

Starlina Sanchez (editor)

*A Lifetime of Lessons in Just One Year:
A. Peter Bailey, Malcolm X, and the Organization of Afro-American Unity
(1964-1965)*

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Oral Interview with A. Peter Bailey, conducted by Joan V. Feeney,
July 27, 1976, New York, New York.

Introduction

The oral history interview transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "African American Collection." The interview with A. Peter Bailey was conducted by Joan V. Feeney on July 27, 1976, in New York, New York. The interview lasted 1 hour, 9 minutes, and 4 seconds, and is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in 2020 by Starlina Sanchez.

Alfonzo Peter Bailey, also known as A. Peter Bailey or Peter Bailey, was born on February 24, 1938, in Columbus, Georgia. An accomplished writer, activist, lecturer, and educator, Bailey was the co-founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (1964-1965) and editor of their newsletter *Blacklash*. He also served as associate editor for *Ebony* magazine and associate director of the Black Theater Alliance, editing their *BTA* newsletter. His publications include: *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey* with Alvin Ailey (1995); *Seventh Child: A Family Memoir of Malcolm X* (2000) with Rodnell P. Collins; *Harlem: Precious Memories, Great Expectations* (2003); and *Witnessing Brother Malcolm X: The Master Teacher* (2013).

The interview edited here reflects upon Bailey's relationship with Malcolm X, whom he refers to as Brother Malcolm, even walking through their last interaction together at the Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965—just moments before tragedy struck. Bailey begins by recalling his personal introduction to the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) and his glimpse at the stature of its leader, Malcolm X, months earlier during his first summer in Harlem. He makes the distinction between Malcolm X's two organizations, Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the OAAU, as they clashed beyond their shared political ideology. Bailey comments on the pioneering nature of the OAAU's constitution, which influenced not only the Black Power Movement but subsequent figures of the Pan-Africanist Movement due to its values of restoration and community control through self-defense, education, and economic security. He distinguishes Malcolm X from

other leaders of the time due to his vision, international presence, and mindfulness as provocateur in all realms. He affirms that Malcolm X had support beyond the working class in circles that even surprised him. Bailey dispels misconceptions about Malcolm X that may have been generated via media distortion, taking it upon himself to dissect controversial aspects of his late mentor's life, including the Kennedy assassination and his ban from France. Bailey concludes his interview with the key factors that, in his opinion, ultimately led to the demise of the OAAU and adds his thoughts regarding the alleged involvement of the Nation of Islam in Malcolm X's assassination.

A. Peter Bailey presents not just an intimate perspective on the Civil Rights Movement and Black liberation, but also the inner workings of grassroots movements from the position of a founding member. He provides insights beyond American media on Malcolm X as a leader, mentor, and orator. The latter's revolutionary legacy reflects a commitment to challenging oppression in all its forms and upholding global solidarity. Bailey's captivating memories of Malcolm X and even his own artistic contributions have become subject to erasure; just like the cultural impact of countless other Black figures. The erasure of Black individuals' lived experiences pervades academia, even more so in the discipline of history, making it crucial to acknowledge the voices of Black individuals beyond mere simple respect. A. Peter Bailey "is" Black history, and his testimony is an act of cultural restoration.

ABOUT THE EDITOR: *Starlina Sanchez of La Habra, California, is currently pursuing a B.A. in Sociology and Women and Gender Studies at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). She is a member of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship. The primary-source edition published below originated in the "History and Editing" course offered by CSUF's History Department.*

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 1685)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: A. Peter Bailey [PB]

INTERVIEWER: Joan V. Feeney [JF]

DATE: July 27, 1976

LOCATION: New York, New York

PROJECT: African American Collection

TRANSCRIBER: Starlina Sanchez

JF: Taking place in New York City with Mr. Peter Bailey on July 27, 1976. The interview is being conducted by Joan Feeney.

PB: My name is A. Peter Bailey, and I am currently the associate director of the Black Theater Alliance,¹ um, a job I've had for the last eight months. Before that, I was an associate editor and writer for ten years with *Ebony Magazine*.² The reason I'm involved with this project is that, before that, I worked very closely with the late Brother Malcolm X³ during the last year of his life, having been a founding member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity,⁴ which was the organization that he formed when he left, uh, was suspended from the Nation of Islam.⁵ I got involved with the OAAU, uh, through a friend of mine. I remember back in, uh, early February 1964, this friend of mine who worked near me, a girl—a woman, she asked me to have lunch with her, and while we were having lunch, she said to me, "There is a new organization being formed, and would you like to be a part of it?" and I said yes. Well, a new political organization, would you like to be a part of it, and I said yes, and she gave me a little brief overview of what the organization was all about. Then, she said, "I cannot give you any of the other—any more details but, uh, I will call you, and there will be a meeting on Saturday morning. I will call you Saturday morning and give you the time and the place. This will be the first meeting." So, Saturday morning I got the call, and they told me where to go and where the meeting was going to be. At this time, I had no idea who were going to be the other people there, except, you know, her. When I got to the meeting, I got there a little early, but as I saw people come in, I began to see people that, you know, that I knew and recognized from having seen them around at various rallies and meetings in my other activities. And then just before the appointed time, in walked Brother Malcolm X with about five or six of his aides. Well, this really shocked me because I was, you know, uh, I had no idea that when she started talking that Malcolm X was the one who was gonna be involved in the founding of this new organization and that really began. We sat there, and he ran down to us what was going on with the organization; what the organization was all about; what it was planning on doing; uh, and then we all, you know, came up with ideas and suggestions, uh, as to how things should work. And in fact, from the next, from February

¹ Federation of African American theater companies in New York City.

² First monthly magazine with the African American community as its target audience.

³ African American Muslim minister and human rights activist (1925-1965).

⁴ Also referred to as OAAU, founded by Malcolm X after his departure from the Nation of Islam, fought not only for the rights of African Americans but strived to uphold unity among Africans and those of African descent, collapsed in 1965 after Malcolm X's assassination.

⁵ African American political and new religious movement, combining traditional Islamic and Black nationalist philosophy.

until June, we had those meetings. We had decided that the organization was going to be announced publicly at a public rally.⁶ In the meantime, we would just keep it quiet, and we would meet and kind of formulate the plans, uh, for the OAAU. The name came out of those meetings, you know, because there were several names thrown around. This was the name that came out of the meeting, especially since we had a very, very, uh, international as well as national lean to us. We figured that we would call ourselves the Organization of Afro-American Unity in line with the Organization of African Unity,⁷ which existed, you know, on the continent. That's how we, you know, got the name. I can't remember exactly who was the person who came up with that name, but I do remember that when it was, you know, when it was said, everyone, like, agreed unanimously that this was the name we wanted. Uh, so we began to meet every week, we would meet up at this – a motel in Harlem to discuss –

JF: This was the Hotel Theresa,⁸ you were (inaudible)?

PB: – no, this was not the Hotel Theresa. After the organization was formed, we made the Hotel Theresa our headquarters, but this was a motel up at 153rd Street and 8th Avenue⁹ in Harlem. I think it's about the only motel in Harlem and we used to, you know, we would meet there in the mornings usually. Uh, finally, in June of 1964, the OAAU was publicly announced at a rally, you know, and from that time on, you know, it became a functioning organization. In fact, right after, uh, the announcement of the OAAU as an organization, that was when Brother Malcolm had to leave because he went off to, uh, on a trip to Cairo¹⁰ and to the OAU conference which, I think, that year was being held in Addis Ababa,¹¹ Ethiopia. But he was allowed to sit in on that conference as an observer, which was the first time that a Black American had been so honored. He was not a partic – he could not vote in that kind of thing. They did allow him to sit in and watch the proceedings, which was a first and which gave a big impetus to our, you know, international, uh, meaning. It was a recognition of him as an international person. And he left right after the meeting. It was, I think, the first week of June, right after that he took off and went, you know, to this meeting. So,

⁶ June 28, 1964, at the Audubon Ballroom.

