings by black students, at the beginning of the black revolution. The negotiations and everything lasted around three weeks. The first couple of memos they sent demanded rights for the Negro students. The memos later demanded rights for the black students, and they got very angry when the reply came back mentioning the words "Negro students"--all within three weeks.

Levenson: What year was this?

Schottland: This was 1969.

Levenson: That was about the time of the change.

Schottland: They got very angry, as if, you know, you had violated a long-standing practice.

Levenson: Did Walter Gordon have anything very much to say about anti-Semitism? Was he interested in the parallels between the Jewish and the Negro experience?

Schottland: Not particularly, at least in our conversations. He sort of dismissed it with the idea that prejudice is prejudice.

Levenson: What did he feel about the possibilities of change? I mean, obviously his own career was outstanding, but perhaps not as successful as he had hoped at one point. What did he feel were the possibilities for the average, or below-average, blacks?

Schottland: I remember a discussion with him once on this, in which he felt that as they become better educated they're going to take their place along with the whites.

Levenson: So he believed in education. What did he feel about legislation to correct wrongs? Did he feel that this was going to be successful?

Schottland: I don't recall talking with him about it. We may have, at the time. We discussed all these things, but I don't remember. If I should guess, I would say he would take the position: you can't legislate feelings. That's just the impression I have of how he would handle this kind of subject. I think he would feel that you don't settle it by law. I think he tried to avoid much discussion of that. I don't think he wanted to look upon himself as sort of a defender of a black point of view.

Levenson: Were there any other subjects about which you felt he had reserve?

Schottland: None that I can think of right now.

Levenson: Did he ever talk about athletics? Was he, for instance, like Ford--using football metaphors?

Schottland: I never heard him do it. I don't know whether he would do it with Warren or with others. I never heard him do it.

Levenson: He had a stellar career, of course. He was also very active at the local level, as you may not know--for example, in desegregating Berkeley High's swimming pool in the thirties. They did a neat job. The city said during the summers it was a money-making operation and that if they desegregated, it would lose the city

Levenson: money. So Walter Gordon, in cooperation with Stiles Hall, the University YMCA, got the city to agree to a trial period, and they kept a very careful weather chart, "a dull foggy day," the attendance, and so forth--a number of factors--and proved that if anything attendance had gone up. And the city didn't lose money by desegregation. It was an effective public relations job.

Schottland: I would think he could handle that kind of thing very well without even having very strong violent feelings on it. He just would know it was right and go ahead and do it without being militant about it.

He was an impressive personality, and my guess is that in a thing like that he could get a lot of things done merely on the basis of his personality and presence. He looked important, and he was heavy, big, and impressive. He spoke beautifully, and with a good Western accent, so there were none of the implications of a Southern black. He was relaxed in conversation, even though it was in an argumentative situation. I practically never heard him raise his voice, and I was in some heated discussions, cabinet meetings and others--nothing related to any black-white issue, just the normal bureaucratic problems.

Levenson: Did he have a sense of humor?

Schottland: Yes, he did. Yes, he did. Very jovial. When I met him in the Virgin Islands, he'd always hug me, a very jovial person.

Levenson: Well, let me ask you again: Are there any areas you can think of?

Schottland: I can't. I wish I could be more helpful. I just didn't know him too well. All my experience with him was very pleasant and good.

Levenson: Thank you very much, Professor Schottland.

Transcriber: Anne Brower

Final Typist: Lee Steinback

V. OVERVIEW

Interviews with:

Agnes Robb
Warren Olney
Sol Silverman
Minnie Ruth
Redmond C. Staats, Jr.



Agnes R. Robb, 1918

Interview with Agnes Robb

Interview History 321

Walter Gordon as Student and Athlete 322

Policeman, Lawyer, Friend of the University 323

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Agnes Robb and Walter Gordon were fellow members of the University of California class of 1918. Miss Robb admired her classmate as a football player and has a vivid recollection of the enthusiastic response to his appearance before the student body at the last University Meeting for their class. Later, in her capacity as assistant to President Robert Gordon Sproul, she came to know Walter Gordon and to respect his judgment when President Sproul sought him out for advice, as he did frequently.

Conduct of the Interview

Miss Robb elected to come into the Regional Oral History Office in the Library Annex for her interview. She entered the room looking far more like the impeccably groomed and pretty young woman whom I recalled in the President's Office in the thirties than the intervening years should have permitted.

She gave her interview with scrupulous attention to the complete accuracy of what she was recording. When she received the transcript she revised the original version of that careful document, rewriting it in beautiful Spencerian longhand.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: June 7, 1977]

INTERVIEW WITH AGNES ROBB*

Walter Gordon as Student and Athlete

Brower: Miss Robb, where would you like to begin your recollections of Walter Gordon?

Robb: Perhaps I should start by saying Walter Gordon and I were both members of the class of 1918 of the University of California.

In Walt's time and mine it was the policy of President Wheeler, followed by succeeding presidents, to dismiss classes every other Friday at eleven o'clock in order to hold a University Meeting, to which were invited distinguished persons to speak to the students. Through the years, presidents, diplomats, international greats, etc. appeared. These meetings were held in old Harmon Gym.

Brower: That nice old wooden building behind Strawberry Creek?

Robb: Yes. It creaked too!

At these meetings the seniors wore caps and gowns, and sat as a body, but this tradition ended after World War I, when classes were less homogeneous.

At the last meeting of the academic year President Wheeler invited leading seniors of various activities to give their classmates a farewell message. It was at this meeting that Walter Gordon was one of the speakers. I shall never forget that meeting

*The original interview was transcribed and went to Miss Robb, who rewrote it in longhand. The original transcription is on file; this represents a typed rendering of Miss Robb's revision.

**See interview with Agnes Robb, Robert Gordon Sproul and the University of California, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1976.

Robb: for when Walter was introduced the whole student body rose in tribute to him. I don't remember what was said, but it left a lasting impression on me. Walt was a fine tackle on the football field, and a highly respected student.

A review of the Blue and Gold pictures of Walter both as an athlete and a student foretell his future place in the hearts and minds of his peers.

He was one of the first blacks to graduate from the University and Boalt Hall.

Both as a student and coach Walt was one of those who believed and followed the policy so often expressed by President Sproul of students playing as athletes, not athletes playing as students.

Brower: That's an interesting distinction.

Robb: As an example of Walt's sensitivity, when he was traveling with the team he always found separate lodging so as not to complicate arrangements or embarrass his teammates.

Policeman, Lawyer, Friend of the University

Robb: While Walter Gordon was a student at Boalt Hall, August Vollmer, the chief of police of Berkeley, and a pioneer in criminology, wanted Walt to become a part of the Berkeley police force, but Walt wanted to get his law degree. Mr. Vollmer then said he would adjust his time to allow him to complete his legal training. This he did and Walt and Bill Dean, who was to become the famous general of the army, worked hand in hand for many years.

Later, in the middle or later twenties, Walt practiced law in Berkeley and was admired by Mr. Sproul, the comptroller, who often sought advice on social problems, and particularly Negro organizations, which were seeking either funds or support from Mr. Sproul.

Brower: To get his view of whether these were worthwhile groups or not? That's very interesting.

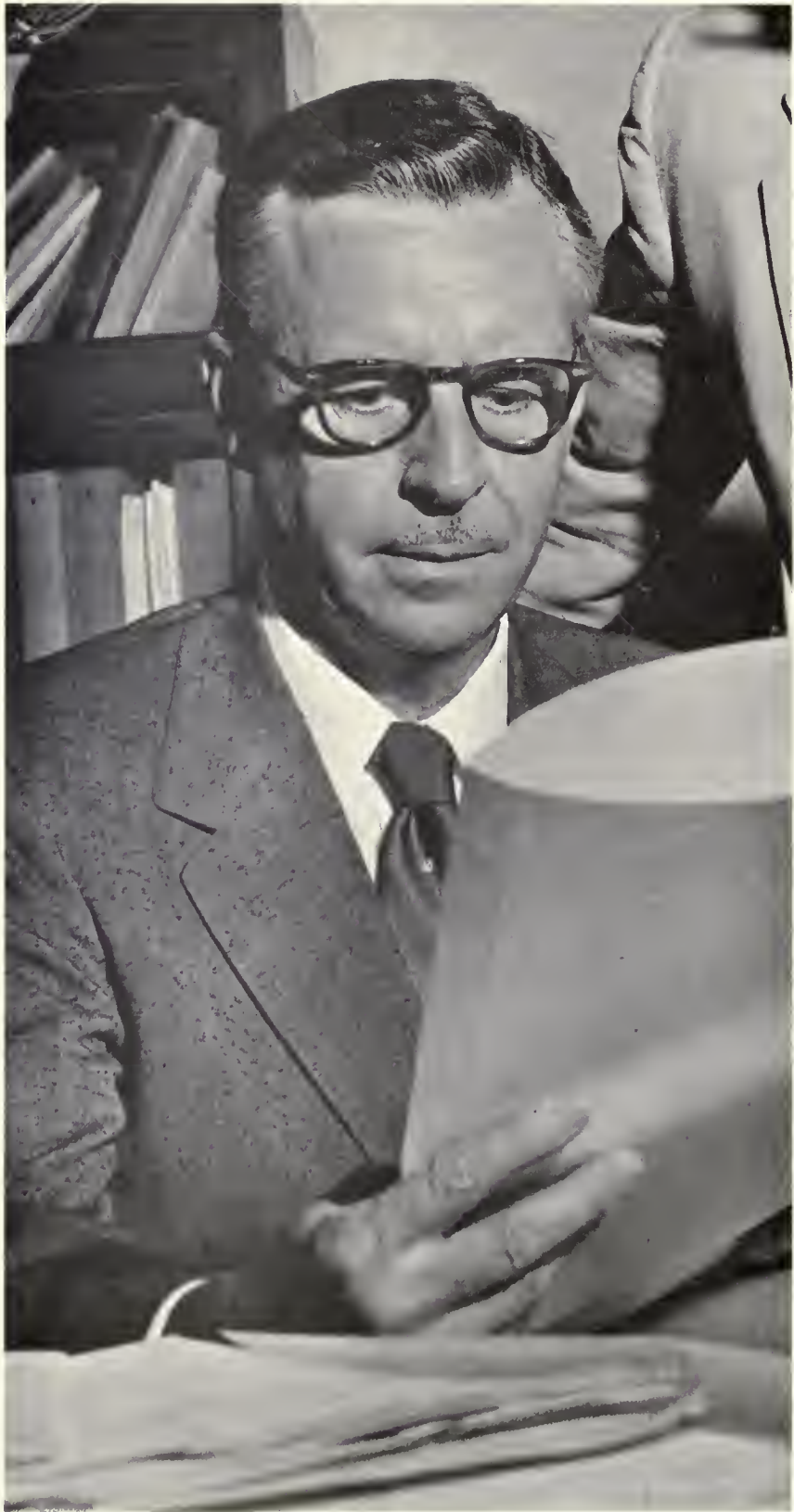
Robb: Another example of Walt's wisdom was in the twenties or early thirties when a black graduate of the University with a master's degree in education was seeking a principalship in the Oakland schools. She was very high on the list and admired by Mr. Gordon, whose advice was sought. He felt that Oakland was not yet ready for a Negro principal and a woman. This ended a friendship, but was sound advice. This was typical of Walt.

Robb: All through the years of Mr. Sproul's presidency, he would call on Walter Gordon for advice in the area in which he was informed. They were good friends.

Walter Gordon left a great heritage to the university, the community, his widow, and his three children--a lawyer, a dentist, and a mother of a talented daughter.

Transcriber: Teresa Allen

Final Typist: Lee Steinback



Warren Olney III
ca. 1956

Interview with Warren Olney

Interview History	325
Walter Gordon's Reputation	326
Walter Gordon on the Adult Authority	321
The Indeterminate Sentence	329
Walter Gordon and the Governorship of the Virgin Islands	331
Walter Gordon as District Judge in the Virgin Islands	333
Walter Gordon's Last Years	334

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Warren Olney's acquaintance with Walter Gordon was one of long standing. Before the two men met, Warren Olney had heard of Walter Gordon's prowess as a football player from his father, Warren Olney, Jr., who was active in University of California Alumni affairs.

The professional lives of both men brought them frequently in touch. Warren Olney was deputy district attorney in Alameda County when Walter Gordon was practicing law there; he was assistant attorney general of the United States when Walter Gordon was, first, governor, and then district judge in the Virgin Islands, and in that period they had occasional meetings in Washington. The friendship was an enduring one, based on mutual respect and affection.

Conduct of the Interview

One interview on Walter Gordon was taped on the morning of Saturday, September 11, 1976, with Warren Olney III in the quiet, handsome library of his home in Berkeley. Warren Olney's recollections of Walter Gordon spanned many years and, although fragmentary, testify to a warm and enduring acquaintance.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: September 11, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH WARREN OLNEY III

Walter Gordon's Reputation

Brower: Can you tell me when you first met Walter Gordon?

Olney: I can't tell you when I first met him. I can remember very well hearing about him long before I met him. I heard about him when he played on the California football team. My father at that time was very active in the Alumni Association; in fact I think he was president, and ex officio a member of the Board of Regents at that time. He talked about Walter Gordon.

The thing that was unusual about Walter Gordon was that he was not only a superb football player, he was an All American and one of the best that ever played in Berkeley, but also he was black and that made him different from the rest. I knew about this magnificent black athlete who had gone through the university with a very good record before I ever met him.

I don't recall ever meeting him on the campus. I may have-- I went to the Berkeley campus in the fall of 1922, I think, after having my freshman year at Pomona. But I don't recall seeing him there or during the time I was in law school. I used to read about him in the papers because by that time he was coaching for California, for Andy Smith, and he was a scout as well. And the papers used to carry accounts of that.

The next definite recollection that I have is meeting him and at that time I was a deputy district attorney in Alameda County and he was practicing law. The years are a little difficult to fix.

*See interview with Warren Olney III, Warren Olney: Law Enforcement and Judicial Administration in the Earl Warren Era, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, in process.

Brower: I have 1930 to 1935.

Olney: I think that's right. Yes, that's right. And I believe it was along 1930, '31 that I came into contact with him and met him. I was prosecuting criminal cases although the office at that time handled civil business as well. And I believe that we had one or more cases in which we were on opposite sides. I doubt that they went to trial; I think that they must have been disposed of by a plea because I haven't any recollection of trying a case in court with witnesses in which Walter was on the other side.

Brower: Would these clients have been black clients? Was his practice entirely with blacks, do you know?

Olney: I don't think his practice was entirely with blacks. He did represent some blacks.

Brower: Did you ever see him in a courtroom?

Olney: Oh yes. In those instances in open court, and he was very effective in his appearance in the court. I think that these were cases, as I say, that were disposed of on plea. So I don't believe I ever saw him handling witnesses and I'm quite sure that he didn't try any jury case against me or I would have remembered that.

I think he would have been reluctant to try a jury case because in those days there weren't any blacks on the jury panel. One reason is that there were very few blacks living in Alameda County. The impression that I got of him, although I can't be specific, was that he was a first-class lawyer. The impression that he made in the district attorney's office was that he was an ethical lawyer and a man who could be depended on and a man of high standards. And this was in marked contrast to one or two other black lawyers that were appearing in the courts even at that time, from time to time.

Walter Gordon on the Adult Authority

Olney: Now, I don't recall Walter or coming in contact with him again until he became chairman of the Adult Authority.

Brower: You had no role in recommending him for that office?

Olney: No. During that period I was in the Marine Corps and didn't see him, of course, then. I went into the Marine Corps in November of '42 and was discharged in August of '45. I didn't see him at that time.

Olney: After the war, in '45, I opened a law office of my own in San Francisco. Bob Kenny was the attorney general at that time, and he and I had known one another long before the war when he was assistant county counsel for Los Angeles and I was deputy district attorney. And Bob, when he learned I was back and was in private practice, called me up and asked me if I would undertake a piece of litigation for the state. This involved a man named Arthur L. Bell, who had an organization that was first known as Mankind United, and then later called Christ Church of the Golden Rule. And it was one of those fraudulent rackets very much like this Korean [the Reverend Moon] that's operating today.

Bob's idea was that instead of using a criminal law to break this up we bring a civil suit, his thought being that if we started off with criminal proceedings Bell would use all of the assets and property that belonged to his victims to try to keep himself out of jail. And that, on the other hand, if we filed a suit in the name of the attorney general and the state, requiring an accounting of these properties, we could get possession of these properties, stop the racket, and have something to distribute back to the people who had been victimized.

