Cyprian Anyanwu

Interview date: July 17, 2000
Location of interview: Dr. Anyanwu's residence/rehab center in North Philadelphia
Country of origin: Nigeria
Ethnic group/language group: Ibo
Religion: Roman Catholic
Profession: Runs a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center
Level of education: Medical school
Location of residence in Philadelphia: North Philadelphia

Dr. Anyanwu came to Philadelphia in 1963 to study at Temple University on a student visa. He had a scholarship from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Eventually he switched to Saint Joseph's University. During the Biafran War, he was able to change his status to an immigrant visa and become a permanent resident. From 1975-1981, he was in Mexico at medical school. He never practiced medicine in the States, but instead went into drug rehabilitation, working mainly in North Philadelphia.

Dr. Anyanwu is active in local politics. Beginning in 1992, he served as a representative in the Mayor's Office of Community Services. In 1999, he ran for City Council. In 1995, he formed the African Congress, a pan-African organization. He became a citizen in 1981.

Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Leigh Swigart (LS)

Project Photographer: Vera Viditz-Ward (VW)

Interviewee: Cyprian Anyanwu (CA)

[START OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

LS: Could you please tell me your name?

CA: My name is Cyprian Anyanwu.

LS: What is your ethnic group? I don't recognize that name.

CA: I am an Igbo man.

LS: You're an Igbo --- that's what I thought. That's what I had said to Vera [project photographer] ---- that I had thought that was Igbo.

CA: I am Igbo.

LS: Okay. Are there a lot of Igbos here?

CA: Oh, yes. There are a lot of Igbos here. A lot of people. we used to call ourselves "Biafran"; that was from 1966 to 1970 and Biafra ceased to exist. We become part of --- we are still --- we get back to being Nigerians, as we always did.

LS: I know there are a lot of Yorubas here ---

CA: Yes.

LS: --- because they have a very active ---

CA: Absolutely.

LS: --- association. I don't know if there are Hausas and other… And so your native language is?

CA: Igbo.

LS: Which dialect?

CA: Well, umm, it's Igbo, I-g-b-o, Igbo.

LS: But I thought there were different dialects like Ibibio and this and that ---

CA: No, okay. Now, in Biafra section, in those days, they had Ibibio, we had the Efik and we have the Igbos. These are the three dialects that make up what we used to call Eastern Region of Nigeria.

LS: Okay.

CA: The Eastern Region of Nigeria.

LS: Right.

CA: But they speak different languages and I have said this only three languages that make up the old Eastern Region of Nigeria.

LS: And when did you first come to the United States?

CA: I came here August 23rd, 1963.

LS: And you came after finishing secondary school there?

CA: Immediately I graduated from secondary school, I came over here. I came under the auspices of Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

LS: And how did that --- did you grow up in a city? Where did you grow up?

CA: I grew up in a little city in Nigeria and it's called Ugiri and that is where I went to school and then finished up there. From time I was nine years old, I lived with the priests, the reverend fathers over there, and from then I went to a school that is Catholic.

LS: Were you in a boarding school?

CA: Well, yes.

LS: You were in a boarding school.

CA: Umm-hmm.

LS: Okay. Now how did this --- in 1963, how did people know about universities in the United States? Why did you not go to England instead of the United States? How did this all ---

CA: Well, I would say that I've been --- uhh, always trying to find something new. I always wanted to do something different, I don't know why, from many people. We were about two hundred and forty students in the boarding school. Of course, a lot of them were studying for GCE, for General Certificate of Education, according to British, they call it "GCE". And we were studying for our school certificate also, which is generalized, everyone has to have done that, but meanwhile I am going to the library, picking up American text books, American books, American books, period. Unlike other students, until I picked up so many books and then I found a tough examination, I brought it to the principal of our school, who is a priest, Father Smith, Patrick Smith. So I showed it to him and said, "I want to take this exam." And he said, "Okay."

LS: And where did you do that then?

CA: Where I took the exam?

LS: Yeah, where did you take it?

CA: In one of the big cities, where there was American consulate. In, uhh, we call it Enugu. So that's where I went for the exam. In fact that priest took me, like, almost one hundred miles away from my high school. He drove me in Volkswagen, we went down there, took the exam one day, finish it. Took like almost four months when the result came and while we were waiting for this I had written a letter to colleges. One of them was East Lansing, Michigan State University.

LS: And how did you know about that? How did you choose ---

CA: I picked it out from the library.