⁷ Also referred to as OAU, an intergovernmental organization in Ethiopia that inspired the formation of the OAAU, replaced by the African Union in 2002.

⁸ New York City landmark and designated building on the National Register of Historic Places due to its notable guests and prominent role in Black social relations, still standing, but no longer functioning as a hotel.

⁹ Frederick Douglass Blvd.

¹⁰ Capital of Egypt.

¹¹ Capital city, founding location of the Organization of African Unity.

- those of us who were behind, uh, had to like, you know, do the actual, you know, groundwork of getting the organization –
- JF: (inaudible)
- PB: – formed. It happened so many times that on those Sundays when Brother Malcolm was around to speak, we got hundreds out, you know, but then on those Sundays he was away, it was those true believers who came out and who really did most of the work. I became the editor of the newsletter, kind of, I guess, by, um – since there was no one else to do it. At this time, I had no writing experience. I felt that I wanted to write, I began to take some courses in nonfiction writing at the New School for Social Research,¹² and I became the editor of the newsletter. And the newsletter got its name because there was always talk about, you know, at the time it was about backlash and backlash and backlash – but to be worried about the White backlash, so we decided to call our newsletter “The Blacklash” and that’s really how it got its how it got its name.
- JF: (laughs)
- PB: Uh, the *OAAU Blacklash*, and we tried to come out, uh, you know twice a month, but we didn’t always do so. But that was my main responsibility with the organization while it was in existence, I mean, while it was in existence with Brother Malcolm at the head of it. I guess I should say at this time that there were really two organizations. Brother Malcolm did it deliberately, he had the Muslim Mosque Inc.,¹³ which was geared, you know, [as] a religious organization. It was for the people who were religiously involved as Muslims, and then there was the OAAU which was an organization, an inclusive organization of anybody who, you know, shared our ideological beliefs and who wanted to participate in the, you know, organization. Sometimes, I must say that at the time, these two organizations did not exactly get along with the best – because the Muslims, many most of them, were young Brothers who had been with Brother Malcolm, you know, from the very beginning, from way back when he first became prominent and those of us who came in later in the OAAU. They kind of looked at us as outsiders. And it took us awhile to build up a – and some of them did not really participate in the political organization; they maintained most of their participation in the, you know, religious organization. But of course, there were many of them who participated in both. There were those of us who were just in the non-religious organization, but only participated, you know, on that level.

¹² Private research university, founded in 1919, still standing in New York, New York, but renamed to the New School.

¹³ Islamic organization formed by Malcolm X around the same time as the OAAU; Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood is its successor.

PB: Uh, I think I should say here how I first became aware of Malcolm X and how I became involved with him. Uh, in 1962, I moved to Harlem, uh, for the first time, and I think the very first was the summer of '62. In the very first weekend that I moved up there, I was out walking with my roommate, and we walked down Lenox Avenue,¹⁴ one of the main avenues in Harlem, and we got down to 116th Street and Lenox Avenue, and we saw a lot of people up the street, the street was blocked off and people was, you know, standing in the streets, and we asked what was going on, and they said that Malcolm X was going to speak. Well, at this time, Malcolm X didn't really mean very much to either one of us, uh, we had vaguely aware of who he was, and, uh, we were both more involved in what you would call the traditional Civil Rights Movement¹⁵ and the school boycott meetings and the rent strike groups and the NAACP¹⁶ which what I started off with when I went to college – we had sympathy pickings at Howard University,¹⁷ and so we had, you know, were very involved in, you know, uh, we were all Brothers under the skin, "We shall overcome,"¹⁸ brotherhood forever, we were in that end of the Movement. The first time I heard Malcolm X speak, uh, he had an immediate effect on me because I had become frustrated, you know, in what I was doing in the Movement at the time. And, uh, it had an immediate effect – it was an effect which I resisted but I began to go back every single Saturday to listen to him speak. And as I heard him analyze the system and the discrimination and the racism that was practiced against Black people – I mean to me, I became convinced of that sympathy, was no arguments against what he was saying. I mean, his description of the system and how it functioned was for me the first time I had ever heard someone personally (telephone rings) who to me was describing exactly what I thought the system was all about, uh, uh, I mean with no holds barred. I mean he just really laid it on the line. And so I began to go back and listen to him, that was as close as I'd been – could become involved with him for the simple reason at that time, he was still a member of the Nation of Islam. And if you were not a Muslim, there was no way to become intimately involved, uh, with him, and with the organization – other than, you know, just going to rallies and listening to him speak.

[00:10:00]

¹⁴ Later named Malcolm X Boulevard; both names are officially recognized.

¹⁵ 1954–1968.

¹⁶ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, established 1909.

¹⁷ One of the preeminent Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the nation; located in Washington, D.C., founded in 1867.

¹⁸ Originally a gospel song, later one of the anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

PB: So, uh, that was all the involvement that I had. I kept up my participance in Harlem core organizations like that but by the end, near the end of 1963, uh, again I became very conscious of him when you know President Kennedy¹⁹ was assassinated, President Kennedy was assassinated, and they took him and his comment about it was that “the chicken is coming home to roost,”²⁰ and they took it out and made it sound that he was saying that he was happy that Kennedy was assassinated, but what he was not saying that, what he said, he really had been saying, is that ever since 1963, those little girls were killed at Birmingham,²¹ and Medgar Evers²² was shot in 1963, those little girls were murdered in Birmingham, other things were happening and he had said that if the authorities did not do something about this, you know, eventually, the killing is gonna reach them. And as an old, old saying, you know, when you do something, when you let a situation deteriorate, eventually the chicken is gonna come home to roost—that was in the matter that he used it.

JF: Quite often, the press, they did this—

PB: — with him or they did—

JF: — they really manipulated what the person was saying.

PB: I would go to rallies and hear him speak, then hear the papers the next day, and if you didn’t think that your head was on right, you might wonder, you know, were you crazy when, you know, read what the reporter was saying that he said and compared it to what you had heard while you were sitting there. You know, that’s when I really—also of course when I began to learn about the, um, what the press is not the great instrument of freedom that is always proclaimed. Again, it was something I kind of, you know, you think you feel but you never quite have any concrete evidence, but this is where I got the concrete—you know, when I worked with Brother Malcolm—concrete evidence of how the press manipulates and distorts, you know, uh, people whose positions they happen to dislike. And, uh, so then I read about him being suspended from the Muslims; this happened in, I think, December of 1963, uh, he was suspended from the Muslims. It was supposed to be a temporary suspension. Um, and I remember when this happened, there were several meetings that were held, and I went to these meetings. These were public meetings, and he was explaining what had happened—why he was suspended and everything. And, uh, then in early, this was in December of ’63 and early ’64 was when this woman friend came

¹⁹ 35th president of the United States (1917-1963).

²⁰ *God’s Judgment of White America (The Chickens Come Home to Roost)*, speech, December 4, 1964.

²¹ 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, September 15, 1963.

²² African American Civil Rights activist, NAACP’s first field secretary for Mississippi, World War II veteran, assassinated by a white supremacist with affiliation to Citizens’ Council and Ku Klux Klan.

