

Interviewer: So, the goal of this questionnaire is to just produce as detailed a narrative as possible. So, you can answer a question as in depth as you like, you can be as concise as you like. It's really up to you. If you need to stop at any point, or if there's a question you don't feel comfortable answering, just let me know. Okay?

So, actually going to start with your early life. Tell me about your place of birth and what was going on there around the time you were born.

Interviewee: I was born in Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica. My father was a psychiatrist. So, I actually grew up in a mental hospital, on the grounds of a mental hospital. Then when I was 18, 19, I got a scholarship to Colorado College, and that's how I came to the United States, and forever to be changed after that. Because I had grown up in a fairly consistent, placid environment, very beautiful now that I think back on it. Right on the ocean. I really never thought of myself in terms of race or class or money. We didn't have a lot, but we certainly were comfortable. I never thought that the rest of the world might be different. It was very, very happy consistent life. Perhaps boring, and maybe that's why I've been a traveler ever since.

But, I went away and went to Colorado College, got my Bachelor's there. Then, I taught English in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for a while. Then I came back, and I went to University of Wisconsin, Madison, because I had decided I wanted to be a journalist like my sister, and because I didn't want to teach, I wanted to be a journalist. So, I started off at University of Wisconsin, Madison, being graduate student. And then, I discovered that I needed to make some money in order to pay for my tuition. My savings ran out in no time. And so, I ended up by happenstance falling into a job that somebody was desperate to find a replacement for, as editor of the NASA Space Science Center at University of Wisconsin, Madison.

That was how I got into editing. I was an editor there for a year and a half, and I left and was invited to the Institute of the Black World. I had met two of the principals in Chicago, one was an old friend from Jamaica, Robert Hill. He had introduced me to Bill Strickland, who was the second in charge at IBW. He had invited me down to be the editor, because then editor, Sharon, was leaving. As soon as I graduated, I went down to Atlanta, took the job, and stayed there for 18 months. So, that's how I got to Atlanta, where I am now, it's a perfect circle, and how I got into editing, which was my primary activity for many years. I was a communications consultant for many years.

I did do a doctorate at Emory and got my doctorate in American Studies, Southern History, plus Communications, film and TV. So, those were my two majors. Ever since then, I have taught at several universities, three universities. Been a business person, an entrepreneur, and now I am a writer. So, and back in Atlanta.

Interviewer: There you touched on a lot of things that I want to talk about, but I'm actually interested in ... You said your father was a psychiatrist. Can you talk a little bit about your parents? What were they like? And if you grew up with your grandparents, you could talk about them as well.

Interviewee: I grew up in a traditional two-parent home. My father was a psychiatrist, he was the first psychiatrist in Jamaica. Up to then the mental hospital, which was over a hundred years old when he got there, had been largely a place where people were chained or isolated in cells or had really pretty barbaric ways of controlling their illness. My father introduced medication and therapies of various kinds. So, he sort of started the revolution in mental health in Jamaica.

So, while that was going on, my mother was a housewife, lived at home. The people who worked in our home, the staff of our home, were largely patients who were ... you know, their illness had been controlled by medication, so they could wash and iron and do landscaping and gardening and that kind of thing. But we always had a cook who was from outside of the hospital. So, it was a very ... I've had a very regulated, controlled kind of life. Didn't seem controlled at the time. Seemed a little wild sometimes, climbing trees and eating fruit, and it was a beautiful compound. And swimming in the harbor, which was right next to our home. Really, kind of an idyllic life growing up, now that I'm looking back. Of course, I had my qualms and criticisms of it all. But I really had a good life growing up.

It was only when I came to the United States that things just didn't ... I didn't understand at first why things seemed different, or the impact on me seemed different. First of all, Colorado College only had 10 students of color, or from other countries, in all. So, in a student population of 2,000, you have 10, and you're treated differently. Sometimes people are bending over backwards for you, which the administration would do. Other times, I'd be ignored or have racial epithets thrown at me, or whatever, by other students. Rarely, but it did happen. I just tried to get a handle on it, and I just ... I was trying to be like I was at home, to be normal, and it just never quite gelled. So much so, that we had our 40th reunion recently, and I didn't go. I went to the IBW reunion instead, which was great. So, although I got a really good education from Colorado College, the social part of it was missing for me.