LS: You just sort of saw different catalogues, different names ---

CA: Yes, different catalogues, everything. I picked from the library. And I applied at Temple, applied at, I got East Lansing, I got University of UCLA and also I got Saint Joseph's. I got Saint Joseph because there is a Catholic there, a Jesuit, I say that because the priest where we live is all Jesuits priests. So when I did that, the first school that gave me admission was Temple. And they also in that admission they said I was had to submit my TOEFL and when I filled out my TOEFL papers I have asked that they send results to these colleges that I applied and Temple gave me admission to come and do physical education. The reason for physical education is because as a senior student in my last year, I was a gymnast, I was an acrobat. In fact, I was in Olympics, I went to the Olympics in that year.

LS: Wow!

CA: And I did fifteen hundred meters, I did pole vault, I did four forty hurdles. Umm, these are the things I was active, very active and ---

LS: Did you have an athletic scholarship?

CA: Well, I have athletic scholarship from the Archdiocese. That's why I came down here. But back home there was nothing like that, scholarship, back home, you know. So I came down here, when I came here I felt very ( ) that why should I go to Physical Education? That I am going to go to Biology, I'm going to make it in Biology. And that's how I felt. I studied Biology at Temple, in 1964. And, in fact, 1964 I met Bill Cosby in two classes.

LS: Oh, he was at Temple?

CA: Yes.

LS: I didn't know that.

CA: 1964. I was with him in English 101 and History of Western Civilization, but after that I didn't see him again, we didn't meet again. But however, in 1966, the war started in Nigeria and the scholarship that is in alliance with Archdiocese of Philadelphia and my own parish, in my own diocese, it was cut off because of the war. So the bishop from my home has to make arrangement with the bishop here, and they took most of us who were on scholarship, all the Biafrans in that time, and redistribute us to different colleges. And of course my choice was then Saint Joe's, and that's how I got to Saint Joe's.

LS: Oh, I see.

CA: That was in 1968, because the war became very intensified in '66. By '68, I went to St. Joe's, started at Saint Joe's, on full scholarship at St. Joe's.

LS: That was a nice solution. So you finished at Saint Joe's?

CA: At Saint Joe's, yes, in 1971, with the major in Chemistry and Biology. At least I choose my own major in Biology.

LS: When you came here in the early sixties, what did you know about the United States and how did your experience here compare to what you had expected?

CA: When I came here in 1963, I really, umm, let me say things were easy for us. Immediately we landed in New York City, we had four people waiting for us. One is a lawyer, one is a medical doctor, one is a man from International House, when International House was on 15th and Cherry. His name is Mr. Zimmerman. And one other man was from church. So they are four white people who were there waiting for students. And the minute I came they assigned me to these four people. This will be my lawyer, the man's name --- I had him until he died in 1985 or 1986 --- Mr. George Gashenfield--- he was my international lawyer, international student lawyer. I have Mr. Rowcap, who was my Christian fellow. I have Dr. Raymond Silk, who is still practicing, who was my physician. And who else did I have? I had another man who was on the, on the social services or so --- I forgot that much --- oh, Mr. Fred, Fred, Fred… his first name is Fred. He moved to Los Angeles. That's right. So we had these people. So immediately they took us from New York, drove down to Philadelphia. And from then we were affiliated to International House. Every Saturday, every Friday they pick us up --- I was living with my social --- Fred, this Fred --- I was living with him on Baltimore Avenue, again, in 1963 Baltimore was a paradise.

LS: Really?

CA: Oh, my God. Baltimore was unbelievable --- it was just a piece of beauty in Baltimore, Baltimore Avenue, around that area, Woodland, there used to be some hospital, a big hospital there in those days. And it was really a wonderful place, but now it's not worth it.

LS: Yeah, it's coming back little by little.

CA: So I was living there, going to school at Temple, and every weekend we get to suburban area, like, uhh, to farmlands, you know, that's where we spent our weekends for over two years.

LS: So you were in a program that you lived with somebody, you went to Temple, and they had all kinds of arrangements ---

CA: Exactly --- every weekend.

LS: With other Nigerians?

CA: Well, many, many of them, yes, many of ---

LS: But other Africans, it was for African students?

CA: West African students, yes, it was not only myself, many, many of us. And like I said we came on student --- student --- what you call it --- F-10 or F-1, whatever they call it, student visa. So we must go to school and all these people are helping us so we never really had anything disturbing us. We did not have to have a job or look for one because everything was very much ---

LS: Taken care of ?