- to me and said about this new organization and did, I want to be a part of the founding of it, and that's how I got involved with the OAAU and with Malcolm X on a, you know, uh, a personal level and political level.
- JF: Yeah, you mentioned when you went to this original meeting, you didn't know who was going to be speaking at the meeting, but you recognized many people –
- PB: Mm-hm.
- JF: – that were there.
- PB: Mm-hm.
- JF: Can you name some of them? Would their names mean anything? Uh, were they well known people?
- PB: Uh, some of them were well-known, uh, and I would mention some of their names, uh, John Henrik Clarke,²³ the historian and letterer was there; uh, John Killens,²⁴ the novelist was one of the people who was there; and then, uh, the others were people who were known in the Black community, but who would – did not have national – they were about fifteen people altogether.
- JF: Did people like R. C. Davis²⁵ participate?
- PB: Oh no. R. C. Davis was not involved in those meetings. These were people who were, who were writers, um, activists on various levels, uh, writers and activists basically on various levels and people with, you know, very specific skills. For instance, the woman I befriended was working at NBC²⁶ at the time. But there were people that were Black, um, professional middle-income-type people –
- JF: Right.
- PB: – who, you know, were attracted to his program, which helped to also dispel this whole knowledge that many people had, that he just attracted, you know, the dudes off the streets, you know, just ran around who he really – he attracted a lot of people who had very specific skills and who were ready to put them or utilize their skills and put them into forming a new organization with him.
- JF: (inaudible) They could get something out of –
- PB: Those were mainly people who were at that meeting, those kinds of people, I remember there was a doctor there and a lawyer, you know, so those kinds of people who came out, you know, for this – for these meetings. Once we got, I think the first big crisis that the OAAU faced was in July of 1964, right

²³ African American professor, historian, and pioneer in the creation of Pan-African and African Studies, (1915-1998).

²⁴ African American writer and activist (1916-1987), leading figure in the Black Arts Movement.

²⁵ Ossie Davis (1917-2005), African American film, television, and Broadway actor, director, poet, playwright, author, and Civil Rights activist.

²⁶ National Broadcasting Company.

after we had publicly announced when we had the Harlem Uprising,²⁷ when this young fourteen-year-old teenager was shot, uh, by this policeman over in—on East Side of New York. And claiming that the kid had a knife, and to this day they have not found the knife, but, uh, the Uprising started in Harlem. You know, they were rampaging and we were because our office is right on 125th Street and 7th Avenue²⁸ which is one of the main, uh, thoroughfares of Harlem. One thing I must go back to before I move on, in 1963, I had heard Brother Malcolm speak at a rally for the little girls who were killed in Birmingham—they had a rally in Harlem, and they had various—I remember Jackie Robinson,²⁹ I remember was the moderator of the program, and Malcolm X was one of the speakers. He spoke first, and then other people came on and spoke, and when all the people were finished, the crowd started saying, “We want Malcom X” — they wanted to hear him speak again, and the people running the program said it was all over. They started rampaging, running through the streets and running on top of cars, just generally raising a lot of ruckus because Brother Malcolm was not allowed to speak again, but then Brother Malcolm, I remember, he stood on top of his car and he said, “That’s enough, Brothers and Sisters. Let’s—don’t do this. Everybody let’s go home.” And within five minutes, the crowd was gone. I mean that was when I first began to see the kind of power that he had, the kind of appeal he had to the younger people who listened to him, and I remember they stopped immediately and dispersed. And that was in 1963, that was, at this time I was still not involved with him, but I remember this incident, you know, as an incident which showed me the appeal and the way he affected and could move people. Uh, I remember when that thing, the situation started, well, we didn’t know exactly what to do. We were, um, some of our younger guys were really ready to go up and start raising hell in the streets. But we got a call from Brother Malcolm who was in Cairo at the time at the OAU meeting—the OAU was in Cairo that year, it was in Cairo—

JF: Cairo, right. Mm-hm.

PB: —Brother Malcolm was at that meeting, and we got a call from him in which he told us to again to show you—showing his astuteness, he said, um, “Do whatever you can to keep our people out of, you know, the action in the streets, because many times I don’t believe in being involved in nothing you weren’t in on in the beginning. Because many times things such as this are deliberately provoked with the idea of smoking certain

²⁷ The Harlem riot of 1964 occurred between July 16 and 22, 1964, after the killing of James Powell.

²⁸ IRT 2nd Avenue Line, demolished on June 11, 1940.

²⁹ (1919-1972), first African American to play in Major League as a professional baseball player for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

people out.” And now that we start to hear all this talk of provocateur that happened later, (JF agrees) we begin to see very early how he recognized the possibilities of this. He said very early to try to keep an eye on our young—

JF: Things are so distorted anyway in that kind of mob situation.

PB: —we had to really struggle to keep our young out, keep the guys that were involved with us from getting out in the streets and raising hell—it was a real struggle, but he called us from Cairo and told us to do that. And it was also at this time that I got a glimpse at the brilliance of this man and how this man was able to effectively, uh, analyze and intellectually combat the system because he had studied the system. Uh, as editor of the *OAAU Blacklash*, I had written an article for the *Blacklash* for our first one about the murder, the killing of this young boy,³⁰ uh, and, uh, I had called Gilligan, the policeman who had shot the boy, a murderer—and when Brother Malcolm had called from Cairo, I read this to him over the telephone, and he said “Oh no, Brother Peter, don’t use the term murderer, because murderer is a legal term—a man is only a murderer after he has been convicted.”

JF: That’s right, that’s interesting that he knew that distinction.

PB: He said you can call him a killer, because when you kill someone, you’re a killer no matter how you do it or why you did it—

JF: Don’t judge them before they—

PB: —because he said, “You know, he is going to be acquitted, and when he is acquitted, he can sue you, you know, if you’re liable,” so, sure enough, uh, I went through about five, six hundred copies of our newsletter, myself and another guy who was in there with me, and we scratched out the word—I still have copies of it—we scratched out, didn’t have time or money to run off another one.

JF: I would love to have a couple of copies.

PB: We scratched out all—we went through each, one by one, and scratched out murderer and wrote in killer—to go along with what he said, and, sure enough, after Gilligan was acquitted, he sued both SCLC,³¹ Dr. King’s organization, and CORE³² for libel for putting out material in which they called him a murderer.

[00:20:00]

PB: You know, again, so, again, this showed you—a man to me, these two incidents, first him telling us to be on the alert for provocateurs to not, you

³⁰ James Powell.

³¹ Southern Christian Leadership Conference, African American Civil Rights organization, formed by Martin Luther King in 1957.