Well, I agreed to do this, and I handled it as though it was one of my clients. I wasn't on the state payroll. But I recall that while that litigation was going on I ran into Walter Gordon on the train. I used to have to go back and forth between San Francisco and Los Angeles quite frequently. I ran into him at dinner one time on the Lark.* We had dinner together and had a long talk, very good talk. And he told me about the problems that the correctional system was meeting, and he also told me about some of the records that he'd had to go over that involved cases that I had prosecuted years before. He commented about the statements that were included in the record that he thought were helpful and enlightening to the board in trying to decide what to do with these people.

Brower: In determining the parole terms?

Olney: Yes.

*The Lark was the Southern Pacific train that ran from the Bay Area to Los Angeles at night. A similar Lark reversed this route.

- Brower: It suggests a warm feeling on his part for you, doesn't it, that he could sit down and talk that way? You must have had enough contact so you felt easy with each other.
- Olney: Well, we obviously did. And yet, as I look back, it doesn't seem to me that our contacts were very frequent [laughter], very close.
- Brower: That's what I was thinking. I'm a little surprised at the incident on the train because it doesn't seem to have been prepared for by what you have said so far. There must have been more contact than you recall.
- Olney: Well, I think so, but by that time I'd heard a great deal about Walter and I think he had probably heard a good deal about me, because before the war I was assistant attorney general when Earl Warren was attorney general, and I was in charge of the criminal work in the attorney general's office. And I had gotten a great deal of publicity at that time. Walter had known my father and he'd known me in Oakland. He knew my relations with Earl Warren, who had appointed him, and so forth. I think that was probably the reason.
- Brower: You never attended one of the meetings of the Adult Authority?
- Olney: Never did.
- Brower: Apparently the whole orientation of that group was quite unlike the punitive attitude that is now finding expression. Their interest was in getting people out and keeping them out. They were very much concerned about finding jobs and trying to make conditions that wouldn't just bring people right back again. I suppose it was a smaller and more homogeneous world.
- Olney: Well, it was, and I think it's only fair to the people who are presently struggling with that problem to keep in mind how small it was. It was possible at that time to have a single board and the prisoners were few enough so that the board could consider their cases individually and on an intelligent basis. But the sheer size of the problem has meant that the machinery doesn't work any more.

The Indeterminate Sentence

- Brower: How do you feel Walter Gordon would have regarded the rejection now of the indeterminate sentence? Do you think he would have been upset by that, or would he accept it as part of the nature of change?

Olney: Well, I could only guess at that; I'm sure I don't know.

Brower: Of course.

Olney: At the time that he was active in corrections the indeterminate sentence was supposed to be a great step forward. It was felt that they ceased to become big risks on the outside, and on the other hand those who were risks would be kept as long as possible. Of course we've had a great deal of experience with it now, and one of the discouraging things about that approach is that it just hasn't been possible to devise any way of determining who's a risk and who isn't, who ought to be in and who ought to be out.

Brower: I would think that its early success, if it was success, depended on the few numbers and also perhaps on the caliber of the men who were administering it. I'm not sure that's fair to the current people. But the board of the Adult Authority in Walter Gordon's time seems to have been very conscientious, very honorable men.

Olney: They were.

Brower: And one can't hope for that always. I suppose that the indeterminate sentence is only as good as the parole board, really.

Olney: That's right, that's right.

Brower: It disturbed Mrs. Gordon to learn of the change because she knew her husband believed so much in it. That's why I raised that question.

Can you recall any more about your conversation with Walter Gordon going down to Los Angeles?

Olney: Yes. I only recall that occasion talking with him. I remember one of the things we talked about at some length was his son. His son was, I think, interested in the ministry, and Walter talked to me a lot about what his son was doing and where he was going and things of this kind.

Brower: This would have been Walter Gordon, Jr., I suppose? Or was it Ed? He has two sons. You don't recall which?

Olney: I don't recall which. I think it was the oldest one.

Brower: He has since followed his father's footsteps and is in the Adult Authority.

Olney: I didn't know that.

Brower: That's what his work is now, in San Francisco.

Olney: Well, that's most interesting. I don't recall encountering Walter at all during the years that I was counsel for the Special Crime Study Commission on Organized Crime, although that commission was an adjunct to the Department of Corrections. There was a commission on adult corrections as well as this one on organized crime. I think I must have seen him at some of the kick-off meetings that were held. There was one that the governor called in Sacramento when all these commissions were first created. There were hundreds of people there. I'm sure Walter must have been there, and I must have seen him at that time. But our work on organized crime didn't bring us into contact with the Adult Authority, or me with Walter, that I can remember.

Walter Gordon and the Governorship of the Virgin Islands

Brower: So it would not have been, then, until Washington that you and Walter Gordon had contact again?

Olney: Yes, the next time that I--well, I see here from my own record that in March of '53 Walter sent me a letter of congratulations, and there is a reference to George Johnson who he advised to call me. I responded to that letter. I remember George Johnson coming in to see me; I can't remember what it was about.

Brower: George Johnson also attended the party for Mr. and Mrs. Gordon on the eve of his leaving for the Virgin Islands. [interruption]

Olney: I had some correspondence with Walter Gordon when I was assistant attorney general. This was along in March, May, and June of '53 and then in '54 too. The next time I saw him was on October 7, 1955, when I attended his being sworn in as governor of the Virgin Islands. I know that prior to his nomination as governor the usual FBI inquiries were made about him and that agents from the bureau came to see me and asked about him, what I knew about him. They never tell you what the position is for which the man is being considered but they ask you what you know about him, his experience and so forth.

I did hear a discussion--I think the attorney general, Herbert Brownell, asked me himself about Gordon and told me that up to that time most of the governors of the Virgin Islands had been white although the heavy majority of the population in the Islands was black, and that the Eisenhower administration wanted to have a black governor, not a white one. And they thought they were doing

Olney: something that would be very acceptable to people in the Virgin Islands, more acceptable than the kind of appointments they'd had before. Walter of course knew nothing about the Virgin Islands by experience; he'd never been there. I think that he thought that he would be better received as governor than earlier governors had been. There'd always been a lot of complaint about the governors.

I didn't see him after his appointment for some time. Let's see [consulting files], I see on my record here that he came in to see me on November 9, 1956. Was he still governor at that time? I think he was.

Brower: I feel sure that he was. That would be only a year after his appointment.

Olney: My recollection is that he came in to see me at that time, and that we had a very lengthy conversation, an hour or more, about his experiences in the Virgin Islands. He expressed to me his very great disappointment with the situation. He said he found that instead of being accepted he was more discriminated against, more rejected, than if he had been white. Many of the people that he had to deal with down there objected to him simply because he was a black from the continental United States. He said that racial discrimination among the blacks in the Virgin Islands was worse than anything he'd ever seen in the United States. And he went on and related to me at length some of the difficulties he had had with the legislature down there.

Brower: When you say there was racial discrimination among the blacks, does this mean a hierarchy within the blacks themselves?

Olney: Yes, that's right. Yes. Very definitely so. And he found himself just a party of one. He said that if he had had any realization of what the situation was he never would have accepted the appointment, and that they found it quite unpleasant and were quite lonely down there.

Brower: He didn't fare well with the white population either, then?

Olney: Well, I don't know. I don't recall what he said about the whites. The thing that made a great impression on me was what he'd experienced from the blacks. They were the ones that were apparently making life miserable for him.

Brower: It must have been very disillusioning, because I think he had come with high hopes.

Walter Gordon as District Judge in the Virgin Islands

Olney: Yes. Now, I don't recall seeing him more than that one time when he was governor. I believe that he was appointed district judge at about that time. I think he resigned as governor and accepted the appointment as district judge, that it was all one thing, the feeling being that it might be a little calmer in the Virgin Islands if he didn't have to deal with a legislature any more and could assume a judicial role. I think he was quite well qualified to be a district judge in that district, but I had no talks with him about it until some years later, when I became director of the administrative office of the United States courts. And that was in January of 1958. Walter in 1958 had become the district judge in the Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands are a part of the Third Circuit. The Third Circuit has an annual conference which all of the district judges and their wives are invited to attend; traditionally they used to hold it in Atlantic City. Judge John Biggs, Jr., was the chief judge of the circuit. As director I tried to go to the conferences for all of the circuits in order to get acquainted. I didn't feel it was necessary to go to every conference every year, but I covered as many as I could in any one year, and I went to the Third Circuit conference at Atlantic City very shortly after I became director. And I saw the Gordons there.

[End tape 1, side 1]

[Begin tape 1, side 2]

Olney: I talked to Walter privately too. The impression that I got was that he was still not very happy in the Virgin Islands, but at least he didn't have to deal with the legislature any more, and there were parts of his judicial work that he seemed to enjoy, although he was still pretty isolated by the social feeling down there. He talked to me about the possibility of going back to California and said the difficulty for him was that he had no idea what he could do if he went back, that he was dependent on his salary, didn't have outside resources. So he expected to continue as a district judge.

Brower: Why could he not have returned to his law practice, or had he been away so long that he didn't have one?

Olney: He didn't have one; he'd have to start it up. And I don't know how difficult that would have been for him, I just don't know. During the war and the time he was away, conditions in California had changed, especially with respect to blacks, so that it would have been a good deal like his going into a strange community. Anyhow, he couldn't see his way clear to do it, although he and his wife were longing for Berkeley. They wanted to return to Berkeley.

Brower: It must have been an especially trying time for Mrs. Gordon.

Olney: I think it was, I think it was.

Walter Gordon's Last Years

Brower: Did you see Walter Gordon during his retirement, when he came back to Berkeley?

Olney: Yes, I saw him at Harry Kingman's golden wedding party, and talked with him a little. He was failing then. His eyesight was already quite bad. I think I saw him on one or another occasion. But they didn't amount to much. They must have been rather large social occasions if I saw him. I know I had no opportunity of having a real visit with him.

Brower: You spoke of how changed the black community was after the war, and in the light of that it's curious perhaps that Walter Gordon elected to live where he did. He never left the San Pablo area, San Pablo and University, where his law practice had been. As you know, perhaps, he lived in a motel there until his death.

Olney: Well, you've interviewed Harry Kingman, haven't you?

Brower: Yes, I have.

Olney: All I know about it is what they've told me. They tried to persuade him to come up and live up here, and he would have been very welcome here. But I didn't talk with Walter about that.

Brower: I thought you might have.

Olney: No. [Phone rings]

I think Walter had a good philosophy, and I don't think he was a man who was inclined to brood or to be driven by frustration. I think he may have had regrets, but he always seemed to me to be the kind of man who could make the best of almost any situation and be happy. It was his temperament.

Brower: So when he returned to Berkeley he was his old cheerful self most of the time?

Olney: Well, I think so; as far as I know, yes.

Brower: Does that just about wrap it up?

Olney: I think that's all I know.

Brower: Thank you.

Transcriber: Michelle Guilbeault
Final Typist: Lee Steinback



Sol Silverman
1976

Interview with Sol Silverman

Interview History	335
Acquaintance with Walter Gordon	336
The Importance of Physical Fitness	337
Boxing at the University of California	339
Race and University Athletics	341
Boxing and the Spirit to Excel	345
A Last Glimpse of Walter Gordon	346
Boxing through the Years	347
Family Warmth and Solidarity	351

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Sol Silverman received his A.B. and J.D. degrees from the University of California and as an undergraduate was the captain of the University's boxing team. His devotion to the University of California and to boxing has been fervent and lifelong. In 1963 he was appointed by Governor Edmund G. ("Pat") Brown to the chairmanship of the state Committee for Boxing Safeguards, and he has long served as president of the University of California Alumni of Boxers and Wrestlers--a group that in 1955 named Walter Gordon alumnus of the year.

Walter Gordon and Sol Silverman both boxed for the University of California and both held the sport in high esteem. They shared a belief that boxing training is in effect training in motivation to excel. In the sixties they together appealed to the University authorities to restore boxing to its former role as a major sport, with the hope that in this manner some of the earlier student values might also be restored.

Conduct of the Interview

One interview was held on January 19, 1977 in the offices of Moran and Silverman in the Mills Tower, in the heart of San Francisco's financial district. Mr. Silverman was a genial host and an exuberant interviewee, especially on the subject of boxing. He has been good enough to present to the University Archives the original of the U.C. Alumni Boxers and Wrestlers testimonial to Walter Gordon.

After Mr. Silverman edited the transcript of this interview, he had it retyped by his secretary; the changes made were not substantive ones but consisted almost wholly of matters of diction.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: January 19, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH SOL SILVERMAN

Acquaintance with Walter Gordon

Brower: Mr. Silverman, when did you first meet Walter Gordon?

Silverman: I first met Walter Gordon, intimately, beginning at the turn of the fifties.

Brower: At that time he was with the Adult Authority.

Silverman: He was chairman of the California Adult Authority.

Brower: Did he ever talk to you about his work at the Adult Authority?

Silverman: Yes, I asked a number of times about his work there. I wanted to know how they processed the men seeking parole. He told me that they go into the background of their lives very thoroughly. They wanted to know about their progenitors, their family, their home, their education, their occupation, their friends, their motivations, and the circumstances under which they committed their crimes. It really impressed me as being humane and responsible in seeking to understand the persons applying for parole.

He also told me, germane to his penal experience, that he was a policeman in Berkeley for a number of years, which, incidentally, helped him to make his way through the university. I would say he had the temperament, the perception, the judgment and the compassion to discharge his challenging burdens as chairman of the California Adult Authority.

- Brower: There has been a change in the attitudes in penology now, for example in the reevaluation of the indeterminate sentence. In Walter Gordon's time apparently it functioned in a humane way.
- Silverman: Apparently it functioned in his time because of his confidence in his competence to evaluate the prisoner in his social attitudes and his fitness to reenter society. It gave the parole authority the opportunity to really get a profound and realistic insight into the men seeking their freedom and shoring up their pride.
- Brower: I rushed you along there into the Adult Authority without asking you how you happened to meet him at that time.
- Silverman: I happened to meet him on this basis of intimacy because I was president then of the University of California Alumni of boxers and wrestlers, and we had annual luncheon meetings at which he was the principal speaker. This went on until he was appointed, in 1955, by President Eisenhower, as governor of the Virgin Islands, and later by him as judge of the federal court on the Virgin Islands.

It was my privilege to initiate a going-away dinner party for him in the San Francisco Bar Association Lounge to acknowledge his contribution to intercollegiate football and boxing, and to the parole system.

The Importance of Physical Fitness

- Brower: So his interest as an alumnus was not confined to football? He was also actively interested in boxing and wrestling?
- Silverman: Shortly after he graduated, he was assistant football coach at Cal under the peerless Andy Smith. But in my talking with him, our conversation focused on intercollegiate boxing, particularly at the university. In his time and mine, and beyond, you could not graduate from the university unless you passed a defense test. Consequently, all the male students had to take a defense test either in boxing, wrestling, or fencing, an imaginative emphasis on physical fitness and self-defense. The great majority, I'd say 95 percent of the males, took their tests in boxing. We used to line them up, including the muscular football players, in massive numbers to see whether or not they did have the fundamentals of boxing--not to inculcate or inspire them with pugnacity, but rather with the rudiments of self-defense. That was the primary emphasis given for the requirement to pass the defense test.

- Brower: You'd think that such a test would be even more important now, wouldn't you?
- Silverman: I would think so. I would hope that the young men, instead of taking dope and drugs, would really have a great pride in building up their body, their stamina, and self-defense. Also, I think it's a function of the university, after they have had a young man for four years, to send him back to the community with combined development of body and brain for maximum satisfaction to himself and his community.
- Brower: In my time the women were required to take a swimming test to graduate.
- Silverman: In my time, too, all students had to pass the swimming test.
- Brower: But otherwise, I don't think women had any particular test that they had to pass. They weren't taught self-defense.
- Silverman: No. Have you got time for a funny story?
- Brower: Yes, of course.
- Silverman: My brother, who was much bigger than I am, was a football and track star. And he was sent a notice to take the swimming test. My brother, even though he was an outstanding star in football and track, could not swim a stroke. So he got a man named McQueen, his very close friend who was an excellent swimmer, to take the test for him. Then, after McQueen took the test for Silverman, Silverman got a notice from the university saying, "Your performance was so creditable that you should come out for the team." [laughter] I'll never forget that as long as I live.
- Brower: That must have been hilarious! How did he get out of it?
- Silverman: They took McQueen to be Silverman.
- Brower: Yes, but I wondered how Silverman got out of joining the team.
- Silverman: That was just an invitation to which he did not respond. [laughter]
- Brower: I can believe that he didn't!

Boxing at the University of California

Brower: You never saw Walter Gordon box, of course? That must have been long before your time.

Silverman: Walter Gordon last boxed in 1917. I started boxing--to take the defense test--in 1919. In 1920 I was on the team for the full term, three years. Then in 1922 I was unanimously elected captain of the boxing team.

Brower: That wasn't so long after Walter Gordon was an active boxer.