CA: Yes, it was. And that continued, it continued, and in fact it was in 1969 or 1970 --- '69, '70 --- when the war raged so much that the immigration called all the Biafran people, those from original Biafra to come and get immigrant visa. You know, because we were all on student visa. So, by, when the war had disturbed so many of our people, and so forth, they decide that they give us immigrant visa. And all of us were sworn in as immigrants. That was in 1971. I mean 1970, 1970.

LS: So you mean you had more permanent --- ?

CA: Permanent Resident visa.

LS: So they thought you were in sort of a refugee kind of --- ?

CA: Yes, well, that's their thinking. We didn't apply that. They just wrote us letters, you know, different people and ---

LS: I see ---

CA: And I ( ) by the time ( ) I went ( ).

LS: So did you go home during this time at all?

CA: I didn't go home until 1971 when I graduat --- 1974. 1971, I graduated from Saint Joe's. I was recruited by Selanese (?) Plastic Company as a chemical engineer and was posted in Summit, New Jersey.

LS: Where is that?

CA: Summit, in North Jersey, in North Jersey area, near Newark area. I was in Research --- in fact, I have my resume here I'm going to give to you --- anyway, I was in Research and Development, chemical engineer. From there I also started my Masters Degree at Fairleigh Dickinson University at that time, but in 1973, we received a letter from the head of the Nigerian government, at that time General Gowon. And he had written a letter and that letter was delivered to me in Philadelphia. I wasn't here and they came down to Jersey where I was and gave me the letter that I am wanted to come down to United Nation to see the ambassador, Nigerian Ambassador to UN. I was afraid because I took an active part in the civil war, during Nigerian Civil War. I was running a Biafra organization trying to lobby for money, where I raised over at least 1.5 million dollars in medical supplies, and so forth, which I sent to Biafra during that time. So I went down to New York and interrogation becomes a very good thing. They interrogated me what did I do during the civil war, how did I head, did I lobby for ammunition, I said, "No, I was just helping, trying to get food and medical supplies for people." And after the interview --- did it take about three months --- I was given an appointment as a special envoy to Nigerian government in oil industry, OPEC. So I got that job from March of '74 --- March of '73, I'm sorry --- so I work for the Nigerian government, touring all over the world.

LS: You were based in Nigeria, though?

CA: No, I was based in New York, in U.S., United Nations, working under the ambassador of Nigeria.

LS: Based in New York and you traveled all over?

CA: I traveled all over. I go to Nigeria twice, at least two times in a month, depending on where I am. I may be in Mexico, I may be in England, I may be in France --- whatever. Umm, so I did that from 1973 to 1975. And I did contribute a lot in Nigeria, really, there's no doubt about it, because whenever I go to Nigeria there's a lot of government people still remember who I am, my name and so forth. So in 1975, the civil war came up again, where the government of Gowon was overthrown by the military. So I became disenchanted with what I was doing, I went to medical school. That is when I went to Mexico for medical school. And stayed in Mexico from 1975 to 1981, when I graduated from med ---

LS: Where in Mexico?

CA: First I started with Ciudad Juarez, that is where I did my basic sciences, and then I transferred to, it's called, Santo Domingo. Santo Domingo, and finished my medical school there.

LS: Why did you want to go to Mexico?

CA: Well, because it was tough. I remember in 1971, before I got my job with Selanese Plastic Company, I applied in five schools, medical schools here. And the response from medical school is that they have me --- personally, I know for other Africans --- they had me on waiting list, until most black Americans cancel out in most of those schools. Because during that year, '70, '71, '72, was when the Federal government made it that black people, African Americans ---

LS: Quota ---

CA: Yeah, quota system --- that they should be admitted to medical school. So, Temple here is one of the schools I applied; they put me on waiting list. I applied at Harvard; they had me on waiting list. Medical College of Pennsylvania, which is MCP; they had me on waiting list. And they are writing that if any of the black people who applied cancels out then they will help me, but apparently no one canceled out so I did not have the opportunity in '71. So this time, the years '71, '72 more blacks be coming ( ) medical application and so forth. And the room for Africans become a little down. So that's why I went to Mexico.

LS: So how was your experience there? Did you like it?

CA: Oh, I love it, I tell you. I've never --- I speak Spanish, I love it. It took me three months to really get to learn Spanish.