³² Congress of Racial Equality, formed in 1942, played a pivotal role in Civil Rights Movement.

know, sometimes these things are started to smoke some people out, and I began to think he was right that because of the love for our organization out there in the streets, raising hell, and, you know, I'm sure they knew who some, most of us were, and they would have shot us down, and they would have had a good excuse for doing so. And so, at that time, you know, the hostility against him was total, practically, among the police and from the authorities in the city. And I remember the humorous part of it is that I do remember the papers at the time, I think it was the German American with the (inaudible) closed down, was saying that Brother Malcolm was not in Cairo, uh, as it was stated, but that he was in Queens³³ somewhere in a basement of a house – directing the entire uprising that was going on. And I remember reading that, you know, and really getting a kick out of it, that they were saying something like this. But, uh, those things, combined with the way he had stopped the crowd, showed me the power and the, uh, you know attractiveness of Brother Malcolm and as a leader, 'cause he never got in trouble for what he said because he knew just the language, just that you must—he never said that Black people go out and get guns and start shooting people—his position was always that in those areas where the government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives or property of Black people—they must be prepared to protect themselves. This was all interpreted as him in the papers advocating violence, you know, but to me, that is not advocating violence because he was not, uh, a hothead—'cause he always acted from carefully considered and well-thought-out positions. And that's why those of us who worked with him, this is one reason why we were attracted to him and worked with him because, you know, we understood this. So, um, he, uh, when he came back after the, uh, OAU conference, uh, let's see in July—after the conference he traveled around in Africa, so it was really, I think, about September before he came back. He was gone for a long period of time, and we were, you know, like struggling to keep the office open, and, you know, we were talking to people, people were coming by. He came back in September of 1964, you know, we began to have the month-based, every Sunday we had rallies at the Audubon Ballroom,³⁴ that was like our regular meeting place, and this went on, in the meantime, we had meetings to try to get the organization out of struggle—and many people, most of the people who were following Brother Malcolm because of him, it is not so much they were attached to his ideology—it was him, and this like, again, showed when he was not around because it was

³³ New York City borough.

³⁴ Located in Washington Heights section of Manhattan, constructed in 1912, served as a venue to many historical events particularly in the Black community. Site of the assassination of Malcolm X on February 21, 1965, and closed shortly thereafter. Reopened as a Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center on May 19, 2005.

very difficult to get people to do things like the little things that need to be done to keep an organization going. So, this, you know, small group of true believers in both the Mosque Incorporated and the OAAU, you know, we were really working to keep things going while he was away because he really took another long trip – to Africa. Because, you see, Brother Malcom had to make a choice when he first, uh, set up the OAAU, he could either set up the organization first or he could – he was such a strong believer that our ultimate protection as, you know, Black people and a big minority in this country, uh, result depended on both outside relationships, specifically with Africa. He –

JF: (inaudible)

PB: – used to tell us we needed the kind of relationship with Africa that if there was ever really any real effort to move us here, then the African countries – the entire African continent would do various actions that would assist us. It was this kind of – I mean, he was very serious about this, and this is why he decided that in those first few months after his suspension he spent a lot of time traveling in Africa, trying to solidify and set up the beginnings of these relationships, and Brother Malcolm –

JF: It really hadn't been done that much.

PB: – it had never been done on that type of programmed level, of course, there were other Black – you know, Marcus Garvey,³⁵ Blyden,³⁶ there were other leaders, nationalists, who believed in the Pan-Africanist concept, but Brother Malcolm was really the major one of this –

JF: He didn't want to move the Black people in America to Africa, he wanted to have an alliance.

PB: Well, his position was that we should have, he said like in order to return to Africa – he didn't necessarily mean that you had to physically return but he meant you had to psychologically return in the sense that you identified that Africa's problems as your problems and your problems as how to help them and their problems as far as how they could help us. He wanted that kind of relationship, a psycholog – I mean, you know, a relationship that currently exists between the Jews of the United States and Israel.

JF: There you go, right.

PB: That doesn't mean that all the Jews here will run to Israel, but it means that they have a type of psychological connection and identification with each other that one group looks upon a movement on the group as an attack on everybody, so everybody moves to, you know, stop it. And he wanted us to develop the same kind of relationship with the African continent, and that's why he spent those first few – a lot of the first few months, uh, of his

³⁵ Jamaican-born Black nationalist (1887-1940), leader of the Pan-Africanism movement.

³⁶ Edward Wilmot Blyden, Liberian educator, writer, diplomat, and politician, often regarded as a father of Pan-Africanism (1832-1912).

time traveling in Africa. He was welcomed in high African circles. I mean, when he went to Africa, he was invited to dinner by diplomats and he, uh, met Nkrumah,³⁷ he was a guest of Kenyatta³⁸ in Kenya, he was allowed to speak on Kenyan radio. Excuse me, despite the protests from the American ambassador in Kenya, I remember him telling us the ambassador really tried to block, and once he could not block him from being a speaker, he did try to get the Black Americans who were in Kenya to not go and listen to what Brother Malcolm had to say, you know. So, the man, you know, the man had an international stature, the likes of which very few Black people, especially of his time, you know, enjoyed—so that's why he spent, he decided that he would let us do the struggling to keep the organization functioning on this level, and then he would begin to build these international contacts which he felt were really important to us for later.

JF: But really it wasn't possibly plausible for one man—

PB: —to do both. You could not do both, uh, and (pause)—the unfortunate thing is that the day that he was assassinated I was in the hall that day. I had, uh, um, spoken to him that previous Saturday, uh, which was the Saturday after his home was firebombed. Uh, he came over to the office at the OAAU that Saturday afternoon, and I had put out a bulletin around the bombing of his home, and he said to me, "Brother Peter," uh, there was something that I had written in there I don't know exactly what it was now but when he read it, he said, "Brother Peter, there is something in here—you shouldn't say this like this." Because, you see, again, using his knowledge of libel laws and how—the use of words, he said, "You say it like this, you know, they can get us jammed up for something we said. We don't have time to be spending money fighting court battles over things that, you know, that were said," so hey, says, uh, "I wish you would not send this out like this." So, I said, "Okay I understand," so I did not, you know, I did not have time to change it—we were gonna give it out at the rallies the next day, and since I did not have time to change it, we just did not give them out. And to this day, I do not have a single copy of that, of that, uh, bulletin—I don't know what happened to it, I think we might have gotten mixed up after the confusion after he was assassinated, gotten it mixed up. But I wish I had a copy of it just so I could—because I remember jotting down when he told me it had to be changed. But the next day, which was February the 21st, 1965, uh, when he came in, I was up at the Audubon early as usual because, you know, we were getting people ready, getting things set up for the rally. When he came in and asked me if I would go

³⁷ Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), Ghanaian politician and revolutionary, 1st President of Ghana, 3rd Chairperson of OAU.

³⁸ Jomo Kenyatta (1897-1978). Kenyan anti-colonial activist and politician, 1st President and Prime Minister of Kenya.

backstage and speak with him for a minute, you know, when he came in. So, I went and said, "I'll be back in a minute," and went back there, and I spoke with him and, again, this showed me the absolute courtesy and value of Brother Malcolm as a human being, you know, and not just as a leader. Because his worry, despite everything that had happened to him – he had been banned from France, his home had been firebombed, you know, I mean, just a whole lot of things had come down on him in a short period of time; he was concerned that I had misunderstood, uh, what he was saying to me that day before, and that I may have been upset or hurt, and that he was condemning something I had put a lot of work into. I said, "No, I understand why you did that," and this is why when I read things people used to say about him, I said it was a bunch of crap, you know about the type of person he was. Because he was very courteous, very, very thoughtful, and a very, very considerate person. And I remember, you know, I had spoken with him, and I also had with me that day a copy of a paper.

[00:30:00]

PB: A clipping from the *New York Times* about the Deacons for Defense and Justice³⁹ who had been formed out in Louisiana, this is the first time I had seen something about them in the papers, so I took that clip back backstage with me, and I showed it to him, and he read it and said "Uh-huh, see. Now that's what I've been saying all along, that if the government and the authorities are now protected, then you gotta protect yourselves." And I stayed back there, you know, we spoke about several other things, that last conversation that I had with him, we spoke about it. And then he said, "Anybody recognize Milton Galamison?" Milton Galamison was a minister here in New York who had been very prominent in the New York School Boycott Movement, and he was supposed to come to our rally that day to help to make an appeal for, uh, you know, things, for Brother Malcolm's family since, when their home was firebombed, it burned a lot of the kids' clothing, their clothing, their possessions that had been wiped out. Reverend Galamison was gonna speak to the rally and encourage people to give, uh, to replace the things for the family, so he said, "Does anyone here recognize Galamison?" I said, "I do," and he said, "Will you please back and wait? And when he comes in, bring him backstage." So, that's when I left and that's why I was not back there, I was out there, it's like when you go the Audubon Ballroom, there's a little alcove where you sit at the top of the steps and then you walk into the main ballroom. I was sitting in there, waiting on Reverend Galamison to come in there, when I heard the shots.