Then, when I came back from Brazil and went to Madison, because it was such a huge university, I was able to find my niche with West Indian students. I also joined the anti-Vietnam, anti-Cambodian rallies and demonstrations and felt strongly about that. I became aware of myself as not the mainstream in the United States. I began to see myself as a Caribbean person, and then at the time began my struggle with, was I black or was I not black? Because the point was that my mother was a mix of European, Jewish, Hispanic, white. My father was what in Jamaica would be called a brown man, mixed, mulatto, right? So, you know, I never thought of myself as black, and Jamaicans at that time didn't speak of themselves as black unless they were poor people. So, it was a very, still is, very stratified society by class, and by color too at the time. But I was sort of squashed in the middle, so I never really thought about it. I was sort of protected, you know, in an embryonic sort of situation.

But Madison, Wisconsin, really opened my eyes. And then of course, meeting people from IBW and going to IBW was really kind of the ... you know, I still struggled with it, but I began to see myself as a person of color. Because I was so many different colors, I always checked the "other" box. Until recently, they have multi-racial, I can check the other. Because I don't want anybody to categorize me, because ... and I even sent out for my DNA, because I want to know what I was. Then, I discovered that I was umpteen different things. And I said, I'm not going to be called one thing or another, I am who I am, and I'll check multi-cultural, multi-ethnic. You know, it's none of your business. I still feel that way actually. But I self-identify with the African-American community here, and feel very comfortable with the culture and the music. Southern food doesn't turn me on, but I'm good with the rest of it. My ex-husband was African-American, and I continue to be very much a part of African-American society now that I'm back in Atlanta.

Interviewer: So-

Speaker 1: In comparison to your time at IBW do you feel IbW achieved its overall mission at this idea like from what I understand you had a lot of goals like establishing Black Studies as a discipline-

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1: Becoming a resource for both politician, academics but also grass roots organizations. Do you think it was effective?

Speaker 2: I think it was very effective. Some of the sub-goals might not have been achieved, but certainly the interest in starting African-American studies departments was fired partly by IBW. Also, giving a voice to people who had not been heard before. And one of those voices were the voice of black prisoners. And we had a publication ... We had prisoners who would write us, and they would send the letters to me.

And there was one prisoner who was particularly articulate and wrote well, and wrote very descriptively about his experience. And so, I decided and I brought it up with the organization, and it was agreed that we would put out a pamphlet, a small book of this mans writing. And, that was one, I'll never forget that experience because I learned a lot about what was going on in penitentiaries from that prisoner and other prisoners who would write us.

So, we certainly did a lot of things. That whole community where we lived, the Atlanta University Center was very aware of us. And they were like feeders as far as students coming to our sessions or, professors participating in activities workshops and so on. So, I think it was very influential. Everybody who came through that door, you couldn't leave untouched. It was an organization where they force you to think about what was going on around you and injustice that was being perpetrated and so on.

So I would say yes that we had an impact for the years that we were in existence. Just towards the end, the struggle for money, for survival began to kind of overtake other things, and that ... Which was a pity.

Speaker 1: Do you feel like that's why IBW closed or tried [inaudible 00:02:52] or some of the factors in its-

Speaker 2: I would say that there were two reasons. One was the drying up of funds, and the other reason was that the times were changing. And that is a circle effect there because the funds were drying up because the times were changing. So the movement had taken other forms, had moved into Universities, into African-American studies departments. And so, things became different. Those departments became very active during the 70's. As the 70's progressed, and the 80's. So it was sort their time.

So it shifted from an independent, non-profit organization into universities all around the country. And many of their faculty members were influenced by IBW. Some of them never came to IBW, but they read our publications. Because we had newsletters, and different magazines, and publications that went out regularly, and they would send in

and buy them. And in those days you know they had to write by mail and order and send a check. And then we would send our publications out and that was ongoing.