LS: So you went there and learned Spanish and you went into courses?

CA: Yes, yes.

LS: Sounds wonderful.

CA: I love it, in fact.

LS: When you came back here, you had to be re-certified?

CA: Well, yeah, when I came back here, we finished our two year --- according to the agreement between the American Medical Association with Mexico medical schools, they say all US citizens or immigrants will have to take their rotation, their clinical block of medical school here. So I did all my clinical block. In fact, after three years there, I came here, I did a year, complete whole year at Rolling Hill Hospital, which is in Elkins Park, and that is where I did my oncology, internal medicine, I did OB-GYN there, and then I did my pediatrics at Saint Christopher's Hospital for three months, and Eugenia? Hospital. I did another internal medicine, surgery, and radiology at Einstein Southern Division, when Einstein was around, and I completed all my requirements for clinical block. Of course, I did not take the exam immediately. I completed all the requirements and left , went to Nigeria in 1983. But before I left I did my post doctorate fellowship in nuclear medicine at Temple here. And I went back to Nigeria to practice medicine, which I practice there from 1983 to 1986. I came back here. When I came back here, I did not take that exam again. I mean, I did try but I failed the ( ) --- that ( ) exam which I took it, I failed. Because I had been practicing in OB-GYN, which was my specialty in Nigeria, I noticed that drug activities were not only here, but were rampant back home. And I delivered so many fetuses that were very, very low or have different pathologically, very, very bad deformed. So when I came here because, again, of the opportunity that we have in this country that we don't have any other place, I decided that I'm going to go into DAA, Drug and Alcohol Program, to educate women who are pregnant and still abusing drugs. That's how I formed the AB Associates. And first of all, before I did, that I worked with ( ) and Misericordia Medical Center, in detox and rehab units, to get myself familiar with the drug activities here. And then, in 1989, I went to the state and formed the AB Associates Rehabilitation for Women and we get license from that time.

LS: And that's what you've been doing ever since?

CA: Yes, since that time. So I've never really practiced medicine in this country.

LS: That's interesting. And so still your thing is mostly for women?

CA: Yes, but this year we extended it to men, also, because we feel that there disparity in men. So we have eighteen men next door --- 1523 --- and we have six mental health dual diagnosed people who are ---

LS: So next door is like a hospice, a thing for people under rehabilitation?

CA: Yes, under rehabilitation.

LS: How many people can you have in there?

CA: We can have twenty-one, but we have only eighteen here now. All males. And in this one here, we have four females who are actually dual diagnosed.

LS: Now do you work with a lot of HIV?

CA: Oh yes, we do not discriminate anybody. We accept them, no discrimination, whatever they have.

LS: Now, I don't know anything about how these things work. Where does the funding come from for these people's rehabilitation?

CA: Let's put it this way: one of the unique situation about my program here is that in as much we are waiting for state funding, which the state don't give us directly. They give it to the city, and the discrimination is there. The city disposing the money, depends on whom you know. Really, in many cases, because I know that when we had provisional license from then state to do what we are doing, there are other agencies who had provisional licenses and they were funded but we were not funded because I happened to be the first minority, the first black, to go to Harrisburg to get license to run drug and alcohol in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

LS: You mean not a foreign black but any black?

CA: Any black, any black. The first, I am still the first one, to get a license to do drug and alcohol program. We have one black man, but he is a difference. We are inpatient, non-hospital. We have another black man who has outpatient program. And that's the other black man I know, who has outpatient, but

there is a big difference. The policy and procedure for outpatients is different from inpatients. Inpatient is so much involved. And because of the fact that I was the first minority, I knew that we need funding, it was not forthcoming. So we asked women, and that again contribute to my great success with the women that came to the program here. We had ( ) over two thousand women from the day we started up to at least 1995. We have a lot recovery people, with ten years recovery, with no relapse. Seven year recovery, no relapse. Most of our women today are working with the city here, in Mayor's Office. Some are working with other drug treatment programs. The reason is because, I foresaw what is going to happen with DPA. I foresaw it in 1987, and by 1989 when we opened here, the women were using the $89 that they are given from DPA and they given $85 to pay their way for their program and they used their food stamp to buy their food. This is how we managed it from that time until 1995.

LS: What is DPA?

CA: Department of Public Welfare, the welfare they get. Because of the fact that these women have to give up the only penny, the only income they have, to pay their way in recovery, they can not spare the spade. They know that they have to get better.