Silverman: No, no. He was still a dynamo on that campus, particularly as an assistant football coach, with an emerging "Wonder Team." There were certain names there--Walter Gordon in football and Jimmy Doolittle in boxing, I would say, were the names you heard most in campus athletics. I met General Doolittle since in his Los Angeles office, in connection with becoming actively identified with Cal's boxing alumni and with intercollegiate competition.

Brower: He was a boxer, of course, a middle-weight?

Silverman: He was a great boxer, a welter-weight. He weighed 145 pounds.

Brower: You didn't happen to see the bout with Stanford in which he decked Eric Pedley in fifteen seconds?

Silverman: I've got to tell you that story! That's a story that Walter Gordon told me. Jimmy Doolittle was 145 pounds and this fellow, Pedley, weighed 158, a middle-weight. So there was a significant disparity in their weights. Now, there was no middle-weight at the university to box Pedley, so they asked Jimmy Doolittle whether he'd box him. He was great. He's one of the greats. He said, "Sure, I'll take him on."

Walter Gordon told me this story--I'll never forget it as long as I live--they get in the center of the ring, they shake hands, then Pedley looks down contemptuously on Doolittle, before each returned briefly to his corner. Walter Gordon was in Doolittle's corner and he told me that when Doolittle came back he vengefully said, "Wait till you see what I do to that guy!"--a haughty polo player. So, in the first round he came out fast and hit Pedley on the chin, and down he went. Pedley was down not for seconds but for minutes. He laid him out cold, that's all. Doolittle was a great boxer with a fighting heart.

Brower: Do you recall other anecdotes about U.C. athletes of that period?

Silverman: I'll tell you a very interesting story. Brodie Stephens played with all-American Brick Muller as his receiver. Brick Muller made that famous seventy-yard pass to him in the Rose Bowl against Ohio State which Cal won 28-0. Brodie became a very good friend of mine, and very close to boxing, too. Brodie wanted to be an intercollegiate boxer at Cal. He participated in the intramural contests there, wishing to represent the university in the welter-weight division--145 pounds. Well, he met a man named Forest Thiess, who was really one of the great boxers at Cal. He fought a little professionally, too, after he graduated. Unfortunately, Forest Thiess got a decision over him, so what does Brodie do? He went all-out for football on Cal's wonder teams, and became a football hero. [laughter]

Brower: That's one way of getting into football!

Silverman: These are the unpredictable things of life. I could tell you stories of exciting unpredictability. This goes back to MIT. There was a fellow named Harlan Fiske Stone, a member of a distinguished family of mathematicians. So Stone registered at MIT, like his predecessors, and majored in mathematics, of course. Well, what happened was this. He, in his sophomore year, got into a hazing situation that was so bad that MIT expelled him. So what did he do? He went into law and then became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court (1941). [laughter] The unpredictability of life!

And so with Brodie Stephens. He wanted to be a boxer, and he lost in an intramural sport contest, so he went into football and became a hero. Brodie Stephens and Brick Muller were the heroes--that was 1921 or 1922--they were heroes for several years on the campus as a result of beating Ohio State 28-0 in the Rose Bowl. Barrows was president then, and if there ever was a president of the University of California who loved sports, it was General Barrows. He came to see our boxing contests.

Brower: Is that so?

Silverman: Oh, yes! I remember the first time I boxed, they had the band there. Really. Boxing was a big thing. It was right after the war, and athletics were a big thing in those days. It was a matter of a man having muscle and might. Physical fitness was a big thing on the campus in those days and President Barrows certainly exemplified it in his impressive posture and booming voice.

Race and University Athletics

- Brower: On the night that Doolittle knocked out Pedley, I think Walter Gordon was scheduled to participate that same night.
- Silverman: Walter Gordon was in his [Doolittle's] corner as his coach.
- Brower: Yes, but I think he'd been scheduled to box somebody at Stanford, and Stanford drew the color line.
- Silverman: It's very interesting what you say. Much later Walter Gordon called me up at Hillsborough, where I lived at that time, and would you believe it--this was in the middle fifties--he spent one half hour telling me how he was bruised by Stanford drawing the color line, and by Frank Kleeberger, then the chairman of the P.E. Department, siding with Stanford. Let's see, the middle fifties, so nearly forty years after, this bruise was still upon this man's heart although he'd become mature, sophisticated, understanding.
- Brower: I expect things like that are never really forgotten.
- Silverman: Talking about drawing the color line, I want to tell you another story. This was in the spring of 1922. I was just elected captain of the boxing team, and I gave a boxing exhibition with the assistant boxing coach before the graduating class. The morning of the night of that exhibition, the S.F. Chronicle on the first page of the sports section had a bold-face headline, "Stanford Draws Color Line." And who did they draw it against? A man named Errol Jones, who was a light-weight standing over six feet, 133 pounds--straight up and down, you understand? And that night, after boxing before the senior class, they asked me, "Silverman, what is your position here?" I said, "I'll tell you that very quickly. There'll be no boxing contests between Stanford and Cal unless Stanford withdraws that edict." I have the Chronicle clipping in my scrapbook.
- Brower: I wonder how they happened to bring it up at that point? What made it newsworthy at that point?
- Silverman: Oh, the prejudice against the blacks?
- Brower: Yes, but I wondered, did Stanford suddenly enunciate this?
- Silverman: No, it was their policy in Walter's time, too. This was simply a carry-over.
- Brower: How did you implement that decision of yours? How did you make it stick?

- Silverman: We told them that unless they withdrew that there'd be no boxing contests. The Stanford and California contest was the big boxing contest of the year. They used to fill Harmon gym with the band and all. It's unbelievable, isn't it? When you stop and think what's happened since.
- Brower: Stanford didn't, apparently, have this same rule with respect to other sorts of athletics, like football, let's say?
- Silverman: There were no black football players on the Stanford team.
- Brower: No, maybe not the Stanford team--
- Silverman: There were no black basketball players on the Stanford team.
- Brower: But, they played blacks in games.
- Silverman: Well, later on, the blacks were very prominent in Stanford athletics.
- Brower: I was thinking, actually, of Walter Gordon's day. He must have played football against Stanford.
- Silverman: Yes, that's a good point you make. Don't forget, in football you have eleven men out of a squad maybe of thirty-five or forty. But boxing is highly individualized. The boxers are highly exposed. A black stands out more conspicuously in a one-to-one-man contest in the ring than among eleven football players on each side. That's the difference.
- Brower: Do you think it was purely on racial grounds? Walter Gordon suggested that they knew that he boxed with professionals and they were worried about it.
- Silverman: That wasn't the reason. Sparring with professionals did not taint one's amateur status. I sparred myself with them in the gymnasium.
- Brower: That wasn't it?
- Silverman: No.

There was a man named "Smoke" Francis who was a handsome, bright, husky black man who graduated from Polytechnic High School in San Francisco, where he was outstanding in football. He had very little chance at Cal. I don't remember him playing on the varsity at all. He got a Ph.D. in economics. In 1935 he came over to see me at my office. You wouldn't believe this:

Silverman: he said to me, "Sol, can you lend me fifty cents?" I said, "For what?" He said, "I want to cross the Bay Bridge." (That's what it cost to cross the bridge.) It really made me sick.

Brower: I think he committed suicide.

Silverman: I don't remember him playing on the varsity team at all. When you stop to think of Muncie, how they glorified him in his last year, it's incredible to think that this man here [Francis], far more handsome, and much brighter than Muncie--you can capture the remarkable change in the athletic environment at Cal.

Brower: Francis's life was a real tragedy, it seems to me, a waste.

Silverman: A great tragedy. The same with Errol Jones. He wanted to go into law. He had a very, very difficult time. He got to be a drunk. That's what happens when opportunity and acknowledgement are denied. These men are psychologically and socially beaten and battered and bruised.

Brower: The frustrations, the enormous frustrations! Walter Gordon was really remarkably fortunate that he didn't have the same thing happen to him. I suppose it had something to do with his own personality.

Silverman: He had a great personality: intelligent, friendly, energetic, ambitious, and attractive. He was a policeman in Berkeley and very close to the campus. He was assistant football coach under Andy Smith.

Brower: It makes you wonder, though, why a Walter Gordon has such a degree of success, and a Smoke Francis fell by the wayside.

Silverman: I would say the total personality, which includes qualities other than an exceptional intellect.

Brower: By that you don't mean I.Q., because Smoke Francis certainly had that.

Silverman: The total personality. That's what I'd say. And the fact, too, that he [Walter Gordon] was outstanding in playing. He got the opportunity. He was a different man than Smoke Francis. A bigger man than Smoke Francis. Perhaps you might say more sociable, more amiable, more magnetic than Smoke Francis. Not that Smoke Francis was an abrasive man. But Gordon had a captivating warmth, gaiety and articulation.

Brower: I guess those qualities would help a great deal.

Silverman: Yes, it'll be a long time before I see another one like him.

Brower: What did Frank Kleeberger do exactly?

Silverman: Frank Kleeberger was the chairman of the P.E. department, and I would call him a very strict disciplinarian and conventional thinker. I think he reflected the petty prejudices of the community.

What happened with Kleeberger, by the way--Walter Gordon told me--after Kleeberger sided with Stanford on the color line, Kleeberger came up to the gym and put on the gloves with Gordon. Gordon told me with much exuberance that he gave him a real terrific licking. He said he gave him what he deserved. It helped to allay his vexatious feeling that had been engendered by Kleeberger's drawing the color line with Stanford.

I liked Frank Kleeberger. I boxed with him, too, which deepened my fellowship with him. But he was really an unusual disciplinarian. In my own case, for example, I chronically had a hard time making weight. He insisted that I make the set weight or not box. I remember running some distance from my fraternity down to Harmon Gymnasium to weigh in. I was a half a pound overweight. He made me go down to the hot room to try to take it off. No weight came off, because I was so dry. The boxing coach took his knuckles and rubbed my back. No luck. Then I boxed six rounds with the boxing coach. Finally, the scale just tipped. That was Kleeberger. I was fatigued and weak. That night we boxed Davis, and when I got up to Davis I went to sleep. I slept for two hours. Finally when my time came to box, they said, "Go run around the block. Generate your vitality!" That was Kleeberger. A strict and severe disciplinarian. I think he had all the white prejudices.

Brower: Quite a WASP type, as I remember.

Silverman: Yes.

Brower: Did you ever hear anything about Walter Gordon's having been asked to turn professional in boxing?

Silverman: No, I never discussed Walter Gordon in connection with professional boxing. He always maintained his interests in intercollegiate and amateur boxing.

Boxing and the Spirit to Excel

- Silverman: When the University of California was having a terrible time on the Berkeley campus with these protesters, I got Walter Gordon to go with me to the dean of Letters and Science to get boxing restored to the posture and position it had, and to have boxing classes at the university like they had in my time.
- Brower: This appeal to the dean was in the sixties?
- Silverman: I would say so, after Walter Gordon returned to Berkeley from the Virgin Islands, when they had all that turmoil over there, at Berkeley.
- Brower: So you were in touch with him after he came back from the Virgin Islands?
- Silverman: Oh, yes. I should say. In fact, I went over to see him. And he came to my home in San Francisco with his wife, a lovely woman.
- Brower: This was after his return from the Virgin Islands?
- Silverman: Yes. That's when we went to see the dean of Letters and Science, after he came back from the Virgin Islands, to attempt to influence the authority on the campus, this time the dean of Letters and Science, to restore boxing to its past campus position in popularity and prestige.
- Brower: What exactly was the philosophy behind that suggestion?
- Silverman: The overall philosophy was that when the University of California returns its graduating students to the community, it should do everything possible to give them a good balance of body and mind, good health, good vitality, and a good mind, with the mind, of course, being predominant. I always felt that way, that after all the university's primary function was the enrichment of the intellect. There was a confluence rather than a collision between the two objectives. Old Brick Morse used to say, "And brain and brawn will win the day." That was the really essential thing. And I'm still fighting to have boxing restored on the campus to what it was in my time.
- Brower: It has gone into a decline, hasn't it?
- Silverman: First of all, speaking generically, there has been a regression of the spirit to strive and to excel. I found that out years ago, when I went to London in 1963. I'd been Boxing Commission

Silverman: chairman for the State of California. I found at that time there was this visible evidence of a recession in the human spirit to achieve. I talked to a man named Jack Solomon, who was one of the world's greatest fight promoters. I said, "Jack, what goes with professional boxing?" "Well," he said, "it's very simple. There's no hungry fighters." For example, the reason the blacks today, in my opinion, excel in almost every major aspect of athletics is because of the effort to excel. We don't have that nearly as much among the whites today. Dope and ease dominate the young people today, unfortunately. There's not the pride, the incentive, to struggle for excellence. I think Walter Gordon shared that view thoroughly with me.

Brower: Yes, I'm sure he did. That was very much his own position, I think.

A Last Glimpse of Walter Gordon

Brower: So, your acquaintance with Walter Gordon went over a very long period.

Silverman: A long period of time--a quarter of a century.

Brower: You didn't happen to ever visit him in the Virgin Islands?

Silverman: Not in the Virgin Islands. I never did go over there, because during his incumbency as governor and then judge I didn't go to the Caribbean at all. I was sorry about that, but I didn't. I went to Europe instead.

Brower: Do you remember the last time you saw him?

Silverman: The last time I saw him, yes. I remember it very well. I saw him at the annual Big C Society dinner at the Claremont Country Club in Oakland in May 1975, and it was a sorrowful sight. Walter Gordon had gone almost blind, having to be escorted to his dinner table. That night he, among a few other Cal graduate football "greats" was awarded a certificate, for having been elected to the Football Hall of Fame. The next day at the football game in the Cal stadium, he was driven in an automobile that was given to him in honor of all that he did for the university, and for the distinction he achieved after graduation. That was the last time I saw him.

Brower: That must have been a sad thing.

- Silverman: Very sad. I could not believe it. It would have been easier to have heard that, rather than to have witnessed it.
- Brower: It must have been a somewhat sudden failing, because you would have seen him in other years at Big C dinners, wouldn't you? Or did you normally not go to them in the preceding years?
- Silverman: It must have been a gradual and invisible debility and disability. In his day, he was a specimen of great health and exceptional alertness, with a continuing interest in the community and in people. Walter Gordon, if he was able, would have been a great cabinet member of Carter's. He had that kind of mind and dedication.
- Brower: That's the kind of leadership that is needed.
- Silverman: Right. Very strong and very rational.
- Brower: We're getting to the end of this tape, but I was wondering if you've thought of any anecdotes about Walter Gordon that you haven't told me. Any additional ones.
- Silverman: I would say this. The one I remember so vividly and impressively was the one about the defeat of the heavier, taller Stanford boxer, Eric Pedley, by General Doolittle. He gloated on that one because, as I say, he was a coach in the corner of Doolittle the night of that exciting contest.
- [end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Boxing through the Years

- Brower: It might be interesting to know what you feel about the general background of boxing at the University of California and its history.
- Silverman: In my time, 1920-1923, California was the outstanding university in teaching the fundamentals of boxing and in intercollegiate matches, having held the championship for some years. We met at that time at the following universities: USC, UCLA, Davis, and Stanford. We had return matches with them, so we had eight boxing matches each of the spring semesters of boxing, with occasional exhibitions given during the fall of the year. There was a great interest, whether we boxed at Berkeley at Harmon Gym or at Stanford, Davis, UCLA, or USC. Great crowds turned out to watch boxing.

Silverman: The graduates I've talked to usually got a big kick out of boxing. They thought it was really great fun, great sport to have given and to have taken less than brutal punches. They look back and they go through the arm motions on the defense and offense. Some say they were hit on the chin or they hit somebody on the chin, a sensitive part of the anatomy. But they have a great feeling for it, because it really relates to something basic in man.

Ira Cross, professor of economics, held in his large Wheeler Hall lectures that one of the basic instincts in man is the combative instinct. Basically, the idea of teaching boxing and related body courses, was to teach the art of self-defense and not to inspire pugilism.

The point is that a man who has learned the various components of self-defense will develop grace and stamina in the use of his body and in his defense against attacks. I asked Arthur Fiedler, "Why did you and Toscanini go to boxing matches?" He said, "Because they remind us of ballet dances, exhibits of masterful and beautiful coordination."

A trained boxer has many components in his training. He does what they call road-work, what is loosely called jogging today, for cardiovascular improvement. Punching the bag for speeding the movements of arms and hands as well as strengthening the back muscles. Rope skipping for body balance. Hitting a big sand bag to achieve accurate punching and defense. Rowing machine for arm and shoulder muscles. Kicking the big, stuffed ball around to aid the abdominal muscles. In other words, you have a total development of muscular coordination for boxing.