³⁹ Armed African American self-defense group, formed in 1964 by Earnest "Chilly Willy" Thomas and Frederick Douglas Kirkpatrick, served to protect CORE from Ku Klux Klan attacks.

Uh, I jumped up and ran, and looked in, and I got knocked down because the people were running out and screaming and everything. I ran and—finally got down to the stage, and I jumped up to the stage, and I looked, he was laying on the stage and I looked at his chest and someone had opened his shirt up—I could see holes in his chest where he had been hit by the shotgun pellets. He was like, you know, gasping, not a sound; he was not making any sound, but he was trying to gasp for breath. And he was turning ash, a greyish color because he was kind of like a brown, light brown skin. And, uh, I remember, uh, thinking, you know, there is no doctor. So, I jumped down off the stage, and this was a long ballroom, a huge ballroom I was heading down, thinking about running across the street toward the Presbyterian Hospital, you know, to get a doctor. ‘Cause I know I was not thinking properly and calmly at the time, I was in a very stage of agitation. And then right before I did that, I saw a group of Brothers come pushing a—one of those stretchers on rollers. They had gone over there taken it and brought it back to put his body on it, and then they rolled him to the streets. They—almost directly across the street from the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, which is why to this day I can’t get very warmed up about the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center because no doctor came over.

JF: You said that there were policemen, special agents in the audience—

PB: I’m certain there were, because they came to all our rallies, all our rallies always had policemen in the audience. But I had even seen when I was sitting in the back where I was sitting, I could look into the little office—I had seen policemen there in uniforms. At least three policemen I remember seeing, when I was sitting there, in uniforms, talking to the owner or the manager or whoever was in charge of the place that day. They were back there, the door was open, so they were not trying to hide. But I remember seeing them there and, uh—

JF: What about the two, uh, suspects that supposedly were arrested from the crowd?

PB: You see, I didn’t really see that because when the crowd was running out, I was running up to the stage, so I didn’t really see—but I do know that I heard that they got caught, one of the, uh, two of the suspects got caught outside by the crowd, and the crowd was beating on them and stomping them. The police came up and snatched them away from the crowd and threw them into this car. And because the second person, you never heard of again—

JF: That’s right.

PB: –you just heard of the one person, Hayer.⁴⁰ And I firmly believe that if Hayer had not been shot in the leg, which slowed him down so he could be caught—he might have gotten away, and I do not think there would have been a trial or it would have been something where somebody, like other assassinations at the time, they would have found somebody and said, “This person did it.” And that would have been the end of it. I think after Hayer was caught and everyone knew that he was caught because he had been shot in the leg, they had to do something with him, so the trial had to be held. Uh, but I don’t think there would have been a trial—I think they would have—I think he would have escaped—I think all of them would gotten away.

JF: But you two did corroborate that, at that point of the story, there were two people that supposedly were taken by the police.

PB: Well, uh, I know—I know people who were there who saw, who said this.

JF: Right, yeah, but the early newspapers—

PB: Yeah, that’s what I said. Right, you know, I cannot say, you know, I was an eyewitness because when the people ran out of the hall and ran down to the back and caught them out front while I was running out towards the front, and by the time I came back out of the building, which was after they had picked his body up on the stretcher and rolled it to the streets, I came back out of the building with, you know—all of this had happened. You know and the cops had already taken them away, you know. I did not actually see this, but I knew people who were out there, who were people who had been coming to our rallies from the very beginning who said there were two people. I remember when I went in there, it looked like a battleground—there were people laid all over the floor, they were laying on tables, some people moaning who had been hit by stray bullets. You know, uh, and the place was in shambles because in that attempt to get out, people had knocked over chairs and tables and everything—the place had actually looked like a battleground, you know, when I, when I went in there. Um, I think personally that Brother Malcolm’s assassination occurred the way it did for three very specific reasons because people who were trying to assassinate him could have easily done it when he was going home one night to Queens, they could have done it—there were just so many ways that it could have been done but it was done publicly for about six hundred people on a nice, bright, you know, afternoon, in the afternoon. And I think it was done like that for three major reasons. One, I think so that confusion could be caused by the fact the people actually pulling the trigger and shooting him were Black so that if he had been killed in some dark little street going home, you know, it could have been speculated it

⁴⁰ Talmadge Hayer, also known as Thomas Hagan, former member of the Nation of Islam, confessed to the assassination of Malcolm X in court.

was someone White who did it. This way, you could see that the people who did the, did the murder were Black right away, shows conflict and confusion to any reaction, you know. That was the first reason, so this could be specifically seen. I think the second reason was to intimidate you know all the people – to kind of show the people that we can shoot down one of your main niggas in middle of the afternoon in broad daylight, and there is nothing you can do about it. It was a way of intimidation, and then of course the third reason, I think, was to, uh, to do it in such a way so that the Muslims, you know, the Nation of Islam Muslims, and the OAAU people would immediately start shooting each other down in the streets, and then everybody who survived that would've been picked up, you know and that would have been the end of both, you know, groups in New York.

JF: But this did not pan out.

PB: This was the only one of three objectives which did not work, and this was because there were cooler heads in both groups who began to, you know, who had somebody that knew what was going on and were talking to people to cool things out, you know. I think after that shooting had occurred, the very next day, the night I heard was – the mosque⁴¹ on 16th street was burned completely to the ground, and I think that was done, of course, trying to blame the fault on Malcolm X, which I think was a second attempt to cause this shootout. But again, fortunately, it did not work. But I think those were the three main reasons that Brother Malcolm X was assassinated – the way he was. I think he was assassinated because traditionally, in this country, a Black man who stays within the confines of the country and talks can just about say anything he wants. You can call the president an MFSOB⁴² twenty-four hours a day, but when you start getting talking on an international level, then you become very dangerous. And I think there were elements in this country who really began to fear – because, see, one of Malcolm X's ultimate aims was to have the government, because, you know, the United States government was one of the few governments in the world that had not signed the U.N.⁴³ Declaration of Human Rights – and one of the things he was trying to do was trying to get one of the African countries to take the government before the World Court for violating the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. And, of course, everyone knows they would have not been able to enforce anything, but if they would have had them defend themselves before this body, it would have been a tremendous propaganda coup.

⁴¹ Mosque No. 7. Malcolm X preached there when he was a member of the Nation of Islam; redesigned as the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque in 1976.

⁴² Expletive phrase.

⁴³ United Nations.

[00:40:00]

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: I think that this was the reason, you know, that he was assassinated. The Nation of Islam—

JF: Right.

PB: —now, see, we don't really, we don't really—that, that I really am one of the people who really did not know, but I do know that he was working on it.

JF: Right.

PB: That was one of the reasons for his extensive travels in Africa. Because I'm sure he probably could have gotten one of the, you know, communist countries who would have done this, you know, had he—

JF: Gladly.