LS: And men won't do that as much?

CA: Men [laughs], men would not do that.

LS: Interesting. Now what about the demographics of the people you serve? They are mostly African American?

CA: Mostly African American, yes, mostly. About eighty percent of people we see here are African Americans. Another fifteen percent are Hispanics, and maybe two percent are Caucasians, about five percent. We have only have a very few foreigners in this program.

LS: Are you a citizen?

CA: Yes, I am.

LS: And that's why you don't have a problem --- if you had not been a citizen, you might not been able to interact with the social services?

CA: Well, again, it depends on person's and personalities and how you look at yourself, And, of course, if you weren't a citizen it would be difficult for many people to --- Even now with my accent, people still tease me that I am a foreigner, "you are a foreigner," you know.

LS: When did you become a citizen?

CA: '81.

LS: So how long have you been living here in North Philadelphia?

CA: Since --- in 1982, in North Philadelphia, we bought the property here, and then in 1989 I moved in and opened the place. Prior to that I was in Melrose Park. I was living in Melrose Park.

LS: And do you live with any other family members here?

CA: No.

LS: And do you have any relatives in the Philadelphia area?

CA: Let me tell you, Ms., uhh, Swigart?

LS: Yes, Swigart.

CA: One of the things that God has done to me is he gave me a vision when I came here. When I came here, I was just a novice. I did not have a mentor, other than those white people who were helping us, and I copied their ways about what they doing for the foreigners. It took me under two years before I lobby to get my first brother to this country. I have to go back Archdiocese and beg them. I say, "I have a brother who is in a secondary school. I want to get him here." I had two pastors to help me to sign an affidavit to support him, and he got a scholarship at Saint Joe's. Then, in 1972, uhh, 1970, when the war ended, I went down to Saint Charles Seminary, because of my affiliation with Saint Joe's, and begged them to open up a scholarship for Biafran people. And it happens that I happen to be fortunate. One of my

brothers again took advantage of the scholarship and another person from Biafra took advantage of secondary scholarship before they closed it. So I have helped two people to come here, my brother and another person. And my other brother, who is in the seminary back home, the Archdiocese, Saint Charles Borromeo seminary here, they tried to help him and he came here. Now, with all those brothers, and then my sister, my older sister, was married with thirteen children, and her husband is a superintendent of a school. But there is suffering down there, with thirteen children. So I went down to Holy Family College and begged them to give my sister a scholarship. They gave my sister a full scholarship, and she came here with a baby, three months old at that time.

LS: And the other kids were there?

CA: Yes, the other kids were there, and the husband. So, I brought all these people. Now, then we say, I am sitting a goldmine, because anything I want from my brothers or nephews --- [LS laughs] I have a nephew who --- this is one of my nephews here who is an Ophthalmologist, graduated from Temple here. He listen to anything I want. Even they tell me, "retire, retire, retire" because I am, actually I am 56 years, I don't have to retire. But, however, any, anybody, anything I want from these boys, they will come. In fact, there is an architect, one of my nephews --- I have five nephews here. One is in the military, and the other four: a doctor, four architects. They got all good jobs here. And my two brothers --- the one that was in seminary, unfortunately, he did not complete. He finished his senior seminary and when it was time for him to be ordained, he said he's not going be a priest anymore. He is now a lawyer in California. And my second brother, who took advantage of the scholarship at Saint Joe's, he is a big business man who goes in and out of Nigeria. And my sister, of course, went to school at Holy Family here, a psychologist. So I have ---

LS: Did she go back to Nigeria?

CA: No, she went back but now she is here.

LS: And she brought all her children?

CA: All of them, all of them.

LS: And her husband was happy to come?

CA: Yes. So, eventually, I have these people who come to my rescue. So this time, during this elections that I went through, the bulk of money and time were put to by my nephews, who were running around with me everywhere I go. So I have been very fortunate. And like I said, I copied this from my host family. In those days, because the way they put their heart out to help us who are foreigners. And I figure why, if I am learning this from them, then I am going to help. It happens to be my relatives, but there are so other many Nigerians that I signed. When I was in the government, I signed for them to come over to this country. Because, Immigration honoured all of my petitions to get people here, those days. But things are not what they seem, not anymore.

LS: How did you get involved in local politics? How did that happen?