And as I say, the emphasis is on self-defense. Not to become pugnacious or to become pugilistic, but learning how to defend yourself. And at the same time, giving you an appreciation of bodily health and self-confidence. You learn to eat right, to sleep right, and to abstain from habits that are deleterious to the body, like excessive drinking, smoking, carousing or anything like that. In other words, you're given the total picture of a man who has developed--hopefully to his maximum on campus--his mind and his body. "Mens sana in corpore sano," is an old Latin precept of a healthy mind in a healthy body, for all to emulate.

There was an article recently, by Art Rosenbaum, the chief sports editor of the S.F. Chronicle, on boxing as the safest sport. Let's take boxing and football, for example. If, in boxing, a man is hit a foul blow--on the neck or in the groin--the man who does that can be disqualified. You take football--if five or six men jump on the man down below, and they usually

Silverman: go after the man who's the outstanding football player, you know what they'll do? They'll elbow him, they'll knee him, they'll punch him, and nobody will see it. You do anything like that in boxing, you're disqualified at once. The bout will stop. So you get a sense of sportsmanship in boxing, too. I'm all for this because it permits a man, whatever his size, whatever his weight, to be induced to go through this training and to achieve what I call bodily coordination, skill, and stamina. And also to gain a sense of confidence--being able to face a number of people.

For that reason I've urged the university now--I'm after Dave Maggard, who's the athletic director--to restore boxing to instruction in classes. That's why I'm interested in it. By the way, the eastern universities and colleges are now restoring boxing to its past posture, and more than that, there was a man out here telling me they even plan to televise it. Major TV stations are televising professional boxing on prime time.

Brower: That is professional boxing?

Silverman: And amateur contests, such as Olympic and Golden Gloves contests. Boxing has come back as a popular sport.

Brower: I guess collegiate boxing looks pretty tame compared to professional?

Silverman: I wouldn't call it tame. Collegiate boxing is more protective, because if a man is wobbly at all, they'll stop the fight. It's the same thing with the Olympics. They're very careful there to protect the boxer. They're not trying to create brutes, just men who have a love of boxing and also a love of what they call coordination of the body.

Brower: What induced you to go into it in the first place? Do you remember why you were interested in boxing?

Silverman: First of all, I always did like boxing. I gave exhibitions as a kid. I was poor. There was a place called the Lyceum Theater in San Francisco. This goes way back. It was near Twenty-ninth and Mission. They had weekly amateur nights. There was also the Wigwam Theater on Mission beyond Sixteenth Street. They used to give you fifty cents to box. Fifty cents in those days was like about five dollars today. It was a lot of money to get, particularly for a poor kid.

Then, of course, I loved the idea of just being healthy. I used to follow the professionals. In those days I was lucky. I mean, they had great fighters in those days, real professionals,

Silverman: who had no other calling. Boxing was then called a profession. That's all the pugilists did. They didn't divide themselves up as they do today between boxing and other pursuits. They really meant business.

Brower: You wouldn't know what motivated Walter Gordon to get into boxing?

Silverman: I think the same thing. It's a natural instinct, as Ira Cross told us. Man has this combative impulse, and boxing is an outlet to utilize as well as to temper it.

A funny thing. Right next to our boxing quarters was the wrestling room. Charlie Andrews was then the wrestling coach. His wrestlers used to come in our area and say, "How about loosening up our muscles? Let's box a little bit." We'd say, "All right. We'll loosen up your muscles, and you tighten our muscles a bit."

Brower: Wrestling tightens muscles; boxing loosens them?

Silverman: Absolutely. I was a boxing instructor, working my way through law school, and I occasionally put on the gloves with professional, heavy-weight wrestlers. They moved their arms slowly and clumsily [demonstrates], and I moved to save myself from man-slaughter. [laughter] Charlie Andrews was also a referee in contests that included great champion wrestlers.

Brower: When you say, next to us was the wrestling room, was that at Cal?

Silverman: Yes, at Harmon Gym, adjacent to the boxing room was the wrestling room. We were really close friends in the sports.

Brower: Did you wrestle at all?

Silverman: No. Well, I wrestled for fun, but not in any competition.

Brower: I suppose the same guy probably never does both?

Silverman: Eddie Nemir did. Not only that, but I think he made the Olympic games. First of all, Eddie Nemir was a Phi Beta Kappa. That's number one. Number two, he was Order of Coif, which is like Phi Beta Kappa in law school. And he decided to become the boxing coach at the university. Fantastic person.

In my time, you see, we had real professionals as our boxing coaches. A fellow named Bobby Johnson, who was the first, an outstanding boxer and competent coach. He was succeeded by Stanley Jones who, in my time, went in there like this [demonstrates], but a great fellow. He played that piano like

Silverman: nobody's business. I remember when we used to go down to Southern California--we'd meet those devils down there--at night before we went into the boxing, he'd play that piano for us for hours. [laughter]

Brower: To sort of soothe you?

Silverman: Absolutely. This was a soothing operation. [laughter]

Brower: Eddie Nemir was short and dark and--

Silverman: I'll tell you everything. He was short and thin. He was not heavy. He didn't give any appearance of being a boxer or wrestler.

Brower: And he didn't look as bright as he was, either. I remember seeing him on the street.

Silverman: Right. But he made the highest honors on the campus, both as an undergraduate and as a law student.
[break]

Family Warmth and Solidarity

Silverman: I went on an Indonesian tour with the Commonwealth Club and among other places we visited primitive villages. It was exciting and enlightening to see a primitive village--a real primitive village. And I saw children there with their parents and in their homes, living in this primitive environment. It was remarkable to observe their looks, their attitudes, their gestures of affection. I said to myself, "How come these children living in this primitive society have that kind of infectious social attitude?" I wanted to talk to Margaret Mead about this, but my own assumptions were these: first of all, these children are breast fed.

You know, when a child leaves the mother's body there's a trauma. They're out in space. I talked to someone a number of years ago; I said, "What do you do to restore the child to its sense of security?" Answer: The mother takes the child and presses that child to her breast to restore her child to a sense of safety. They're breast-fed children. The families are together. They have a great sense of security in the family unity, like we had on the American farms in days gone by.

Brower: It's interesting that you should mention that, because somebody has suggested that that's where Walter Gordon's security and self-confidence came from, that he came from a very warm, supportive, loving family.

Silverman: Well, there you have it. This recalls to me my observations in Indonesia of close family life. This was the greatest experience I've ever had in that regard! Seeing these children, apparently so integrated within themselves, so sociable, so affectionate. I wanted to learn "why" these children were that way. So, we went to the top of the hill where they live, and we saw there how these children live. There's great family strength and solidarity there that we, unfortunately, don't have in this country today, with its multiple distractions--TV, radio, and other forms of entertainment.

I'm very fearful. What to do? I remember ten years ago when I was a member of the National Conference of the Commission on Uniform State Laws--we had a meeting in Chicago. After that, I went to the annual meeting of the American Psychologists Association. They had great misgiving on the future of the American family life. They talked about the numerous divorces, the broken families, and the impact on the children as well as the adults. I don't know that anything is happening in this country to restore the sense of the dignity and pride of the family.

Transcriber: Marilyn Ham
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Minnie Ruth
1978

Interview with Minnie Ruth

Interview History	353
Walter Gordon as a Member of the Berkeley Housing Authority and the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency	354
The Character of Walter Gordon	357
Walter Gordon and the Black Movement	359
Walter Gordon's Activities on the Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency	359
The Redevelopment of the Ocean View Area	363
Walter Gordon's Later Berkeley Years	367
Walter Gordon: An Appreciation	370

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Minnie Ruth (Mrs. Herman D. Ruth) is a professional planner of some twenty years' experience. She is a member of the firm of Herman D. Ruth and Associates, planning consultants with offices in Berkeley. Mrs. Ruth served on the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency from June 1968 to August 1976 and on the Berkeley Housing Authority from 1967 to the present time.

Upon his return to Berkeley from the Virgin Islands, Walter Gordon was named to the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency and the Berkeley Housing Authority, and he served on those boards from 1970 until illness prevented his further attendance at meetings. During that period he and Mrs. Ruth were colleagues and, in spite of the thirty-odd years difference in their ages, they became good friends. Walter Gordon's attitude toward Minnie Ruth was one of old-fashioned chivalry; he was concerned for her and protective of her during difficult political times when the agency was the target of neighborhood hostility. She enjoyed his wit and respected the keenness of his mind and the solidity of his principles.

Conduct of the Interview

A single interview was taped on October 11, 1976, at the offices on Dwight Way of Herman D. Ruth and Associates, identifiable, as Mrs. Ruth told me, in having the only trees on the block. The interview took place in one of a group of bare, modern rooms, housing a youthful and busy staff. The offices had been newly completed and were not yet mellowed, and the setting was coldly professional.

It was clear that Mrs. Ruth had both admiration and affection for Walter Gordon, and it is fair to assume that he also found the relationship a happy one.

Few editorial changes were made by Mrs. Ruth except for the addition of names and dates.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: October 11, 1976]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH MINNIE RUTH

Walter Gordon as a Member of the Berkeley Housing Authority
and the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency

Brower: Mrs. Ruth, what was your impression of Walter Gordon when you served with him on the Berkeley Housing Authority and the Berkeley Redevelopment Agency?

Ruth: He really was a very great guy. He also had a very quiet sense of humor, and he always had a few jokes and a few stories to tell. He just was a very cheerful person to be around, and a very warm person. I personally felt I gained a great deal. I learned a great deal from him.

Brower: I wanted to ask you about the agencies themselves, what their correct names are and what their responsibilities were.

Ruth: The Berkeley Urban Redevelopment Agency was the official redevelopment agency of the city of Berkeley. There were seven members appointed by the mayor and they were concerned with the redevelopment of the West Berkeley Industrial Park and Sava Island. Judge Gordon was on it when we were working on the West Berkeley Industrial Park and the start of Sava Island. He had been for two years the chairman of the Berkeley Housing Authority, composed of five members. They administered the Section 23 leased housing programs in the city of Berkeley and subsequently initiated the Section 8 Housing Program.

Brower: Did Walter Gordon serve concurrently on those two agencies?

Ruth: Yes.

Brower: From August 1970 until he was not well enough to continue?

Ruth: Right. He served beyond his appointed term, as most of us--all of us--did, as a matter of fact.

Brower: Were there other minority representatives on that group when Judge Gordon served?

Ruth: Let's see. On the Housing Authority at the time that Judge Gordon was on--no. On the Redevelopment Agency there was from time to time, I believe. Annette Green was one of them. I can't recall whether Ken Goode was on there. I believe he was for a part of the time; Henry Ramsey and Frank Yamasaki also served on the Redevelopment Agency.

Brower: Was it a group that was representative of Berkeley in a loose sort of way? What were the occupations of the other members of the board?

Ruth: On the Housing Authority: Bob Nisbet is an attorney for AC Transit. Michael Goodman is an architect and professor. Joe Garret was a student at the time; I believe he came on while Judge Gordon was still on. Annette Green was a student. Ken Goode was a lawyer for AEC and left shortly after his move to the University. I'm trying to remember who was the other member of the Housing Authority. There was an effort to appoint people from different parts of the city by the mayor.

Brower: There was you.

Ruth: That's right. Now, the Housing Authority only had five members, whereas the Redevelopment Agency had seven.

Brower: I see. You were already a member of this group when Walter Gordon joined?

Ruth: Yes.

Brower: Had you known him or met him before?

Ruth: I had never met him before, although I had heard about him for many years before. I can recall when he was appointed first as governor and then judge of the Virgin Islands. I came out to California in '51, and I remember reading about him in connection with the Adult Authority. Somehow, I can remember his connection with the Adult Authority before I ever came out here. It was either during my early professional days in Chicago or possibly just reading the newspaper in Washington or something like that.

Brower: Had you been a student of criminology--?

Ruth: No. I was a student of public administration. But I think that the Adult Authority of California had been held up nationally as a model. And I somehow suspect that's probably where I read about him in some of the national publications, newspapers and articles.

My own impression, when I heard that Wallace Johnson had appointed him to fill a vacancy on the Redevelopment Agency, was that we were getting a touch of class for the first time in the agency. Here was a man who was coming to us having served as governor of the Virgin Islands and as a federal judge.

And there is no doubt about it, over the years he not only had a touch of class but he had warmth and charity and a great deal of common sense, which some of us lack in times of crisis.

Brower: What sort of situation did he come into when he came back to Berkeley and began serving on this board?

Ruth: He came at a time when the Ocean View Committee and the radicals were taking on both the Housing Authority and the Redevelopment Agency for various reasons. The Ocean View Committee wanted to stop the Industrial Park, and about the same time they wanted to stop the conversion of an old hotel for lease by the Housing Authority in downtown Berkeley for housing for the elderly. So it was this kind of a setting that the Judge was coming back to.

Brower: Were these hostilities along racial lines?

Ruth: At first it appeared that they were not. But ultimately, as it sorted out, the radicals lost the majority of the minority group in their battle because they really were not representing the true needs of minority people. Maybe that's what the Judge saw. I can remember his leaning over to me at one of the meetings, having listened to a long, laborious statement by one of the radicals, and saying, "My word, the party line hasn't changed in fifty years, has it?"

And I said to him, "No, the party line has not changed, only the names and titles have."

He laughed and said to me, "I can change the faces, and I can change the names, but it's exactly what I used to hear fifty years ago."

Brower: What sort of a role did he take in this?

Ruth: When he came into the Redevelopment Agency, he came in at a moment when the radicals had threatened, physically threatened, all the men on the Redevelopment Agency. They had threatened to beat them up. They had threatened to burn their houses. And so the agency members--I was the only one who voted against it--voted to declare a moratorium on all action. That motion had to be reversed at the following meeting because it was against the terms of our contract with the federal government, and we were the executing agency for the city.

The staff told the Judge before our meeting that the chairman of the agency would not be present, that the vice-chairman, Minnie Ruth, would be present. And the Judge, bless him, who was a gentleman of the old school, said, "You expect a woman to handle a situation in such a matter, under these conditions?" And they said, "Don't worry about it."

But he certainly was very concerned about me then, and he always was.

The Character of Walter Gordon

Brower: And he was supportive?

Ruth: Very supportive. Supportive in a way that was in the best interest of the city. He knew when you had to take an action that was not popular. But it didn't bother him, and I think that this reflects his whole background. He did things that may not have been popular but he did what he knew was legally, but even more fundamentally, morally right. And to me it reflects his entire life.

I think that he was a very happy man, for the most part, in both his up-bringing and in his married life and certainly even in his life when he returned here, in spite of the failings of old age and the illness that was coming upon him. When he reminisced, he spoke about some of the things that he went through, some of the life that he endured, with a sense of humor and a warmth, and you knew that he had learned something from each situation, that he was not bitter about some of the things that had happened to him. Certainly he was very lucky, but he had within him the things that just meant that he was going to win. He was a winner, I would say, and that was probably detected by people all along the line.

Brower: He was recognized as being somebody who was going to make it?

Ruth: He was. There's no question in my mind that he was going to make it. He described his early childhood. He described, very interestingly, the favoring of women in his family. There was an attempt to give them the required education, normal school, for teaching, because they felt that this was going to be one way to elevate the economic and social standard of the family.

But somewhere along the line he too, and I think with the inspiration from his family, was able to make it, to get to college. And he worked very hard. He worked during the time he was going to law school. He worked and studied, and I think that man only had four hours of sleep a night at some point. He only spoke vaguely about his football days, but he also spoke about being on the Berkeley Police Force. I believe this was when he was going to law school.

Brower: And in addition to that he was coaching and scouting for the football team. A very busy life!

Ruth: It was a very busy life. I think that also, and this was reflected. He was very fortunate in his personal life; he married a very charming and a very beautiful woman, a woman most sought after, very popular. And I have no question, having met her and talked with her, that she did a great deal to make his life a very happy one.

And he spoke, I wouldn't say necessarily with pride, but with happiness in the fact that his children had managed to do so well. I think that in spite of any illnesses and the types of frustration that he may have encountered, he was a man who was able to throw off unhappiness, or at least to gain something from everything that possibly confronted him that was not very happy.

Brower: Do you recall any specific anecdotes that he told about those hardships, about the difficult things that happened, or is it a general impression you have now?

Ruth: Oh, there were probably one or two instances that escape me now, but he was describing, for instance, some of the incidents that occurred while he was on the police force. And while he was a big man when I knew him he must have been bigger before. He described dealing with domestic problems as a policeman and dealing with big drunks that came sailing at him with a broken whiskey bottle or beer bottle. And his own apprehension of being able to deal with the situation, but he said, "one way or the other," he met up with them.

That was, of course, a physical difficulty. But he never spoke, to me at any rate, about his feeling that he had been short-changed. He only told me about the experiences that he'd had where

Ruth: people helped along the way. Apparently in his football days he had some misapprehensions whether he could handle everything. And all of his superiors said, "You can do it!" And they apparently encouraged him in every area that he undertook to make sure that he knew that he was supported, that he liked what he was doing, and they helped him along the way. This is what did come through to me.