PB: —gladly, but that's not what he wanted. He wanted to get an African country to do it and, you know, and I think there were people who thought he might be able to pull this off, you know. I think it very closely tied with King's⁴⁴ assassination. King (pauses) became a factor in Vietnam, probably more of a factor than any other American civilian—Black or White. King's anti-Vietnam position was the one I think that really worried them the most because of his whole Nobel Peace Prize non-violent thing. King was assassinated after that. Before that, no one could get near King because of his non-violence approach—he was the—considered, you—the man who tried to keep the people following. You know, 'cause he was dealing strictly on the domestic level, and he was preaching non-violence—the FBI⁴⁵ and everybody protected him.

JF: Right.

PB: But after he came out and got involved in the whole Vietnam thing, he was assassinated.

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: Again, the international factor. They would not stand—the people who really fear, uh, whatever Black people try do in this country are very afraid of when Black people become involved because that brings up the, uh, you know, the Americans are vulnerable on the question of race, they are vulnerable internationally on the race question. And I think that this was behind Brother Malcolm's assassination. I do not believe that the Nation of Islam—I had personally always blamed the Nation of Islam for allowing themselves to be put in the position to cause the confusion as to whether or

⁴⁴ Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), African American Christian minister and activist, most prominent spokesperson of Civil Rights Movement.

⁴⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation.

not they did it. But I think Elijah Muhammad,⁴⁶ when Brother Malcolm got off that plane in Paris and was put right back on the plane and sent to back London, was not even allowed into Paris – you cannot tell me that Elijah Muhammad can tell Charles de Gaulle⁴⁷ do not let Malcolm X, you know, come to speak. Because he was supposed to speak at a rally that evening, that night in Paris. Elijah Muhammad cannot tell Charles de Gaulle, “Do not allow Malcolm X to speak in Paris.”

JF: Right, in retrospect, that’s rather ridiculous.

PB: That’s ridiculous. So, you see, this was like three things happened right in a row, one week he was banned from France, the next week his home was firebombed, the next week he was assassinated. To me, it’s almost like someone said, “Oh man, this cat, you know – this cat is becoming dangerous. We’ve allowed him to, you know, but something has got to be done about this,” and like I say, Elijah Muhammad didn’t have the power to have Malcolm put on a plane, not even allowed to speak to the American Embassy in Paris. They took him off one plane, put him in a car, drove him into the airport, then put him on a plane back to London. Now that is operating on an international level –

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: – which, uh, you know, I mean who can do that?

JF: Well, certainly not the leader of the Black Muslims.

PB: – of the Black Muslims, right, so this is why, you know – again, it brings me back to my feeling that it was his international activities that were behind his assassination that were disturbing – the most disturbing. Because, as long as he stood in between 125th Street, I could go up on 125th Street right now and call the president a SOB⁴⁸ twenty-four hours a day and they might watch me, you know, and everything, you know, might put a lookout on me, but they’re not going to come out and assassinate and get rid of me. You see, plus, Brother Malcolm, he had vision. He had vision, and I remember him telling – we used to have little meetings, I’d talk to him like in groups whatever of only four or five people present, you know, where you can really listen to him rap. I remember listening to him in 1964, he predicted all the uprisings because I remember him making a statement in ‘64, the Democratic Convention happened over in Atlantic City, the Mississippi Freedom Democrats⁴⁹ were not allowed to speak at that

⁴⁶ Religious leader and writer (1897-1975) who led the Nation of Islam for forty-one years until his death, former mentor to Malcolm X.

⁴⁷ (1890-1970), president of France at the time.

⁴⁸ Expletive phrase.

⁴⁹ Also referred to as the Freedom Democratic Party (1964-1968), designed to encourage Black political participation and the fight against discrimination, for workers’ rights, and against unemployment.

convention in Atlantic City,⁵⁰ and, um, I mean, after they gone through all this hell, Fannie Lou Hamer⁵¹ and, um, SNCC,⁵² that's what these three young guys were killed for. Then, they get to the Democratic Convention, they told them, you're going to have to share your seats with the regulars who have been trying to block them out all these years. So, I remember Malcolm X said, "When those young workers, when the young Black folks find out you've all been telling them, if you do this, if you get an education, if you be right and do good, then everything will happen, and they realize that you've been jiving them—they are going to make me feel like a moderate."

JF: Right.

PB: Those were his exact words in 1964 because I remember them. And, sure enough, the Harlem Uprising occurred that summer, uh, '65 Watts⁵³ happened, then the whole '67 Detroit,⁵⁴ you know '66 Newark,⁵⁵ '67 Detroit, I mean, all these things happened, and I think they happened as a direct result of hopes—people having really believed that things were going to be changing, and then they didn't come about. This is what he had said, he said that in 1964, you know, that when these young people find out you've been jiving them—they're gonna make me seem like a moderate because they're gonna react to it. That was one vision that he had. Another, he told us when the OAAU first started we used to have those meetings up at that motel, he told us at the very beginning, "Listen, those of you who are afraid or worried of getting dossiers or getting phone-tapped and everything, don't get involved with me because it's going to happen to you." So, all this stuff that we hear know about, uh, you know, how the FBI went into the Panthers⁵⁶ and provoked things, provoked fights between the Panthers and us and Ron Karenga's⁵⁷ group, and, you know, the taping of Dr. King, wiretapping and all that kind of stuff—he warned us about, so none of these revelations of the past year have surprised me. None of them. None of them,

⁵⁰ Resort city on the Atlantic Coast of New Jersey, founded in 1854.

⁵¹ African American Civil Rights activist (1917-1977), co-founder and vice-chairperson of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

⁵² Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-1976).

⁵³ The 1967 Detroit Riot, known as Watt's Rebellion or Watt's Uprising, August 11-16, 1965.

⁵⁴ Also known as the 12th Street Riot, one of the bloodiest and most destructive riots in U.S. History, a part of the "Long Hot Summer of 1967" riots. July 23-28, 1967.

⁵⁵ The 1967 Newark riots, also a part of the "Long Hot Summer of 1967" riots, July 12-17, 1967.

⁵⁶ The Black Panther Party, originally the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Militant political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton of Oakland, California, in 1966. It was created in response to police brutality in Oakland but soon shifted to a platform of Black power and community aid through various social programs.

⁵⁷ (1941-), African American professor of Africana Studies, activist, author, and creator of Kwanzaa.

- because he warned us of them, he told us of them, that he knew this was going on—the provocateurs. He used to tell us, anytime you're in the middle of a meeting and some guy stands up in the middle of the meeting and says, "Hey, let's go down, why don't we go down and bomb so and so and so and so."
- JF: Yes.
- PB: He said, "Be very careful about them." So, what happened? Many times, the Panthers got trapped in this very kind of maneuver.
- JF: Mm-hm.
- PB: You see, that's why I said the man had vision. He had vision, he knew, he knew this system and how it operates better than anybody that I have ever known, and the stuff he used to tell me, I could still utilize it this very day (telephone rings) in my readings, in my life, and the very way I look at things, you know, the way I interpret things, my looking at what's happening on the African continent, he told us—he used to tell us, "You know, Brothers, I would never say it publicly, but the dominant ideology from too many of those African leaders is dollarism." He said, "It's not—it's dollarism—as you look around, you see this unity, all the things that are going on, it's not that type of unity that the OAU is proposing—it is not exemplified, it has not come about." That's why when I went to Africa, I was prepared. Like a lot of young people, like myself, who went to Africa with these fantastic, romantic illusions, came back and became very hostile towards Africa because of some of the things they ran into while they were over there. I went over there with a much more realistic attitude on my first trip to Africa because of Brother Malcolm, because those were the small meetings we used to have where he used to us, give us the real rundown to what was happening. So, if I went to Africa, and I thought Africa was a little more British than the Queen, they were more French than, you know, than Charles de Gaulle—I was not surprised, I did not let them turn me away from the Pan-Africanist concept because I still believed in it.
- JF: Mm-hm
- PB: You know, just like I don't let the Black people here who tell me, "What good is Africa gonna do for us?" who can't see that. I can't let them turn me away because I know better and so, just like that, it was all because of the groundwork that he laid. I still live by a lot of the things he laid down for me.
- JF: By this point, you mentioned you still believe in this Pan-Africanist ideal and movement, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, you mentioned one that Malcolm X was doing was that he was trying to bring the case of the Black minorities before the U.N.
- PB: Mm-hm.
- JF: And this—
- PB: That was one of his objectives.