That was the kind of thing that the volunteers did, and our job was just to edit and put together publications and print them out and, assemble them. We did all of that ourselves, except for Harvard Education Review, which Harvard took care of. But, the impact of those publications was pretty wide. Was pretty wide. So, I don't know how you can quantify it but, there's still people from California to New York, to Louisiana who do say occasionally that they were impacted by IBW.

So, we know that ... And Bobby here was ... Had the Marcus Garvey Center in UCLA and he was very deeply impacted by IBW and contributing to it. And, so he had a center out there as well. So oh yeah, it definitely had an impact. Yeah.

Speaker 1: But you say that sort of like because the ... It seems like in some ways the movement became deeply entrenched in the academy. And that sort of changed the movement itself, which then dried up the funds. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? How did that entrenchment in the academy change the movement?

Speaker 2: Well, there was only so much money. They was sympathetic to the African-American cause after Civil Rights, towards the end of the Civil Rights era [inaudible 00:05:54], and giving money and so on in black institutions. Got big enough that they could contribute money. But then when you had many, many institutions or departments requesting money, then it just got thinned out. The money got thinner and thinner because there were so many groups now requesting money.

Writing proposals, and getting grants, and having donations given to them, raising funds that IBW began to lose its donors.

Speaker 1: Why do you think people were more ... 'Cause it seemed like people were more likely to give to those department than maybe to IBW, or do you feel like that was the case or was it just that there were so many that they money kind of got spread out.

Speaker 2: I can only speculate that the money just got spread out. Yeah. Because you had institutions that were growing and doing well like Bronner Brothers in Atlanta, and Johnson Publications in Chicago, and so on. Those were donors. But then other people were coming to them. It just got to be too much. So, there was a point of saturation where they just couldn't give anymore. And I think too our relevance perhaps, became not as great too.

Because, as the money started drying up people ... We couldn't have as many events and we just couldn't sponsor as much as we did before, and our employees got dispersed. So, there was less and less that we could do. So it sort of ... I guess one could say it died a natural death, but then the good thing is that it just wasn't focused in Atlanta anymore, it was all over the county.

So, I definitely would think that we were a contributing factor. I don't know that all of

the politics involved but the Martin Luther King Center was more mainstream in its thinking, and it was really more about Martin and Coretta and their legacies. And then, there was IBW, which came out of the idea of struggle and an intellectual revolution and so on. So, there was sort of a choice there too, about to whom to give-

Speaker 1: That mainstream versus alternate.

Speaker 2: Right.

Speaker 1: Two questions for you, so one of them, a little earlier you mentioned you were like, I think some of the sub goals might not have been accomplished but overall, there were a lot of things that got done. When you talk about the sub goals, which ones are you referring to?

Speaker 2: Well I think that it was hoped that IBW would grow and get bigger and become, you know, a large teaching and publishing organization and just have a rock bed of support. That was always a hope and that one did not materialize.

The grass roots effort was I think, not as successful as we had hoped. Maybe because the pamphlets and publications, people had to pay for them, there was that. I also think that the style of writing was academic and literary, and it, style of writing did not appeal to the grass roots, and that was not a medium that they would normally use for information, most, most. You always found that there were one or two people in communities who really took the time and you know wanted to educate themselves, but I think we tended to have more of an audience that was academic, and less of an audience that was grass roots.

So that part, that was more like the [inaudible 00:01:47], you know, they were very comfortable with that and with their organization in Detroit and with growing that. We were more the intellectuals.

Speaker 1: Was there ever a time that, or were there other things about IBW, about its mission, about its, about how it went about achieving its mission that you disagreed with? I know a little earlier you mentioned like sometimes you would give your professional opinion about a thing but there were also times when you felt like, no one really wanted to hear you. Like were there instances when there were things happening that you disagreed with that you either spoke up about or you would've liked to but maybe felt like you weren't heard?

Speaker 2: There were times when I would attend workshops and have questions and there not ask them. I felt that my questions were not, ... intellectual enough, were not interesting enough, that it was just not in my place to ask. So there were, almost every workshop session I attended, I felt that way.

Speaker 1: Was that because, was that a thing that you felt?

Speaker 2: Excuse me, you think we should attend to the dog?

Speaker 3: I'm hearing.

Speaker 2: Okay, maybe-