Walter Gordon and the Black Movement

Ruth: I think that he was a man who all his life fought for integration. He felt that that was the basic principle that he was trying to attain, and as a result in his later years was probably considered--

Brower: An Uncle Tom?

Ruth: Well, yes. An Uncle Tom, a turncoat, because he did not, and could not, support a black movement, because he felt that was not the correct approach, that it was turning a back on integration. He certainly felt very strongly about equal opportunity, but he did not feel that because of a person's skin he should be given preference when the ability and the training or the knowledge was not there. He felt that they should be given the opportunity to join in. There's no question in my mind that he felt that education was extremely important.

Brower: Did he have any real confrontations with blacks who took other positions that you know about?

Ruth: The only thing that I know about was a gathering of law students and young professors or young instructors at the university who wanted to increase the proportion of black students in the law school. This bothered him a great deal. From what I understood, he would not join in. He felt that it was going against integration--that you were awarding entrance into the school simply on the basis of color rather than ability. And he felt that this was a way of asking for preference, which was not a part of integration as he saw it and as he fought for it all his life.

Walter Gordon's Activities on the Housing Authority and Redevelopment Agency

Brower: What was his relation with other members of the board? Do you know? Did you have a special relation with him; were you especially close to him, or--?

Ruth: Well, let's put it this way. He used to sit next to me all the time, partly because I could very quickly explain to him what the matter was that was coming up, and partly because he felt very protective toward me, I being the only woman around, and in his courteous and gentlemanly manner--he always felt that I should be protected. But I laughed and I used to say, "Now Judge, you've got to sit next to me because I'm the only one around here who can calm you down when you get excited." There were things that angered him, statements that were made, very rash statements that were made--

Brower: Now was this, you mean, within the group itself?

Ruth: No, that would have been made from--

Brower: --from the public who would appear--?

Ruth: Usually a member of the Ocean View Committee.

And I'd say under my breath to him, "Now, now, Judge, take it easy, calm down."

Brower: How did this show itself, the annoyance? I mean, did he say things out loud, or could you just sort of see it building up?

Ruth: I could see it building up, and he used to mutter things under his breath to me. I could also see that his facial muscles would sometimes tighten up. But I think that in the course of his being an attorney, a policeman, a judge, he was far more used to these matters than anyone else on that committee was. No question in my mind. So he would take it, but--

Brower: Not without some anguish.

Ruth: Well, not only anguish but I think any person, someone who has done a great deal in his life for social causes, to be accused at this stage of his life of disregarding the poor, disregarding equality, of taking people's property away from them, or any other of these false accusations--it was very human that he resented these statements. But I don't think it went any further than that, than just a very hot, momentary thing. I don't think it ever lasted more than that minute.

Brower: Did you find yourself in agreement with him, always?

Ruth: The only time I didn't I learned a very bitter lesson. It was at a time when the Redevelopment Agency failed to enter a lawsuit brought by California Tomorrow dealing with the question of an environmental impact statement. The Judge said we should join San Francisco and HUD in fighting the case. Nisbet led the

Ruth: opposition in saying: Let's not. We shouldn't spend the money. Let them do it; we'll just follow.

And the Judge was absolutely right. In effect, we kept quiet. The particular nuances of the Berkeley case did not come out in the court, from what I heard. Our attorney could not participate, and the Judge [Walter Gordon] really had listened very carefully to what Don McCollum had to say, and he said, "Listen to your attorney. He's right." We didn't, and we suffered. The whole project was delayed as a result.

Brower: Do you think that his choosing to live where he did, on University, had something to do with his not wanting to be judged as someone who had moved away from his own people? I'm not clear at all what his motivation was in remaining there.

Ruth: Well, I know that, at least initially, they were looking for a place to live. And Mrs. Gordon wanted a house with a view. The Judge no longer drove a car when they returned [from the Virgin Islands], so it meant that she was his chauffeur, or he used public transportation. I think it was a necessity and he probably saw that. Indeed his final blindness came about when he was on a bus.

He had to rely on public transportation. As time went on I think he may have thought of moving elsewhere; he may not have. But this is certain--what was temporary turned out to be of a very permanent nature and very handy for him.

Brower: Are you suggesting then that it was a matter of convenience as much as anything?

Ruth: I don't know what was further behind it, but I think there was no question that it was really a very convenient location. I think that they might have liked to have moved up to the hills, or located on a quieter street, and maybe there was a little reticence. I really don't know about it. But I will say that I would see Mrs. Gordon scooting about in the car and driving him around. There's no question in my mind that it was a very convenient location. I do remember a taunt by a member of the Ocean View Committee regarding the location of his residence. The remark brought on momentary annoyance. I suspect that it might have been rather noisy as well, and I don't know for how long they continued to look, but I do know that they were looking for another place.

Brower: Was your association with him solely at meetings? Did you know him socially as well?

Ruth: I did not know him socially. I didn't know any of the other members of the agency socially, and don't to this day. The only socializing that we may have done, if at all, was at a committee meeting or before and after an agency meeting, where we may have chatted. But that's been my relationship with all the agency members.

Brower: Where were the meetings held?

Ruth: The meetings were held in the offices of the Redevelopment Agency, first on Center Street when it was located in the Wittich Building, and then at 2000 Hearst.

Brower: Those meetings were how frequent?

Ruth: According to our by-laws they were to be held once a month. Sometimes we had two and three meetings of the agency a month. But there were also committee meetings, at least one or two a month. Now, not all of the members went to all of those committee meetings because they were made up of only three members. But Judge Gordon was on a couple of committees and he did serve except when he was ill. He was at those meetings and he participated. I did not as a rule attend the committee meetings when I was the chairman of the agency, but when I was not the chairman I did attend those meetings and participated.

Brower: Do you feel that he made a valuable contribution to that group?

Ruth: No question in my mind that he did. Old age is not popular in our modern-day American society, but I think he looked at what was going on from a much broader background and vision than most of the other members of the agency. He may have been deliberate, which was part of his background, and people might have gotten impatient with him. But no question in my mind that he made a contribution, and a positive one, to both agencies.

Brower: Did he have cordial relations with all members, or was he more frequently in conflict with certain of the group?

Ruth: No. Our decisions if you look over them over the course of the years were usually whoever was there against one. And he [Walter Gordon] was with those of us who voted on the majority decisions, usually. His conflict with the one person was on the same grounds as the others of us.

Brower: Were these partisan political alignments at all?

Ruth: Not in terms of Republican or Democrat, if that's what you mean?

Brower: Yes, that's what I meant.

Ruth: Actually--gee, I don't know people's politics, but that never entered into it. It was the question: do you do what the purposes of the agencies are (i.e., carry out the redevelopment plan) or do you succumb to the political pressures of the times, or pull back from the missions of those two agencies?

Brower: And his view then was that you functioned as you were set up to function?

Ruth: His view was: this was the ordinance of the city; we were there to carry out the ordinance in a fair and equitable manner. He was most concerned, for instance, that we carry out the provisions of the federal and state law and of the city ordinance. He wanted to make sure that there was adequate compensation for the taking of property by the Redevelopment Agency. He wanted to make sure that there was adequate notice and that sort of thing. But the ordinance was passed, the plan was approved, and there was no question but you were carrying it out.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

The Redevelopment of the Ocean View Area

Brower: We were talking about Walter Gordon and the redevelopment of the Ocean View area as an industrial park.

Ruth: What most people do not realize is that those houses, while they may be very picturesque, are structurally in very bad shape. To blacks, to minorities, and to people who must live in such housing because they are poor, those houses represent a way of living--in decrepit, unsafe, unsanitary housing--to which the minorities and the poor are condemned.

Brower: Well, the solution to that, I would think, is not in putting factories up in lieu of those houses but in providing adequate, low-cost housing.

Ruth: Well--sure. But those houses are there, and those structures are there. They represent a way of living that people who have had to live in those places do not want to see continued.

You must understand that Walter, in his position as a Housing Authority member, was extremely interested in the whole matter of public housing, of low-rent housing, of subsidized housing--of ways of helping families better themselves.

Brower: It's always seemed to me that that was the first step. I mean that before industrial use should be made of bad housing the step that should precede is providing adequate similar housing, that is low-cost housing.

Ruth: Well, the laws in one way or another require that the family be relocated in safe and sanitary housing.

Brower: Not just doubling up with their cousin.

Ruth: That's right. And, lord, if you go into the archives you can read about communities where this was not done. This was done here. Some of the families resided here because of special circumstances; some were there because it was an accident; some had moved here when they worked here. There were some, of course, that wanted to move on, or were ready to move on on their own, but even there, there's documentation of those families being moved on.

Judge Gordon was concerned that the families were properly relocated and then, looking at the public housing picture, that our housing units were standard housing units. This was wearing his other hat, of the Housing Authority. He wanted to be sure that families that were eligible were able to get into the housing that the city was able to get.

He certainly wanted to see as much improvement in the housing stock as could be. That improvement would come in many different ways. I think that only if you have lived in or experienced the conditions of those structures and areas, can you know how deep the hatred is of that kind of housing, of what it stands for.

Brower: It is a symbol?

Ruth: It is, very definitely, and interestingly enough I have seen that same feeling come out in the black community from rich, poor, professional, laborer, and in others who've had to live in that kind of housing, not out of choice but out of necessity.

Brower: I suppose that makes all the difference, whether it's choice or necessity?

Ruth: That's right. When you know that you can get out of there any time, you can look at it as a great big lark. But when you don't have that opportunity, then you look at it much differently.

The other thing I wanted to say about Walter Gordon as a Housing Authority member was that he looked at the problems and the complaints of both the tenants and the landlords who came before the agency from time to time with that same judicial equanimity.

Ruth: He was not going to favor one group or one person over the other. He certainly was a profound believer in the law, and in the judicial process and in the administrative process. He did not want to see inequities and he did not want to see an injustice, but on the other hand he disliked seeing somebody taking advantage either one way or the other for their own personal gain or privilege.

Brower: There was nothing knee-jerk about his reactions, apparently.

Ruth: No. He was not. People will say that he did not relate to young people. I don't think that that was true. I think that what he didn't relate to was the latest labeling, because he may not have been on the street and familiar with it. I can remember there was one occasion that was really hilarious. I'm trying to remember whether this was the Housing Authority or the Redevelopment Agency. I think this was the Redevelopment Agency. A couple of young people came in who wanted temporary use of some of the buildings that the agency owned. One was for an alternate school and the other was for a commune. The Judge looked absolutely bewildered by "commune," because he immediately took this to mean the terms of the Communist commune. And the alternate school didn't mean anything to him. So I looked at him, and I think maybe with a little twinkle in my eye, said to him, "Judge, you just have to understand the definition. A commune is a boardinghouse, and an alternate school is a private school."

So he looked at me and said, "Well, why don't they say what they mean." [laughter]

Brower: Well, did the young people get their temporary use? I suppose that wouldn't have been his decision alone?

Ruth: No, it was not his decision. The commune, I remember, was not an acceptable use at all. The agency had problems with that alternate school; since it would have occurred on property that we owned there would have to be all sorts of protection, all sorts of insurance, to make sure that we would not be responsible--

Brower: Legally liable?

Ruth: Yes, if something happened to the kids. If I'm not mistaken, it was the problems of insurance and getting the right clearances from all the necessary authorities that just weighted the thing down. But we would not grant immediate approval of it unless these terms and conditions were met and we were assured that the children would be adequately protected from the very heavy traffic that occurs in the Industrial Park.

Brower: But within the law you're not limited to residential use of the property?

Ruth: The redevelopment plan did not permit residential use in that area.

Brower: Oh, I see. So the use as an alternate school would have been appropriate if the other conditions had been met?

Ruth: Well, it really wouldn't have been appropriate. You wouldn't call it appropriate because the property was really meant to be primarily industrial.

Brower: At least it was not residential.

Ruth: It was not residential. At that point, for instance, the agency did use some of the housing as a temporary measure. We would relocate a family from one structure perhaps into another one on a temporary basis. But these were primarily families from the Industrial Park. As for the commune itself, as I recall, there was no reason for giving them even a temporary use in that area.

At one time there was a drug-related program that wanted to come in there. And again it was a matter of having the insurance. I don't know why it was that they really didn't come through. But the people in the area were very resentful of this half-way house coming in. As I recall, if they were stopped, which I assume they were, maybe it was because they knew that if they came into the Industrial Park it would be temporary. Maybe they found a permanent place. Or, again you would think that it was just a simple matter, but there were clearances and approvals and certain factors that have to be considered when you take something even like a half-way house or something that is institutional in nature into a residential structure.

Brower: Was Walter Gordon quick to grasp the ground rules of this agency and the problems?

Ruth: Yes. I would say there is no question but what the staff adequately prepared him, but in any case he was a learned man--an attorney and a judge, and he had also served on an administrative agency for the state. So there was no problem.

I think he was getting reacquainted with Berkeley, perhaps. But he took to the whole matter as if he had been there for some time. I think that he needed very little tooling up on some of the legal issues that came up on either agency from time to time, and with just a few words by the attorney or attorneys he knew exactly, probably far more than most of us, what the significance of a problem was.

Brower: And he must have been in his seventies at that time.

Ruth: I'm not sure. But he certainly was up in his years.

Brower: He must have been about seventy-three.

Ruth: But, you know, in some of his remarks and some of his attitudes and some of his perceptions he could certainly see what the issues were; he could see what the problems were and he could come to a decision very rapidly and see what the consequences of action and inaction were.

Walter Gordon's Later Berkeley Years

Brower: You spoke of his humor--do you think of specific examples of that or was it just sort of pervasive?

Ruth: It was a pervasive kind of thing. He always had it, except when he was not feeling particularly well, and even then he managed to have a twinkle in his eye. He was a very cheerful and a very warm person, and I think that no matter what difficulties he faced I have a feeling that this kind of character in him helped him face these things with a lot more ease. And it's probably one of the secrets of his success.

He had great compassion for people. He was very concerned that people were adequately protected, that no matter what the difficulties, whether in his eyes a person was acting right or wrongly, that they were not suffering.

Brower: Did he speak to you at all about the Virgin Islands experience?

Ruth: He did but only briefly. Generally, I heard about it only in two ways. One was when various friends would come out here for a conference. And so he would see them and he would merely say that he had gone out to dinner or had seen a particular friend from his Virgin Islands days.

Brower: Would you know if this was a black friend or a white friend?

Ruth: I had no way of knowing, because in the course of his conversation he would speak of both black and white and only if I happened to know about them would I have had any inkling who they were. He'd speak of Chester Nimitz as being an old friend of his and he could speak of having seen Paul Williams.

Brower: Unless you knew there would be no way of knowing?

Ruth: That's right.

Brower: I interrupted you. You said there were two ways you heard about the Virgin Islands. One of them was when Virgin Islands friends visited, and--?

Ruth: And the other was some of the problems--and I recall reading about it--that he faced on the bench, and this had to do with housing. I don't know if you recall, but there was a great FHA scandal all across the country, and certainly the Virgin Islands was no different, where contractors substituted the wrong or inferior materials in the construction of housing. I recall his saying that for a while there the greatest part of his caseload had to do with where the prosecutors were after these contractors who had substituted inferior materials, who had not carried out the provisions of their contracts.

Brower: That gives me some idea of the kinds of cases he was dealing with.

Ruth: Also, I think from time to time when the weather here was inclined to be chilly he would say, "My blood's thinned out after all those years in the Virgin Islands."

Brower: Yes, I imagine Berkeley seems pretty chilly after that.

Ruth: And of course, getting along in years, he would feel the cold more than he had as a young man when he was very active and very healthy and wasn't plagued with the circulatory problems that he had in his older age.

Brower: Do you know anything about his other community relations at that time?

Ruth: In the Virgin Islands?

Brower: In Berkeley.

Ruth: Oh, in Berkeley. He was apparently busy with some of the other organizations. I'm trying to remember which clubs they were but--

Brower: I think the Breakfast Club was one.

Ruth: The Breakfast Club may have been one, but it seemed to me that he also spoke about another couple, including membership in the Elks Club; but not being a member of them and not having much to do with them, I really didn't pay too much attention to them, I suppose.

Brower: Did his athletic interest show itself at all?

Ruth: He would talk about athletics with other people and I might come in at the tail end of the conversation, that is, I might hear it. But aside from when he was talking about his days on the Cal team or dealing with that period of his life I was really not that familiar with it.

Brower: Did you know that he was the first black All-American? Well, he and Paul Robeson were named the same year--1918, Paul Robeson to the first team and Gordon to the third. And actually Gordon was the first Berkeley team man who was named.

Ruth: He never talked about that as such. He talked about the training table; he talked about the coach spurring him on to various and sundry things.