CA: In 1992, they threw up a paper around the area and that they need some people to file and to be elected, to be representative in Mayor's Office of Community Services here, in about four zip codes within the area. So I filled it up and circulated the petition. A lot of people signed it. And I contested, we were about six of us who contested, two females and four males. And I won the election in 1992. So I became a representative of Mayor's Office. And, in 1995 again, another election came up. I decided that I am going to contest again. This time, it was about seven of us and I beat the other six and won the second term. And then I have been serving on Mayor's Office of Community Services since then until 1998, I mean 1999, when I decided that I was going to run for City Council. And again I have been absorbed and been very much interested in advocating for homelessness, and for women who abusing drugs and don't know what to do. And if you remember, one of the reasons why I formed this organizations in '89 was because there was this disparity of females' programs in those days. And I was the first female program. In fact, before, in 1995, Governor Casey gave five hundred thousand dollars to Episcopal Hospital to open up Beacon House. Otherwise, I was absorbing all the patients from Temple,

Episcopal, Einstein. If you see my register, it's all those institutions before 1995, when they got big money and opened up Beacon House for Females with Children.

LS: And so would you ever consider running for City Council again?

CA: Well, let me tell you, I don't know if I will. But I continue to be very active in many things --- **[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

CA: I have not made up my mind to run, but, in fact, American people should knew that I was the first African to come up and open up the eyes of African people that we can be active in the political arena. We are here and we are contributing. We have wives and children, everybody here, mothers and sometimes our fathers. We cannot be a passive spectator in Philadelphia. And I came up and opened up everybody's eye, that we can do it. But I tell you, it's American people who are telling me that I did a very good job. I got congratulatory letters from many people, encouraging to be out there, every time I'm to run again. So I am going to give it --- we've got about two more years to see what these people are doing and see what we are going to do, next year, and in year 2003, something like that. [Pause in tape] Things here that are very historic, to me, to African people and to Nigerians. Last year in 1999, the United States black newspapers, I think they had a meeting in big cities to develop a legendary, in chronological order, people who have contributed to the welfare of black people in the United States. Chicago did their own, Philadelphia did their own, Los Angeles did their own. And in Philadelphia it was Tribune. I was here one day, Tribune man called me up. And this was in November. It happened that they have a series of Negroes from 1899 to 1999 and my name is there. I have the picture here.

LS: Excellent, you deserve it.

CA: It was published. And it's only two Africans, they picked up. One is from Ghana, a medical doctor, and myself also. They pick up as people who have contributed to the welfare of blacks in the city of Philadelphia, at least in the 21st century. ( ). But I'm trying not only make Africans --- because we are a community. When I say "a community," I mean educationally, we all can communicate. We can be together, we can change things. This is where they have been having meetings since 1980, 1988. We are meeting every Wednesday, all Africans, at this office here, this their office.

LS: People who are in the Pan African --- who are in the African Congress?

CA: The African people, the African Congress, yes. All of them, the Ethiopian have two or three representatives. The man who own Ethiopian restaurant Dahlak ---

LS: On Baltimore?

VW: So you meet every Wednesday here?

CA: We used to, from 1988 to 1999. Just after the election was over, that was ended.

LS: So you haven't had meetings ---

CA: We haven't had any meetings since May of 1999.

LS: Oh, I see, I see. Interesting.

CA: So we used to meet here, and every Wednesday evening from eight o'clock to one in the morning. Every Wednesday evening, we used to meet here ---

VW: And what would you be discussing? Different issues?

CA: Different issues. We discussing affairs of Africa, how we can get together, and so forth. In fact, it is one of the things that I brought here that I was going to give you, the Mission of African Congress.

LS: Oh, I would love to see that?

CA: I brought it here.

VW: In what --- I don't mean to interrupt, but I just ---

LS: That's fine. I just want to make sure that you can be heard on this. Maybe you should move closer.

VW: What did you think were the problems that prevented it from continuing after 1999?

CA: There is a misunderstanding of some people who really didn't --- who said they would have run for the election. They would have for the current position.

LS: The City Council one?

CA: Yeah. So, first of all before we started, before in 198-ninety-eight, before I started to open up, I went to one of the political people here, Jim Tayoun?

LS: Yeah.

CA: I went to him ---

LS: He's the guy with the Arab show.