JF: Right. What were some of the other objectives of this Organization of Afro-American Unity?

PB: Um, in our constitution, we talked about many of the things that later became big issues—community control of the schools was in our constitution, this was back in 1964. We were saying that we had to have community control of the schools.

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: Because, you know, because the schools are so important in shaping ideals, ideas, and what the children live by. This became a big issue about '68 or '69. But we had it in our constitution in 1964.

[00:50:00]

JF: Right, right.

PB: You know, uh, self-defense was in our constitution. We advocated that people simply, you know, had to be in the position to defend yourself. You should not allow yourself to be pushed around, you know, uh, of course, the Pan-Africanist thing. It was not just a case of romantic concept, you know, (telephone rings) he looked upon it (telephone rings) as our really only (telephone rings)—we are, you know, the minority here and the minority that we are, you know, we are outnumbered like two hundred million to twenty-five or thirty million or something—he said, “You have to have somebody on the outside of the United States who will, you know, look out after you.” His position was that, for us, this would be the African continent. So his, um, pushing for the government relationship in Africa was not based on any kind of romanticist—it was based on what he considered purely practical, another practical survival technique, you know, that we should utilize, you know, as well as being something that was desirable from a psychological and an emotional point of view.

JF: Right.

PB: But something that was a very practical necessity or us to develop these kinds of ties, uh, as a protective as, you know, a protective situation.

JF: That was really another means of uniting, uh, this diverse people—

PB: —right, who were scattered around—

JF: —under the same color of the skin—

PB: Yes, right. Right.

JF: —because you did all have an African heritage.

PB: And that brings me back to another point. I remember when Brother Malcolm came back from Mecca,⁵⁸ they were saying, “Oh he has changed his mind” —

JF: Yeah, and—

⁵⁸ City in Saudi Arabia, birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam. Millions of Muslims arrive each year for their annual Hajj or pilgrimage which serves as a rite of passage. Malcolm X took his Hajj there in 1964.

PB: – because they wanted to show inconsistencies. But when Brother Malcolm said, when he came back from Mecca, he said, “I met White people in my travels who, you know, who were not – devils as I had believed.” And that – he has been saying that White people were devils and everything. He said, “I have found that Whites who have accepted Islam,” you know, to be what he considered free of this strong sense of racism that existed, you know, in Christian countries. He said, “Maybe if White people in America, those would accept, you know, things of Islam,” some of them – I don’t know exactly how those words were coming out, but he was saying those Whites who accepted the tenets of Islam, you know, were the ones who he felt could be, uh, could treat people fairly and get rid of that racism. So, they tried to make it seem like he came back and said that everything was cool now and everything was good to show inconsistencies and to cause confusion among his followers. But, you see, Malcolm understood words – he never said words carelessly. He was – I eventually think I got into writing as a career because of dealing with him and understanding, you know, and – and just enjoying how he understood the use of words and how he used to tell us that old saying, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is not true because words can hurt – ‘cause words can hurt.

JF: Yes.

PB: Words create images, and he was very, very sharp with word play. And you read what he was saying that he had changed because he had met with Whites he felt had rid themselves of racism and – but he said they were the ones who had accepted Islam –

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: – which means that in America, you are still eliminating ninety-nine nine ten percent of the people –

JF: Yes, and Blacks and Whites were –

PB: – but the whole big thing, you know, is that they were trying to make it sound like he was now, you know, – and the man had broadened his viewpoint, you know, it’s not a matter of change, it’s a matter of, you know, of – the reason he was so skillful was that he had the ability that when he got into a situation, he was not going to hold onto something that had been no longer, you know, to have been proven to, you know, no longer be correct. He did not go down with some erroneous concept, just because he saw something that broadened it and, you know, added some dimensions to it, he did so – which made him even more dangerous. (pauses) Because a man who just sticks to something, no matter how wrong it is – you know, I mean, you don’t really have to worry about him too much.

JF: You can make him a –

PB: Right, you didn’t have to worry about him too much, uh, because eventually, he’s going to destroy himself.

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: You know but, uh, because of Malcolm X's—he was brilliant. He was a brilliant, brilliant man and, uh, I for one you now just cannot imagine—I doubt, I think, I'd be doing any of the things I've been doing for the last ten years had it not been for my relationship with him. I still utilize his things in my writing. I still believe in the things that I, you know, learned from him, despite all the setbacks and, you know, the retreat on many areas of people going back to those same old, you know, uh, tacky ways that they had been going back to, some of the Black people, you know. I still think that eventually that type of program he was espousing back in 1964, that program is gonna be necessary for us to survive. When I say "survive," I don't mean survival—I'm not talking about survival—I don't think—I really don't believe right now that nobody is gonna try to, you know, take us all and put us in concentration camps and wipe us out. But I'm talking about survival, you know, as a cultural survival where you can exist and still maintain some of things that make you unique, you know, as a people, you know, I'm talking about that kind of survival. Those types of things are still necessary—I still think community control of schools is an important thing that we need so, you know, people would be more involved in the schools of our communities. I still think the Pan-Africanism that was in our constitution is a correct ideology. I still believe in self-defense, you know, where you (telephone rings) don't go out aggressively and attack other people, but you do not allow people to come into your communities, you know, and raise hell and destroy. And that includes as you gotta deal with now, the whole question of Black-on-Black crime, which I think, um, uh, is a throwback to that old self-destructive thing that so many people have gotten into and hoped we had gotten out of, but so many people are going back into now. I still believe we had a, uh, statement in our constitution on the importance of cultural activity because his position was—and we, many of us agreed with him, he got it from someone else—was that people's culture is how people live, the things they do, the way they enjoy life, I mean, the music, the theater, and that if people are in tune on this level—they will automatically be in tune politically and economically, because they will be moving by—they will support their own out of a cultural necessity.

JF: Right.

PB: They wouldn't think of doing otherwise, so the culture, you know, had an importance along with economics and politics because, most of the time, you put politics and economics, then you drop culture down here somewhere. And in our constitution, we had culture right up there with politics and economics.

JF: That's incredible. It was going to be an important part—

PB: – part of the movement, the stress on the cultural, you know, was put into the constitution you know that we, uh, had.

JF: So, in other words, people like LeRoi Jones or Amiri Baraka,⁵⁹ and, um, Ron Karenga, actually were going beyond carrying on with Malcolm X's program in certain ways?

PB: In certain ways, oh yeah.

JF: Going beyond Black cultural revolution?

PB: Yeah, but, you see now, like so many things, you cannot take one thing and make it like the only thing you deal with. But what a lot of the Brothers, especially after Brother Malcolm, they just got involved in cultural activities and let everything else go.