Brower: When he talked about the training table did he mention that he wasn't served at the training table initially? He had to eat somewhere else.

Ruth: No. I'm trying to think what it was that he had to say. It's interesting--only in a very few, very few, oblique comments would he mention where he was discriminated against. He never dwelt on it, but what he would always dwell upon--and he would repeat them and some people said that he was being senile because he would dwell on them--would be the success, the positive things that happened.

Brower: And, as you said, on the positive help he'd been given rather than the--

Ruth: Always. And I think he was always grateful for it. I think it was those things that he was looking for in the younger people today, and it was the thing that sort of bothered him--that these weren't the things they were building on.

I was really taken aback at first when I discovered young black people, both professional and nonprofessional, who did not know who he was. In a period of time when my children in school had been given all this information about various black heroes, and here is a man who--

Brower: A local one.

Ruth: A local one. I was explaining that he had been a governor and a judge to these young people in their twenties and thirties, and I was really quite taken aback that they didn't know who he was. Those who did know who he was, there's no question about it, and the older whites who had known him, all had nothing but praise and good thoughts about him.

As I say, my relationship to him was maybe a little bit different than most, because of being only on the Redevelopment Agency, but in comparing him with other older people that I have known I would say that he was quite active and still in his way very supportive of the things that he believed in. Now, they may not have been popular at that moment, but in the long range these were the things that he felt very strongly about.

Brower: And of course his methods had served him in his time as the methods of young blacks now simply wouldn't have.

Ruth: I don't know, because this short period of time in the late sixties, early seventies, was the period of revolution, and interestingly enough, now that things generally have calmed down and the dust has settled, the things that he was striving for are the things that still must be done. No question about it, education is extremely important; he believed whole-heartedly in integration of housing and of education. And these are still the important things--they may not be coming about as rapidly as the revolutionaries of the late sixties/early seventies wanted, and they're getting setbacks in our recession period, but I think that the net gains have been great. The things that may not have been so popular are extremely important, and that is that, regardless of who you are, you cannot ride on the color of your skin or your popularity; you have to have something behind it.

Walter Gordon: An Appreciation

Ruth: Walter Gordon was, I think, a very popular and probably a very personable guy, but he had something behind that. I think this is true of the young black professional people, the young black technicians that we see. They may have personalities and may have winning ways about them, but they also have something to back that up.

I think that our housing integration is not proceeding very rapidly. It probably would have proceeded much more rapidly if we had a bigger and a better housing supply, but with virtually no building going on, that is stymied.

I think that the barriers of isolation are slowly crumbling, and I think that Walter Gordon took a longer range view of things, that he knew you're not going to accomplish any revolution like that overnight. He was satisfied to see a change, maybe slow, maybe an occasional step backwards, but certainly from the time that he saw it as a youth to the time of his old age there was a very definite improvement and a very definite advancement.

Brower: Is there anything more you would like to remember or any avenues to explore that I haven't thought to ask you about?

Ruth: No, I think not. You know, my dealings with him were very narrow. I always prefer to remember him as a very vital and a very, I'd say, courageous person, always courageous--and his dry sense of humor and

Ruth: his sparkle. And particularly I think what was important was that he could look at things no matter how rough they got with a perspective that very few of us have. I guess part of it is old age, although I wouldn't say that it was old age, because rather than old age I would say that he had maturity, and that was the thing that he had that I really gained a great deal from.

Brower: I get the impression that you're very glad you knew him.

Ruth: Oh, I would say that it was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had.

Brower: Thank you very much.

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Redmond C. Staats, Jr.
ca. 1955

Interview with Redmond C. Staats, Jr.

Interview History	372
Walter Gordon as an Attorney	373
Walter Gordon as Chairman of the Adult Authority	375
Walter Gordon's View on Penology	378
Contacts with Walter Gordon in the Virgin Island Years	379
Walter Gordon's Legal Philosophy	381
Walter Gordon's Later Berkeley Years	382
Walter Gordon and Racial Discrimination	384
Walter Gordon's Last Years	385
Walter Gordon's Humility and Humor	386
The Gordon Family	387
Walter Gordon's Funeral	388

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Judge Redmond C. Staats, Jr., has served the Berkeley and the University communities with distinction. Educated in the Berkeley public schools, Judge Staats has an A.B. (1933) from the University of California, Berkeley, and an L.B. (1938) from Hastings. He practiced law in Berkeley from 1938 to 1951, when he was named first to the municipal and then to the superior bench. He has served as president of the Berkeley Junior Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club and of the Alameda County Historical Society. In 1958 he headed a committee of the Berkeley Board of Education to study interracial problems in the schools. He was alumni representative to the Associated Students executive committee and a member of the California Alumni Council executive committee and of the Big C board of directors. In 1961 he received the Benjamin Ide Wheeler Award, presented biennially by the Berkeley Service Club Council in recognition of notable community service, an award that Walter Gordon also received.

In his various capacities Judge Staats had frequent and affectionate contacts with Walter Gordon. He became a fan of Walter Gordon's when he was in grammar school (via his older sister's yearbook); he met him as a U.C. student; he observed him in court as a fellow attorney; as a judge he became familiar with Gordon's role in the Adult Authority, and they had opportunities to discuss penal and legal philosophy; during the years Walter Gordon spent in the Virgin Islands the two men met when the Gordons vacationed in Berkeley; and after Walter Gordon's retirement their participation in community service organizations and projects brought them together frequently. Judge Staats is well qualified to speak on Walter Gordon.

Conduct of the Interview

One interview was held, on July 6, 1977. With typical thoughtfulness and courtesy, Judge Staats arranged to come down from his Santa Rosa home to the Berkeley campus so that the interview might be taped in the Regional Oral History Office. He came into the office with the vigorous air of a man who is contented and in splendid health, and his comments were both thoughtful and lively; they required minimal editing when he reviewed them. Clearly Judge Staats's memories of Walter Gordon are happy ones, and I think the interview gave him pleasure, as it did me.

Anne Brower

July, 1979
Berkeley, California

[Date of Interview: July 6, 1977]

[Begin tape 1, side 1]

INTERVIEW WITH REDMOND C. STAATS, JR.

Walter Gordon as an Attorney

Brower: Judge Staats, do you recall your first meeting and first impression of Walter Gordon?

Staats: Well, rather, my first impression is one that I derived from when I was a youngster of about eight or nine years of age when I used to read of his exploits on the football field in my sister's Blue and Gold, the University's annual yearbook. I immediately became a fan of his, and from then on. Actually, I didn't meet him until I was on the campus as a student some time between 1929 and 1933, and then it was merely a casual meeting at a big gathering. But I first met him, to get acquainted with him, when I began practicing law in 1938.

Brower: What sort of contacts did you have with him when you were both attorneys?

Staats: First of all, it was barely getting acquainted with attorneys to see them in the courtroom, but a short time after I was admitted we had our first encounter in the courtroom. He gave me a good licking at that time, coming up with a new thought in the law that the judge bought hook, line, and sinker at the time. Shortly after--this was 1939--we had another case against each other in a child custody case. This time I won a moral victory. I almost got custody of the child for my client, but he still came out on the winning side temporarily, until his client finally turned the child over to my client. But in both of those meetings, the admiration I had had for him before just increased. He was gracious, intelligent, and working for his client all the way through, a very able attorney, but never resorting to any tricks or anything like that, and trying the case like a good, able lawyer should.

Brower: May I ask you, were his clients black or white in those two cases? Do you recall?

Staats: The first one I don't recall; the second one, they were white. As a matter of fact, you'd run into him in the courtroom on occasion when you were down there for uncontested matters, and I would say that the majority of his clients were probably white people from down in West Berkeley at the time.

Brower: That's interesting, isn't it? Neighbors, probably?

Staats: This would be in 1939, and there wasn't a sizable black population in Berkeley at that time yet.

Brower: Am I correct in thinking that when you were in high school there was only one black boy in school?

Staats: No, there was more than that, but I think you could count them on both fingers of your hands. The black population of the whole school was maybe about twenty altogether.

Walter Gordon's offices were down on the corner of University and San Pablo, which was, at that time, in a predominantly white area. If you recall the segregation of the old days, the black population was mainly over near Ashby and Sacramento which, by the way, is where his home was--a little north of Ashby on Acton Street. That's where the greatest number of blacks was. He was the only attorney with offices down in West Berkeley and had quite a big clientele from what we call the West Berkeley population, which at that time was a very clannish population, too. It was a division of the city.

Brower: It was a real community?

Staats: Yes, it was a community strongly bound together. He had a number of clients from there.

Brower: Do you recall other times when you appeared in court together?

Staats: Those are the only two times that I can think of and remember specifically. I'd see him, maybe, at a probate hearing and occasionally on an uncontested divorce. But if I'm correct it was 1943 when he went to the State Adult Authority. Is that correct?

Brower: Not quite. According to my figures it was 1945. But he became the attorney to the Golden State Insurance Company, and I don't know whether that limited his practice somewhat.

Staats: That might have done it. I thought it was 1943 or 1944. Maybe that's when the appointment was first announced, because I remember picking him up, seeing him on the street one day just after he'd been appointed; that was before I'd gone into the service, and I went into the service in 1944.

Brower: That's what I was thinking, that your association with him must have been interrupted by your war service.

Staats: That's right. It was interrupted by the war service and also by the fact that he went on the Adult Authority, and it may have been before, when he became attorney for Golden State that his civilian clientele was left to someone else. I don't know.

Walter Gordon as Chairman of the Adult Authority

Brower: You would not have had any occasion to have contact with him as the chairman of the Adult Authority?

Staats: Not until I became a municipal court judge in 1951. In the early fifties my contact with him became that of a student of just what the Adult Authority did. Although none of the people I would handle at the municipal court would go to the Adult Authority, it was part of the whole state penal system in which I had a very particular interest. As a result, I would have talks with him and would get a number of his publications. I believe it was in the fifties that he began making extensive public lectures all on his own time. I don't think anyone ever gave him an honorarium for them. He would have to travel at length throughout the state to service clubs and civic gatherings.

Brower: To explain the nature of the Adult Authority?

Staats: That was the thought of it. He was explaining the nature of the Adult Authority and his experiences with the prisoners that appeared before him.

Brower: The Adult Authority was a departure from the established penal system, wasn't it?

Staats: It was an entirely new system that had gotten away from the old one of the judge sentencing the fixed term, and then the Parole Board--which the Adult Authority replaced--would then have a request before it by the prisoner to be paroled, which they would act on. They had the authority to parole them. But then we started our indeterminate sentence law in earnest when Walter first became chairman of the Adult Authority.

Brower: It had been on the books since [19]17, actually.

Staats: Yes, but it had gone on a parole system. Then the judge merely sentenced the person to prison for the time fixed by law, which would be one-to-ten years for something like assault or burglary, life for murder, and different terms for each offense. Then the Adult Authority would immediately start conducting an investigation and within a certain period of time--if I'm not mistaken, six months to a year--the prisoner appeared before them the first time. Beginning with that--they wouldn't necessarily do it then--they went into his history and then would eventually fix the terms of the prisoner.

It was a revolutionary concept and well thought of. In fact, in all ways all the time that Walter Gordon was there--oh, there's always criticism of any public official or any public body--but the Adult Authority was very highly regarded until long after he left in the late fifties. Then all of a sudden the public seemed to become incensed with the idea at both ends. The conservative end felt that they were letting too many prisoners out. The liberal end thought that they were being unfair to prisoners, that they'd built up a bureaucracy that was hard to get through. So now we have a new law on the books just starting that leaves the sentencing up to the judge again. I see great problems for it, myself.

Brower: I was going to ask you what your own view was of the indeterminate sentence.

Staats: I just think that the judge is not in a position to fix a definite sentence, without having conducted a number of hearings. The judge has seen and heard the trial and there may be some impression there of the defendant. Say the defendant is found guilty; then the judge gets a probation report. So he has his history up to that time. But he doesn't know at that time when he sentences him whether this is a man who is going to be motivated to be rehabilitated when he gets to prison or whether he's just going to be a bum and go to prison until he gets out and then go back again to his life of crime.

It's going to take subsequent investigations to see how he's doing in prison before you can, in my opinion, really set a fair time for him. On the other hand, the liberal group urging the new sentence feels that the prisoner will have a fixed term and he will know how long he's going to be in prison the moment he goes in. The more conservative people say that this will put the responsibility on the judge, who is responsible to the people, and the judge is going to have to sentence him for a good length of time or else he's going to be voted out of office. And that's about it.

Brower: I would think that the indeterminate sentence is as good as the Adult Authority is.

Staats: That's right. And I personally went over to San Quentin one day when Walt asked me over. I went over with Kent Pursell, as I recall, and a couple of other fellows, Bob Gaylord, a lawyer, and Ed Mansfield, a long-time Berkeleyan who was at that time retired from California Corrugated Pipe. The Adult Authority divided into two groups. They had, oh lord, about thirty hearings that day, I guess. We went over in the morning and had lunch there and were there again in the afternoon. This is what they did all week long. I was greatly impressed not only with what he was doing but also with the other members of the board as well.

Brower: I talked with one of the staff members of the Adult Authority and he said that--although they would have disliked being called that--they were social workers. They went into the background of the man's family, the kinds of contacts he had with his family currently, and his possibilities for jobs. And they made opportunities when they could. So it was a very thoughtful and concerned group.

Staats: The year I was there [at San Quentin] was probably about 1953, because I know Walt left here in 1955, so it had to be 1953 or 1954. Before that I must have heard him speak on the subject a half a dozen times. He went into just what they did, and I was tremendously impressed with the whole system. Now, with the increase in numbers, broken down, I don't really know.

Brower: In fairness to the newer people, the problem has enormously multiplied by numbers.

Staats: It has multiplied. There's no question about it. I did know, after I came on the superior court, that in some cases it took a while to get information back. The only other experience I have is talking with Walt Gordon, Jr., who was a member of the Adult Authority for about six years, I guess.

Brower: I thought he still was.

Staats: No. He resigned after Governor Brown went in. Governor Jerry Brown, the new governor. But it seemed to me to be working all right at that time, judging from my conversations with Walt, Jr. But evidently there were too many of these factions on either end of the yardstick, so to speak, so that they were both picking at it.

Brower: The general climate seems to be more punitive than it was during that period.

Staats: Definitely.

Walter Gordon's Views on Penology

Brower: Then you really had an opportunity to discuss with Walter Gordon his attitudes toward penology and the law?

Staats: Yes, very definitely. We had long discussions and during these discussions I found him to be--I always thought he was--a great humanitarian. He was always interested in people themselves. In other words, he didn't place all prisoners in one category. Each was an individual as far as he was concerned. He would go into their history to determine, and he was one that felt that all people make mistakes; there are a number of people that violate the law that never get caught at it but still are able to correct themselves without penology entering in, while others are unfortunate enough to get caught in the penal system. He felt that each individual was one to be looked at. There were a number of cases where he felt that they were a victim of circumstances; not entirely victimized by circumstances but had some unfortunate circumstances contributing to getting where they were. He did his best to see that they got back into society and led a normal life again. At the same time, he always ventured the viewpoint that crime has to carry punishment if we're to deter others from committing it, and that it depends on the individual circumstances of the case. He was no soft touch, as one might say. He was a disciplinarian but a fair, honest, and impartial observer of the whole penal system.

Brower: Would you say that racial considerations got into his judgments at all, one way or another?

Staats: I never knew racial considerations to get into any of Walt's decisions that I heard of, either as a lawyer, a member of the Adult Authority, or as governor of the Virgin Islands. As a matter of fact, I remember that the day we were over at San Quentin he was very upset with one of the lawyers over there who represented one of the prisoners, who was a black person. He had a lower opinion of him than he did of a number of white people. [laughter]

Brower: I would think that a lesser man might tend to overcompensate and lean a little more heavily on blacks.

Staats: I rather think that Walt Gordon was color blind. As color blind as could be. He probably, in his later years, was not admired by the black people as much as he was before, because he was not aggressive enough for the radical thought of the sixties. He spoke to me a number of times [about this.] This was after he had completed his service in the Virgin Islands. He said he just had no use for the

Staats: Black Panthers. I never asked him, but he volunteered it that he felt that any group that deliberately, publicly, and knowingly violated the law to try to achieve their goals was not the kind of a group that he was in favor of. He was always one that lived within the law and tried to advocate his position within the limits of the law.

Contacts with Walter Gordon in the Virgin Island Years

Brower: You spoke of his term as governor of the Virgin Islands and then subsequently he was a judge there, of course. Did you have any contact with him then? You didn't visit him when he was in the Virgin Islands?

Staats: No. A number of other Berkeley people did. It's interesting to hear from them how royally they got treated by him. They said they never had much of a chance to see about his work because he was entertaining them all the time.