CA: I went to him to be my campaign manager, because I've known him. He had helped me during the time I was running this organization, when he was with City Council. The man has wrote four page --- which I can give you if you want to --- four page papers about the mentality of African people and told me, don't get despair because a lot of them, especially for people from your own kinsmen, will say, "Why me? It could have been them. Why me? It could have been them." ( ) that we had a meeting in his house for four months and within that four months, the man build up and many people were coming from the meeting. Then he said to us, "Okay, now you get representative of African community. Go down start ( ), restaurants and so forth". You know what broke down on that? A lot of them , those from Ghana, those from Liberia, those from Sierra Leone: "Oh, who is he? He has that slave mentality, he thinks he's white. He wants us to get money and bring to him so he can be the manager. We can do it ourselves, we can do it ourselves." Out of their own words, they discredit that man. That's when I know I lost the election. So they are too clever. They are running the campaign, which I know they weren't going to make it. And I don't know how to feel about it, because these are my own men and that's why I want to build my political platform. So it was very difficult ( ), Jim being a good friend, but he still supports me now. He just covered me in an article when I come back from Nigeria, about three months ago, covered me to say what I had done in Nigeria while I was there and ( ) is. The present mayor here, we are assisting and helping him. He intended to create an opening for Africans affairs. And I have letters --- I have Jim Tayoun sending a letter, I have Lucian Blackwell sending a letter stating that nobody could better be as director of African affairs than I am. So these are the things, but again this is what we miss. Because if we have gotten ourselves together in a union, we would go to John Street and say we need a creation of

African affairs. At least ( ) we have children, we have our wives, parents, people who are very much deprived of good lang --- they can't speak well in schools. Our children can't get along with the other students, and that makes them not to study as hard as other students. We need to have a social worker, we need to have people that will intervene and work with them in the school district. Plus many other things we need. But because of their behavior , I guess John says, "Well, you're not together, you're not going to do anything." That's maybe his attitude.

LS: Well, yeah. I can understand that. Was it your association? Somebody's, maybe it wasn't yours, maybe this was a Liberian, I think it was a Liberian association. In the directory, we're publishing, they said that one of the things they did was to try to help was psychological counseling and intervention for Liberian children who are in schools and having a hard time. Especially children who'd had refugee ---

CA: Well, I have a lady, Miss Johnson --- I think her last name is Johnson --- who was also one of the volunteers of mine. She was for school district, somehow, something ( ), and she was having that aspiration [phone rings several times] how to coordinate social workers in schools, but I do not know how far she has gone with that now, anyway. The Liberians were active during my campaign.

LS: I want to go back to something because I think it's a very interesting question. When you came in the 1960s and you had read about the United States and you landed here in Philadelphia and you come to a part of Philadelphia that essentially also a black part of Philadelphia --- what was it like and how did you compare it to your expectations?

CA: Well, let me put it this way, and this is the truth. This is the real truth. One of the things that today, even John Street, because I know when he was a councilman here, I know him. I know him maybe when I was twenty something years old. By 1963, you have few blacks that can walk the streets of Philadelphia. That's the truth of the matter.

LS: What do you mean they could walk the streets?

CA: Because they were either afraid to walk across, around in Philadelphia. In fact, in 1963, black man will come down say, "You are African." They want to touch our body. They want to really --- "Let me, can I touch your hand?"

LS: So this was a really warm reception you had as an African?

CA: In those days.

LS: In those days.

CA: But not nowadays. I tell you, not nowadays. Like I said, ranging from 63rd Street --- ( ) Street --- to 63rd and Cityline Avenue, all we felt coming to where you have Adams Mark now, it was all white-owned places. Very few blacks were living ---

LS: On 63rd Street?

CA: Absolutely. Those people who are there, their migration is just about maybe fifteen years ago. And on this area where I live, this place here on Erie Avenue, it was all white. Maybe two or one percent were blacks. It was Italian neighborhood. And on Baltimore [interruption as VW prepares to leave].

CA: And you come to Baltimore Avenue --- like I said from there 52nd and Baltimore, 49th and Baltimore, 42nd, all to University City, up to Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, now they have changed their name, down on Chester Avenue, Chestnut Avenue, also Walnut Street --- all were white neighborhoods.

LS: So where were the blacks?

VW: Yeah, where were the blacks??

CA: You have North Philadelphia here, mostly. And that is from 33rd Street, we have all projects. There were so many projects in those days. So many projects. In fact the projects ---

VW: Were they as bad then as they are now?