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: And that is not—no good either. He was talking about the three things: politics, culture, economics. The three things came hand in hand, and you moved on all three levels in order to build a sense of self-identification and power as a people. All the things he was espousing were leading to Black Power.

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: You know, I mean, uh, that was the ultimate end of all the things we were doing, where we will be determining things which were affecting our lives most directly. Uh, he believed in, uh, now you got self-determination, he believed in economically collective, he believed—in our constitution, we talked about collective economic activity on the part of Black people (PB chokes and clears throat) because you know everybody's gonna become General Motors as far as Black people were over. And I, collectively, he used to tell us back in '64 that very few things that Black people cannot do on an economic level in this country, if we were to pool our moneys because we have enough money as a collective group, you know, to move. We might not have enough money as, you know, individuals—

JF: Mm-hm.

PB: –but if we pooled our resources and moved on a collective economic activity, we would still have to get—

[01:00:00]

PB: –our government things because we pay taxes and deserve to get everything from the government that everybody else is getting, but we would not be so dependent on government handouts and things.

JF: It starts making sense to move collectively.

PB: This was another stress that was in our constitution: collective economic activities. You know when people would curb to pool their resources and open daycare centers and buy remodeled buildings and run schools and set

⁵⁹ African American writer of poetry, drama, fiction, essays and music criticism (1934-2014).

- up—I mean just, uh, livelihood and your survival as a group depended upon this. (PB clears throat again) And Brother Malcolm never, uh—his ultimate, his, his strongest thing was that he always believed in Black people.
- JF: Mm-hm.
- PB: You know, he really did. He used to say, even as much as he believed in Islam that he believed in Islam as a religion, but that if Islam ever became an obstacle to dealing with and supporting and aiming things of Black people—that he would give up Islam first.
- JF: Mm-hm.
- PB: He said this. His—and the thing about him again I’ve listed some of the things that have impressed me: his knowledge, his wisdom, his analytical abilities, his, uh, his reasoning. He uses his style of a Baptist preacher, his speaking style, the traditional Baptist preaching style, of course he used it in a different kind of way, he was talking more about secular than religious things, but the style the way he used to speak and the effect he had on people, you know—
- JF: That style was very effective.
- PB: —was very effective. (telephone rings) It’s a style that is still, of course, used today of course in, uh, by most great Black orators. The use of repetition, the use of parables.
- JF: Right.
- PB: Uh, (telephone rings) “I have a dream, I have a dream, I have a dream.”⁶⁰ Brother Malcolm spoke the same kind of way. He and King shared that, you know, uh—
- JF: Well, King was a preacher too.
- PB: The great Black orators of all time shared these kinds of things, um, and another important and, you see, another important thing to remember about Brother Malcolm and King was that he [Malcolm] had the support of many Black people in this country that could not publicly allow themselves to be associated with him.
- JF: Mm-hm.
- PB: There were people whose names we could not publicly say because of the type of things that they were doing, and they were, you know, would be put down upon, but they supported him.
- JF: Yeah. It was interesting that Ossie Davis⁶¹ came out at his funeral and gave the eulogy.
- PB: There were people like Ossie Davis at the same level, different type of professions who—
- JF: Now, that was a very daring thing to do as a Black actor.

⁶⁰ Allusion to *I Have a Dream*, speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., August 28, 1963.

⁶¹ Referred to as R. C. Davis earlier in this transcription.

PB: Mm-hm. (clears throat) There were other people who helped finance you know who provided monies to finance some of the things that we were doing. You know, these were people who were, uh—

JF: — who couldn't publicly say, right, but—

PB: — who couldn't publicly say, right but—

JF: — who helped out in any way—

PB: — who helped out in any way that they could, you know. Mm-hm. And some of them we didn't even know. We were all much younger, and anybody that was not down the line, we were ready to jump on, and he would tell us, "You know you gotta be very careful about some of these people who you're coming down on because I get some very strong support and if you knew their names, it would surprise you."

JF: Right.

PB: He would tell us that, "If you knew their names, it would surprise you." You know some Black people were helping them while one time they might be giving a negative interview about him, one in the papers, making a statement, you know, about that terrible Malcolm X and what he was doing. You know, well, uh—

JF: Well, with the distortion by the press, maybe that wasn't exactly what they had said in the first place anyways, but what the press got out of it. So, for what they turned out of it.

PB: But that was, uh, that was a very, very—well it wasn't quite a year—well it was a year because it was February '64, '65, that I was involved with him. And, uh, it was the most learning—I learned more in that year than I learned in all my previous years of schooling. And, uh, many of the things—

JF: Why do you think the organization fell apart? Or didn't fall apart? Are those the correct words?

PB: Well, well, uh, you see, I gave those three reasons. I said one was to intimidate, well, the second reason was to intimidate and to cause suspicion, to intimidate the people who believed and supported Brother Malcolm, and also to cause suspicion, that might even be a fourth one, among the people who worked with him—and everybody started looking over their shoulder at everybody, you know, like, uh-oh, this one is an FBI agent. It really affected—it was very effective in destroying the organization. I think I was one of few in the organization that most all of— who many—most of the people who were involved spoke to. So, I really got a glimpse as to how effective that thing was with—outside having everybody looking over their shoulder with everybody. That was one of the reasons the organization fell apart. You know, again, maybe that should be the fourth. And then, you know, uh, his sister came in from Boston, and he told her that she was to take over the organization, uh, if anything, you know, should happen to him. There were those of us who could not believe

this and did not believe this was so, we just kind of stopped. I think I went to one meeting after he was assassinated, I went to only one about two weeks after his burial. We had an OAAU meeting, and I went, and it was just some things that happened there that I realized that the organization as I knew it was no longer really going to be in existence. That and the fact that so many of the people became uptight and suspicious about each other helped to bring it down. It still exists in name and every now and then – on his birthday, on the anniversary of the assassination of – them doing little things but it's really not doing very much.

JF: It's really not the organization that –

PB: – it's not the same organization that it was – the unity that existed. During that year, that very, very exciting year, you know, that, uh –

JF: The only other main question I have is – concerns the trials of his assassins and the people who were convicted, and two of them were Muslims. It seemed if you read the records of the trial, really, they weren't in the ballroom at all.

PB: This is, uh, has always been a possib – it's very a strange trial. I think that even at the end of the trial, Hayer himself admitted flatly that he was there, and he said that the other two guys were not there, and that he moved, and he knew, but would not tell where the other people were. And I've never heard of anybody saying, you know, I know some names but I'm not gonna tell you if they really want to find out. They make you tell. You know.

JF: So, whatever happened to Hayer?

PB: He is still in prison, as far as I know.

JF: Well up to 1971, the last big thing I've seen written on it, he was still in prison.

PB: As far as I know, he's still in prison, but you know like – you never know, because a lot of the provocateurs, people who do things, they give them new identities. You know, they've been talking about all this kind of stuff, giving people new identities and sending them off somewhere after they've, you know, accomplished – done their jobs, you know. So, uh, I happen to feel Brother Malcolm's death was the result of a very definite conspiracy by higher people, on a much higher level than the Muslims.

JF: Right.

PB: You know, there's no way, like I do not believe that Oswald was the lone assassin of Kennedy, just as I do not believe that James Earl Ray was even the assassin of Martin Luther King, you know. I most certainly do not accept the story of Malcolm's X's assassination that has come out, you know, in the papers.

JF: Thank you very much, Mr. Bailey. That will conclude our interview.

[01:09:04]

END OF INTERVIEW