It was in the fifties that I guess we really became quite closely acquainted. I happened to invite him on a Rotary trip up to Reno to speak up there to the Reno Rotary Club and about five hundred other Rotarians from East Bay Rotary clubs. Then, just after he was appointed governor, four of us arranged within a period of three weeks to put on a public dinner for him as a good-bye occasion. The amazing thing about that was that it normally takes about three weeks just to get the tickets printed, but in three weeks we sold the Hotel Shattuck out--four hundred people--and then allowed another one hundred to come in for standing room, and probably turned down a couple of hundred people. That was all in a period of three weeks. There were four of us. It was Kent Pursell's idea; he was then county supervisor. Fred Swan, who was formerly a football player at Stanford and an assistant football coach, he had a number of contacts with Walt in that field. K.C. [John] Ward, who was the editor of the Berkeley Gazette. And myself. The only publicity we had was through the Gazette and by word of mouth, and before you knew it the place was jammed to death with people and others clamouring to get in.

The first year he came back once for a few days to accept the Wheeler Award that year. While he was governor, he didn't come back again for about a year and a half. But then, after he became judge, he would have his vacation here every year, and I would see him every time. We'd get together somewhere, either at Berkeley Rotary Club, of which he was an honorary member, or at somebody's home. We would discuss his affairs there.

Brower: I was going to ask you where you met to have these discussions with him. I wondered if you had been to his house and he to yours.

Staats: He has been to my house. I was thinking I had just been to his house to pick him up, but one day I spent about an hour there in his home sitting in the front room and talking. Another time I recall a bunch of us talked for about two or three hours in George Dunscomb's office, the publisher of the Berkeley Gazette. That was after a Rotary meeting. I had to leave. I had to get back to work. The others were more or less semiretired and could stay longer.
[laughter]

Brower: I gather from what you were just about to say when I think I interrupted you that he did discuss his life in the Virgin Islands with you.

Staats: Oh, yes.

Brower: We have very little material on that, and I'd be grateful for what he said.

Staats: Well, this is an impression of my own. I don't think he enjoyed being governor as much as he did later being a judge down there. He was put in a peculiar position, you might say, of being the representative of the United States government. It's a territorial government and he, as governor, was not elected by the people of the Virgin Islands, but rather appointed by that enemy in the White House, the United States government.

The representatives who were elected to their legislature--they had a senate and an assembly--were elected by the people and, naturally, were all for home rule and were antagonistic toward him. So he was put in a position--although he had the ideal, logical thought of governing fairly--of always being put on the defensive by the state legislatures there. It posed difficult problems, and he had to be in a fighting position, more or less. A number of the bills that they would pass were not necessarily those for the ultimate good of the Virgin Islands but rather to embarrass the governor and make him veto the same.

But he did talk about it and [would say], "I had a talk with this person and I had to put him in his place." It was interesting, there was no question about that. The other thing that he didn't like about it was that he said that the only time that he and Betty [his wife] could be alone was when they were in their own bathroom. They were followed. I mean, there was someone around them all the time, some government aide of this kind or that. They had no privacy at all.

Staats: But then when he became judge he was in the position of actually sitting in and hearing both sides of a controversy and making a decision based on the evidence. This is something that as far as I know was what he always wanted to do. He really enjoyed it and told me about different legal doctrines that had come up in federal courts, new doctrines that he was in favor of and others that they had gone too far in. We had a number of discussions. But my impression was that he enjoyed the judgeship much more than the governor's position, although I don't think there would be any question that he'd say it was a great challenge and that he felt that he accomplished a great deal while he was there.

Brower: Did he ever suggest to you which part of the community, the black or the white community, that made life most difficult for him in the Virgin Islands?

Staats: There are hardly any whites in the Virgin Islands. It's a black community almost entirely. There wasn't any issue of whites down there. It was just the blacks versus the blacks, or people versus people, as he referred to it.

Brower: Did he ever discuss with you the legal problems that he encountered? Warren Olney suggested that he was awfully isolated during that period, that he couldn't take down the phone and say, "Hey, Bud, what would you do about so and so?"

Staats: As governor, no, he could not.

Brower: As judge?

Staats: As judge, he would talk about it when he'd be out here. We'd draw interesting parallels of types of people that we had before us. Also, bigger civil cases. Of course, he had some very large civil cases involving big corporations from time to time, and problems such as that. I don't remember any of the specific problems, but there were a number of interesting problems that he enjoyed.

Walter Gordon's Legal Philosophy

Brower: Would you find it at all possible to summarize his legal philosophy?

Staats: That's difficult. I'd say in the field of criminal law he would be one that I'd call about the middle of the road. He was very careful and observing of the individual civil rights of every person that appeared before him and saw that those rights were

Staats: granted. The conduct of the trial would be fair, just following the law as it should be. I think I already indicated that his sentencing philosophy is one that depends on each individual case. He was a great humanitarian but at the same time he felt that discipline and punishment were a major portion of our life.

On his normal civil cases I felt that he had a philosophy that you might call middle-of-the-road or liberal Republicanism--that you had to be careful of big business but that big business wasn't all bad either. He tried to be as fair an individual as he could. That's my feeling. He was interested in some of the newer developments in increasing the liability of bigger corporations for injuries resulting from goods they'd manufactured, even though they had gone through a number of hands before and formerly, under the law of thirty years ago, the corporation would not have been responsible. But this is a progress law of placing more responsibility on business. As Roger Traynor said when he was chief justice, they are better able to afford the damage done than any other segment of society. I believe he talked at length on that subject and seemed to agree with that at the time.

Brower: Do you know what he felt were his major accomplishments in the Virgin Islands? And I suppose he had disappointments as well.

Staats: There was a period of about his last year of his governorship down there that I didn't follow because he didn't come out that year until after he'd become a judge. But his first year or two there, it seemed to me, he felt that they tried to push him around, and he asserted the authority of his position and kept them from going hog wild in some of their spending programs and also in what he called "trying to embarrass the United States government." He felt that he represented the government and kept things in line, so to speak. Again, my own impression was later on that he enjoyed being a judge much more than fighting with the legislature.

Walter Gordon's Later Berkeley Years

Brower: When he returned to Berkeley, did you pick up your relationship then?

Staats: Yes, we'd see each other from time to time. He became an honorary member of the Berkeley Rotary Club while I was president. That was in 1956, but he was in the Virgin Islands at that time.

Brower: Is that why he had honorary status?

Staats: Partly. Two things. An honorary member is not subject to the attendance rules and isn't an active participant, and the second thing is that honorary membership is awarded to one who the membership feels is an outstanding citizen who has helped bring good things in a good vein to the community, or one who has rendered special service to the Rotary Club itself. This was what we felt at that time. He was such a wonderful representative and brought so much fame to the city of Berkeley itself, and still wanted to maintain his residency here. He always, until he became a judge, he kept that sign on the door down there in the building at the corner of University and San Pablo, "Law Offices of Walter Gordon." Of course, his son went in there as a dentist eventually. He was using it but then moved out. I think he left there.

After Walter Gordon came back, after he retired, he would attend Rotary quite often up until, of course, as you know, the illness of the last two or three years when he was prevented. But I'd see him there from time to time.

Brower: You wouldn't have had any contact, I suppose, when he was on the Housing Authority and the Redevelopment Agency? I mean professionally.

Staats: No, I didn't have any contact with him there at all. Most of my personal contact was from the 1950s on. Most of the other was my admiration for him that I acquired as a youngster. I recall that even after his football career was over I would hear from youngsters and elderly people what a wonderful policeman he was. He seemed to impress everyone with his performance as a police officer. He knew how to handle disputes without having to acquire the antagonism of the people involved, at the same time being one who was a great law enforcement officer.

Brower: Was it your impression when he came back to Berkeley that the disappointments of the Virgin Islands had made him a less happy person or did he seem to pick right up?

Staats: No, he seemed to me to be just as happy as ever. The only thing that I felt he was unhappy about was looking for a house. This wasn't based on any discrimination, but the only time I ever heard him criticize his wife he said, "The house she wants doesn't exist. It's got to have a view of a certain part of the bay and it has to have certain characteristics inside. We haven't found one that even looks like that yet."

Walter Gordon and Racial Discrimination

- Brower: I do think there was another factor in that, though. At least Edwin, his son, suggests that he'd seen friends of his go through so much hassle moving into all-white neighborhoods that he just didn't want to expose his family to that, if it should happen.
- Staats: Oh, there's no question. As I say, I was raised in a different era. But the people, even here on the campus, never thought of the racial question at all, even though undoubtedly in the twenties and thirties there was a great deal more discrimination.
- Brower: He couldn't eat at the training table, for example, with the rest of the team, at the beginning.
- Staats: I didn't know about that. I was too young. That was another thing that he had to go through. This is the other part that I haven't discussed so far, that undoubtedly he lived down on Acton Street because he couldn't find a place up here. Fred Swan told of the incident--the former football player and assistant coach at Stanford--that he ran into him in Corvallis or Eugene, at Oregon or Oregon State, the night before a game. Walt was up there to scout Stanford who was playing one of the Oregon teams. He ran into him in the street and asked him to go back to his hotel with him. Walt said, "No, no. I can't do that right now." Finally Fred realized what it was. Walt said, "No, I've got to go back to my room now and I'll walk around the streets for a while." He had to stay in a separate hotel and they wouldn't accept him at the first-class hotels that the football teams all stayed in and all the other scouts. He evidently adjusted to it in a way. He kept trying to work for equal rights but, evidently not, as I say, in the aggressive manner that some did.
- Brower: It certainly wouldn't have been practical at the time he was doing it.
- Staats: No, it wouldn't. Some people didn't recognize that. I understand later that Stub Allison did things in a way to enable him to stay at the better hotels.
- Brower: I heard that, too. Allison was much more aggressive about that than Andy Smith had been or Nibs Price or any of the others.
- Staats: Right.

Walter Gordon's Last Years

Brower: It was a pleasure to me to learn that when he came back to Berkeley and was on the Housing Authority and the Redevelopment Agency his role was a very active one and he was very quick in his mind still. I previously had the impression that he'd come back as an old and tired man, and I think I was mistaken. I wondered what your impression was?

Staats: I think you were mistaken. He came back quite vigorous. In 1969 when he came back he was vigorous, but I'd say about 1972 I noticed that he wasn't as sharp as he had been. Of course, he was a good age then [seventy-eight years old]. He died in 1976. I was a pall bearer, which I felt a great honor to be. That must have been a year and a half ago.

Brower: March 1976.

Staats: The last year and a half he was practically blind. He didn't get out much at all then. But around 1972 or 1973 it seemed to me I noticed that he wasn't as keen as he used to be. (I don't know that I'll be keen when I get to be that age, either.)

Brower: His Grand Jury experience, I guess, was cut short by his illness. He had just been named.

Staats: Yes, by Judge Cecil Mosbacher. He had started to serve and then evidently he had to cut it short.

Brower: Do you remember your last visit with Walter Gordon?

Staats: It was some time before he died, because I didn't see him after he became blind. As I recall, it might have been at Judge Hamlin's funeral. No, no, I saw him after that. He also used to come to some of our judges' luncheons. The last time I saw him was at a Rotary meeting, probably about 1972 or 1973. We just chatted about not much of anything. Probably it could have been about sports at the time.

Brower: He kept up his interest in sports?

Staats: Oh, yes. When he first went to the Virgin Islands he said he was lost until he finally got a subscription to the [San Francisco] Chronicle. He said he didn't read the front page but just had to read that "Sporting Green." He read that religiously every day down there.

Brower: This has been very useful. One of the things that you filled in for me was his law-practice period. There's been very little material on that. I'm very glad to have that.

Staats: Let's see if there's anything else [looking through his notes].

[pause]

Walter Gordon's Humility and Humor

Staats: These are just a couple of other things that I thought of that I thought would be interesting. He was such a humble person; he had such a sense of humility that in many of his talks he would tell of the mistakes that he made. He used to talk to small groups while he was a football coach, an assistant coach, about his experiences and, of course, making predictions.

One time I remember him talking about a game that he scouted. Washington State was the team he was scouting. The next week they were playing California. He came back and told Stub Allison, "Oh, you have nothing to worry about there. They've got a strong man here, a little weak there, but we shouldn't have any trouble with them." The next Saturday Washington State beat the pants off of California, so to speak. Walt said that he didn't see the game; he was scouting down in Los Angeles. But he said that when he came off the train the next morning from Los Angeles, Stub met him there and said, "Did you really see that game?" [laughter] He had such a sense of humility that way. He would tell of some of the mistakes he'd made in the Adult Authority as well as success stories. At this banquet that we had in 1955--it seems to me it was late in August--

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Staats: The 1955 dinner was in August, I believe. There was coverage in the Berkeley Gazette on it. We had on the program, besides the names I've already mentioned, Cort Majors, who was captain of the first Wonder Team. He was a year behind Walt. He told stories about Walt's football experiences, some of the more humorous ones. This, again, goes into that sense of humility. As Cort would start out, Walt would [say], "Oh, I know what's coming!" and would bury his head. [laughter] He said, "Oh, he's going to make fun of me again." But he took it in such great spirit.

General Bill Dean was on the program. Robert Gordon Sproul could not be there because he was out of town, but Mrs. Sproul was there and read a short message from President Sproul. Stub Allison

Staats: was there. Senator Knowland was there. I think that's about it. The program traced all aspects of his life. There was joviality in the audience. I'd say the audience was probably two-thirds white and one-third black (we made sure that we got tickets down to the black community as well), but even at that more whites clamoured to get in. He had friends everywhere. Everyone was happy.

Harry Kingman didn't speak that time, but that same year Harry presented the Wheeler Award to him. I happened to be on the Wheeler Award Committee when he was awarded that. The year before I was on it, and he almost won it the year before. This was after he'd become governor of the Virgin Islands and there was just no question. He won it unanimously without any thought of anyone else.

The Gordon Family

Brower: I understand that Harry Kingman proposed that it be a joint award to Mrs. Gordon.

Staats: That's right. Well, that's another thing, that family. Mrs. Gordon is one of the most wonderful women I've ever met. And those boys, Walt Jr. and Ed, and Betty Dixon. I never worked with Ed. He's a dentist. Walt, Jr. worked in a Berkeley courtroom as a probation officer when I was judge there, and he and I worked very closely together. That was in the early fifties. Later on, when he was appointed to the Adult Authority, one of the proudest times of my life was when he came to me and asked me to swear him into office. I just felt so happy about that. Then, when I was on the superior court, Betty Dixon wrote a number of probation reports and worked together with me on them. They're just a wonderful family all the way through. I mean, real down-to-earth people.

I remember Walt talking about his scouting days. Walt, Jr. was playing ball then. He got hurt, and Walt, Sr. said, "Oh, geez, he's one of those darn fool Christian Scientists. He'll take care of it himself. He doesn't want to go to any doctor." Sort of in a sense of admiration and criticism both, if you know what I mean. He had such a fine relationship with his children, too. They're a remarkable family and they'll always be there in force. When Walter received the Alumnus of the Year Award the whole family was over there at the Palace Hotel.

All I can say is that when I used to read the Blue and Gold I was an immediate member of his fan club, and my enthusiasm and admiration for him grew rather than diminished over the years, even though I never had any personal contact with him until I started practicing law.

Walter Gordon's Funeral

Brower: It's a rather grim thing to ask you, but I wonder if you'd tell me a little bit about the funeral? Who besides yourself were pall bearers?

Staats: The pall bearers were General Dean, former Mayor Hutchison, Harry Kingman, Vic Bottari, and myself. Is that six or is that five?

Brower: That's five.

Staats: There's one I'm missing. Oh, what is his name? An old-time resident of Berkeley, a black fellow from South Berkeley.

Brower: Rumford?

Staats: No, but Byron [Rumford] was a pall bearer, too. I just can't remember the fellow's name, although he is an old-time Berkeley man.

The amazing thing about it was that Harry Kingman and Bill Dean because of physical disabilities couldn't handle the casket, but Mayor Hutchison, who was then eighty-nine, was right there holding up his share of the casket. He made a point of it, too.

Brower: That's interesting. Was it an impressive service?

Staats: Well, actually, it was just a very nice service. Gordon Griffith officiated. It was the traditional Episcopalian service. The funeral was very well attended, even though he'd outlived most of all of his compatriots.

Brower: Yes. And there again, I presume that there were more white people than black people at the funeral?

Staats: Yes, I would say so, and I say that because of the fact that I think he's outlived most of his black compatriots. Because he was a football coach, a lot of his white compatriots were a lot younger than he.

Brower: Yes, that probably is a factor. I hadn't thought about that.

Staats: Yes.

Brower: Well, this has been very, very helpful.

Staats: Well, I hope I've contributed something.

Brower: You have indeed.

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INDEX -- Walter Gordon

- Acty, Ruth, 160, 164
 Aiso, John, 27
 Albrier, Frances, 155-169
 Alexander, Archie Alfmeo, 291, 301, 304, 305
 Allison, Leonard ("Stub"), 4, 62, 151, 199, 384, 386
 Alpha Phi Alpha, 170, 171-172
 Alumnus of the Year Award, 387
 Andrews, Charlie, 350
 Arbelbide, 48, 50
 Armstrong, Barbara N., 175
 athletes, recruitment of, 10-12, 40, 63-67, 76-78. See also "Southern Seas"
 Aubert, Edward, 144
 Avery, Russell G. (Russ), 55
- Bancroft, Stevens G. (Steve), 51
 Barnes, C. Rankin (Rev.), 6
 Barnes, Stanley M., 1-17, 22-28 passim, 33, 35, 79-80
 Barringer, Nate, 50
 Barrows, David P., 80, 340
 Beam, Stewart, 6
 Beckett, Ted, 67
 Bell, Arthur L., 328
 Berkeley Breakfast Club, 35, 90-91
 Berkeley Fellows, the, 29, 32-33
 Berkeley High School pool, integration of, 132, 152-153
 Berkeley Housing Authority, 354-357, 362
 Berkeley Police Department, 87-89, 93, 95, 98-100, 102-105, 113, 119-120, 151-152
 Berkeley Urban Redevelopment Agency, 354-357, 360, 362
 Berkey, Robert A. (Bob), 10
 Big C Society, 27, 60, 63, 69, 78
 Biscailuz, Eugene, 113
 Bixby, F. Lovell, 201-205 passim, 220, 222, 223
 Black, Benjamin (Dr.), 136
 Black Panthers, 318, 379
 Board of Prison Terms and Paroles, 201, 202, 237-238, 246
 Boles, Albert (formerly Boles-Rosenthal), 7, 74
 Borne family, 312, 314
 Bottari, Vic, 388
 boxing, importance of, 337, 345-346, 348-350
 Brooke, Edward, 172, 186

Brooks, Fred, 9
Brown v. Board of Education, 84, 293
 Brown, Edwin G. ("Pat"), 177
 Bush, O. Roy (Dr.), 136-137
 Butter, Hugh A., 302

California Adult Authority, 194-195, 200-222, 226-229, 231-235 passim,
 245-262 passim, 329, 376-377
 "California Spirit," 19-22, 78-80
 California State Board of Prison Directors, 246, 259
 Camp, Walter, 3-4, 105, 150
 Campbell, William Wallace, 80
 Carlson, Glenn ("Scoop"), 5
 Carlson, Mildred (Mrs. Glen), 5
 Carter, Jimmy, 181-182
 Carver, George Washington, 84
 Cayot, Lynn, 10
 Chadwick, John, 249
 Christie, Walter, 70, 71
 civil rights. See race discrimination
 Claunch, Charles, 302
 Coakley, Frank, 177, 185
 Cobden, Harry, 176
 Cobleigh, Marshall, 283, 285
 Cockburn, James, D., 57
 College Football Hall of Fame:
 Walter Gordon named to, 346
 Communist influences, 160-161, 163
 Coombs, Malcolm, 72
 Corley, James (Jim), 65
 Coxe, Charles C., 249
 Cranmer, Lee D., 39
 crime, criminals, and prisons:
 changing attitudes toward, 31-32, 234-235, 249-253, 259-261, 265-266,
 273-274, 329
 See also California Adult Authority

Daily Californian, 21
 Daly, E.E., 161
 Dean, Jim, 6, 7
 Dean, Mildred (Mrs. William F.), 94, 95, 96, 97
 Dean, William F. (General), 85-100, 386, 388
 death penalty, automatic review of, 210; pros and cons of, 262-263, 276
 de Castro, Morris F., 301, 304, 305
 Deeds, Karl, 10, 11, 12
 De Groot, "Dud," 114
 Dellums, C.L., 145, 161-162, 174, 186
 Dellums, Ronald, 145, 186-187

Dixon, Betty Gordon, 281, 387
 Doolittle James (Jimmy), 33-34, 218-219, 339, 341
 Drucker, Lewis, 200-236, 248, 249, 255
 drugs and crime, 263-265
 DuBois, W.E.B., 172
 Duffy, Clinton T., 225-235, 262, 276
 Dullea, Charles, 112-115 passim

Ebright, Carroll ("Ky"), 19
 Edwards, Ralph, 5, 108-109
 Eells, W.H., ("Dutch"), 10, 12
 Eisan, Lee G., 36-59
 Engebretson, Karl ("Shingles"), 10
 Erb, Charles F., 10, 55
 Evans, Clint, 40, 52, 58, 64, 175

Fawcett, Ed, 192
 Feeley, Father, 114, 115
 Fenton, Norman (Dr.), 203-204, 209, 213
 Francis, Robert ("Smoke"), 44, 81, 82, 175-176, 342-343

Gallen, Hugh, 284
 Garrity, Clarence T. ("Moose"), 57
 Garvey, Marcus; 97
 Gill, Carol ("Pinky"), 67
 Gill, Frank F. ("Red"), 67
 Gill, Harry, 67
 Gill, Ralston W. ("Rusty"), 57, 67
 "Goofs," 13, 62, 68, 150
 Gordon, Edwin, 46-47, 281, 387
 Gordon, Elizabeth (Betty, "Sis," Mrs. Walter Gordon, Sr.), 5, 90, 92, 94, 97, 106, 120, 149, 154, 167, 192, 198-199, 211, 222-223, 229, 238, 241, 287, 290, 307, 308-309, 315, 333-334, 343, 358, 361, 383, 387
 Gordon, Henry, 83, 95-96, 161, 198
 Gordon Walter, Jr., 46-47, 92, 244, 280-281, 330, 377, 387
 Gordon, Walter, Sr.:
 Adult Authority, 29, 32, 90, 188, 194-195, 201-222, 226-229, 237-259
 passim, 311, 316, 328-329, 336, 375-378
 attorney, 110, 120-121, 166-167, 178, 327, 373-375, 381-382
 boxing, 1, 34, 106, 150, 337, 339, 341, 344, 345
 district judge (virgin Islands), 16, 24, 180, 224, 297, 307, 309, 312, 333, 368, 381
 football coach, 5-6, 7, 8, 28, 39-41, 93-94, 106a, 151
 football player, 1, 3-4, 26, 87, 105, 106, 150, 323, 326, 339, 346
 football scout, 7-8, 28, 37-39, 93-94, 103, 106a, 120, 150, 241, 386
 friendships of, 4-5, 15, 90-91, 196-197, 220-221, 223, 224, 240, 379

Gordon, Walter, Sr. (cont.):

governor of the Virgin Islands, 14-16, 92, 122, 153, 179-180, 287-297
passim, 300-309 passim, 312-313, 315, 331-332, 380, 382
 in history, 81-84
 on Housing Authority & Redevelopment Agency, 354-357, 359-367
 Interstate Probation and Parole Compact advisor, 211-212
 minority youth, 111, 132, 136-138, 139-140, 143
 NAACP, 96-97, 152, 157, 162, 166-167, 173-175, 197
 as parent, 46-47, 387
 as peace-maker, 113-114, 115, 213-214
 as policeman, 17, 88-89, 95, 99-100, 103-105, 107-108, 111, 116, 117,
 219, 358, 383
 politics of, 164, 180-181, 187, 197-198, 293-294, 308, 316, 382
 as public speaker, 13-14, 25, 26, 195-196, 271-272, 323, 375
 and race, 2, 29, 68, 71-73, 81-84, 89, 104-105, 112, 132, 139-140, 143,
 145, 146, 151, 152-153, 157-164, 173-175, 197, 212-214, 218, 222-223,
 226-227, 229-231, 238-245 passim, 308, 318, 319-320, 323, 334, 359,
 369-370, 378-379
 religion, 308
 as role model, 42, 91, 144, 168, 243
 as son, 83, 95-96, 198
 Greenrose, Henry, 70
 Griffith, Gordon (Rev.), 388
 Griffiths, Edwin H., 49

Hale Brothers robbery. See Pender, Bobby

Harding, Gus, 10

Hastie, William Henry, 305

Hawkins, Gus, 184

Hector, Louise, 162, 163

Holstrom, John, 114. See also Introduction

Howard, Sydney Coe, 21

Howell, Walter, 90, 91

Hoyt, Ralph, 255

Hutchison, Claude, 90, 91, 388

Imlay, Talma W. ("Tut"), 55

indeterminate sentence, 203-204, 215, 221, 234, 248-249, 256, 274-275,
 329-330, 337, 375-376

Ingram, Bill, 66

International House, 68

Jackson, Ida, 159, 160, 323

Jensen, Arthur R., 177

Johnson, Bobby, 350

Johnson, Clarence, 191

Johnson, George Marion, 5, 15, 118-122, 173, 192, 331
 Johnson, Jack, 76, 106
 Johnson, Kenneth, 192
 Johnson, Lyndon B., 182-184
 Johnson, Robert S., 60-84
 Johnson, Wallace, 356
 Jones, Errol, 341, 343
 Jones, Howard, 103
 Jones, Stanley, 350-351

Kennedy, John F., 183
 Kenny, Robert (Bob), 328
 Kingman, Harry, 149-154, 387, 388
 Kingman, Ruth, 149
 Kleeberger, Frank, 341, 344
 Knowland, Joseph, 387
 Knox, Ellis O., 189

Labuzon, Mary, 160, 164
 Latham, George H. ("Fat"), 8, 55
 Lester, Ervis W., 193-200, 219-220, 221, 248, 249, 253, 255
 Lom, Ben, 48, 49, 50, 52, 55, 57, 74
 Los Angeles Bar Association:
 integration of, 13-14, 25-27

McDaniel, George, 229-231, 269-282
 McGee, Richard, 201, 205, 245-247, 252
 McMillan, Dan, 6, 10, 39, 74
 Madison, Marshall P. ("Marsh"), 4
 Majors, Olin Cortis ("Cort"), 1, 10, 12, 386
 Manuel, Wiley, 186
 Marshall, George (General), 89, 90
 Marshall, Thurgood, 172
 Mehrtens, Gus, 105
 Merwin, Dadja Childs, 283, 295-296
 Merwin, John David, 283, 295, 298-309
 Milne, Henry A., 306
 Monahan, Bill, 63
 Montgomery, William, 129-130
 Mooma, Jerry, 64
 Moore, Allen, 236-268, 271, 277
 Morrison, Jesse B. ("Duke"), 55, 74, 93, 94
 Mosbacher, Cecil, 385
 Mueller, Ted, 90, 91
 Muller, Harold P. ("Brick"), 7, 10, 11, 52-53, 64, 74, 75, 94, 109, 340

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 96-97, 152, 157-158, 161-162, 167, 173-175, 197
 Nemir, Eddie, 350-351
 Nesbitt, Archie, 74
 Newmeyer, Don, 5, 8
 Nisbet, Robert, 355, 360-361
 Nimitz, Chester, 367
 Nixon, Richard M., 14

Occident, 21
 Ocean View Committee, the, 356, 360, 361
 Ohashi, Ted, 68
 Olney, Warren, 15, 154, 325-334
 Olson, Culbert L. (Gov.), 142, 237, 238, 259
 Ottley, Earl B., 296, 305

Paiwonsky family, 295, 312
 Peckham, Robert, 266
 Pedley, Eric, 34, 339
Pelican, 21
 Pender, Bobby, 206-209, 217-218, 255-258
 Phillips, Irvine (Irv), 52
 Pickens, Dean, 175
 Pidgeon, Ralph, 104, 108
 Pittman, Tarea (Mrs. William), 162
 Pittman, William, 130
Plessy v. Ferguson, 69, 81, 84
 Price, Clarence Merle ("Nibs"), 7, 9, 10, 12, 38, 55-58, 63-65 passim, 68, 74
 Prison Reorganization Act, 1944, 201, 203, 228-229, 246, 252
 Pursell, Kent, 379

race, attitudes toward, 44-45, 83, 84, 116, 145-148, 161-162, 168-169, 175-178, 317-319, 369-370; and politics, 160-161, 164-166, 180-188 passim, 198
 race discrimination:
 in the army, 91
 in athletics, 2-3, 29-31, 41, 45-46, 68-73, 75-76, 82, 151, 175, 341-344
 in business practices, 138-140, 197, 222-223, 239-241, 384
 in education, 189-190
 in employment, 81-82, 105, 110, 136, 140-145, 151-152, 158, 159-160, 162-164, 175-176, 244, 323
 in housing, 153, 179
 legal recourse against, 158
 in the Los Angeles Bar Association, 13-14, 25-27
 in the press, 131-132
 in the prison system, 212-214, 229-231
 in the use of public facilities, 152-153, 174

Radin, Max, 175
 Ramblers, 62
 Richardson, Leonard, 173
 Riegals, Roy, 51, 52, 54
 Robb, Agnes, 321-325
 Robeson, Paul, 3
 Robinson, Jackie, 76
 Rollins, Fitz, 91
 Ross, Eldridge, 173
 Rumford, Elsie C. (Mrs. W. Byron, Sr.), 170, 189
 Rumford, W. Byron, Sr., 130, 170-192, 388
 Ruth, Minnie, 353-371

San Diego High School:

contributions of, to U.C. football, 2, 10-12
 Schmidt, Charles, 57
 Schottland, Charles I., 310-320
 Schuur, Werner, 10
 Schwartz, Bert, 51
 Selvin, Herman (Herm), 9, 13, 18-35
 Sigma Chi, 12, 23, 64
 Silverman, Sol, 73, 335-352
 Small, Merrell F. ("Pop"), 316-317
 Smith, Andrew Latham ("Andy"), 1-7 passim, 12, 28, 29, 33-34, 55, 62-64
passim, 74, 75, 94, 95, 105, 106a, 150, 199
 "Southern Seas," 9, 13
 special service parole, 206-207, 256-257
 Spratt, A. Bryan ("Pesky"), 1, 6, 8, 10, 12, 55
 Sproul, Ida W. (Mrs. Robert G.), 386
 Sproul, Robert Gordon, 77, 78, 80, 321, 323, 324, 386
 Staats, Redmond C., 372-388
 Steinhart, Jesse, 23
 Stephens, Brodie, 340
 Stephens, Henry Morse, 1
 Stone, Harlan Fiske, 340
 Storment, Frank, 9, 22, 23
 Swan, Fred, 379, 384
 Sweetwyne, Alvin, 123-148

Thiess, Forest, 340
 "This is Your Life," 5, 108-109
 Thomson, Meldrim, 283-297
 Toney, Charles, 10
 Toomey, Irving F. ("Crip"), 6, 8
 Tresidder, Don, 203-204

Unity Party (Virgin Islands), 305

University of California:

athletic policy, 76-78

boxing, 73, 337, 339, 341, 344, 347-348

campus dress, 21

football, 1-2, 5-12, 27-29, 37-43, 48-57, 74-75, 93, 94

graduates and politics, 23-24

student self-government, 21

Urban League, 84

van Sant, Merritt E. ("Muggs"), 9

Verling, Kelley, 9

Virgin Islands:

employment in, 289, 294, 303

government of, 287-289, 291, 301-303, 305-306

legal code for, 286-287, 291-292

revenue for, 294, 314

schools in, 295, 303, 306

social security for, 314-315

tourism in, 297, 303

transportation for, 294-295

water for, 297, 303

Vollmer, August, 17, 85, 88, 90, 95, 101, 105, 111, 113, 114, 115, 120, 151, 152, 199, 219, 323

Voorhis, Jerry, 14

Waldorf, Lyn ("Pappy"), 19, 28, 30, 49, 80

Ward, John ("K.C."), 379

Warner, Glen S. ("Pop"), 103, 107

Warren, Earl, 14, 23, 24, 26, 108, 109, 153, 175, 184-185, 188-189, 194, 201-204 passim, 208-209, 211, 221, 243, 246, 254-255, 257, 258-259, 293, 309, 316, 329

Washington, Booker T., 84

Washington, Jimmy, 131

Weinberger, Casper, 185

Wheeler, Benjamin Ide, 19-20, 78, 80, 322

Wheeler (Benjamin Ide) Award, 372, 379, 387

White, Gordon H., 117

White, Walter, 157, 175

Whyte, Ed H., 249

Williams, Archie, 132-133

Williams, Paul, 367

Williamson, Brick, 56

Wilson, Garff, 34

Wilson, Lionel, 128

Wiltberger, William Alden, 101-116

Wonder Teams (1920-1924), 1, 7-9, 27-28

work-furlough program, 272-273, 277-279

Young, Whitney, 317-318
Younger, Evelle, 185-186

Zirpoli, Al, 266
Zwiener, Kenneth, 10

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