CA: They were not as bad as they are now, no, no. They were great projects. Bill Cosby used to come to Temple from projects, Richard Allen's project. So this what they are now. I can ( ). If you go down to South Philadelphia, if you go down to Passyunk, Tasker --- a lot of projects everywhere that is truth. And Philadelphia was just about not up to a million people that time. So I have all those histories. I was interested in statistics at that time; I still am now. Philadelphia was about seven hundred and something thousand people. Today there are up to 1-point-5 or almost 2-point million people. And things change dramatically, especially with the death of Martin Luther King. Everyday --- I am telling you this is from my heart --- everyday when I go to bed, when I wake up, I will thank God for bringing Martin Luther King because his life is like Jesus Christ life. He died on the cross only that he shed his blood down to save the black man. Without him, things would be rough. And immediately he died, then the white man start to know that they can have relationships with these people and whatever they want has been going very clear. And then thank God, because Kennedy did his best and many other people, but the president, the present-day(?) president enhanced the philosophy of Martin's direction. And got himself to fulfill the dreams of Martin Luther King. That's what is happening today.

LS: So you think there's been a vast improvement ---

CA: Oh, yes. Absolutely! Tremendous, unbelievable. You know, sometimes I want to give lectures to the black folks, because being very, very overzealous, we can lose what we have. I mean, I guess you can say, when you get in trouble what you never expected he can just go crazy about it, and then that's what it is, that's what happening today. All this problems we have, criminals --- there were not too many criminals in those days, but now is the fact that with the freedom --- Luther King opened the door, opened the freedom --- so everybody thinks they can run red light, thinks they can walk on the street, double-park, do everything --- that's what's going on now. Never went on that time. How many blacks were in police department in 1963, '64, '65? I know when Rizzo was around, how many --- this subway you ride here, buses, maybe two or three blacks would be driving buses in the city of Philadelphia. The subway, no black man drove subway in '63, '65 --- at least when I was here. Up to '67, maybe '70. Before they start

employing black people to drive the subway, the train. But today they are everywhere! Which is God's gift from Martin Luther King, believe it or not. And that's the way I envision it.

LS: So you've always liked living in Philadelphia?

CA: Since I've been in this country, I've never moved anywhere other than city of Philadelphia, except when I was in medical school. When I was in medical school, I was here. When I was working for the Nigerian government over there, I was still have my home here in the city of Philadelphia. I just love the city, simple as that. I don't care whether I am making money or not. I just love the city, the city itself. And like I said, things were very good in those days. Things are getting very, very a little, you know, out of hand now. That's change of the world. The society is changing and so forth. We can't do anything about it. Like you say before, is the society. Everybody change.

LS: I know you came when you were a very young man. So maybe you haven't --- well, you have lived in Nigeria as an adult. You say you've gone back and forth a little bit. But what do you miss most about Nigeria that you don't have here?

CA: (laughs) I tell this very funny thing, but, uhh, that's the truth. No police harassment. (laughs) There is too much laissez-faire in Nigeria. Sometimes laissez-faire --- you know what I mean by "laissez-faire"?

LS: Yeah, I do.

CA: Sometime laissez-faire can be dangerous, sometimes can be beneficial. Make you happy, you don't have too much blood-pre --- you know. I look up some diseases as a medical doctor, and having known the origin of some disease, something like blood pressure, something like diabetes, ( ) metabolism and so forth. In Nigeria, we don't eat the real good food that you have in this country. Everything we have are crude, not well-refined, not scientifically refined, but they've kept us long. We have people who die at the age --- in fact, when they say lifespan --- have people who die at the age of ninety-two, ninety-three. They never went to the hospital. I was delivered on the street when my mother was coming from market, open market. She never went to hospital.

LS: Now I know, Since you did OB-GYN you wouldn't recommend that women actually have babies on their way home from the market, right? [laughs]

CA: No. [laughs] That's changing the society, changing times.

LS: I'm teasing you. [laughs]

CA: Yeah, changing time. So what I miss about Nigeria, is no harassment, really. You don't pay electric bill. You don't pay water bill. You just go down and come home and be crazy like anybody else, and so forth ---

LS: So you really believe in this kind of profiling of blacks ---

CA: Well ---

LS: As an experience that's common.

CA: Yes, absolutely. There's no doubt about it.

LS: Certainly this is a common thing that we hear is that people don't really think themselves as black until they get here. And they're made to feel constantly that they are. I'm talking about Africans who come here.

CA: Yes, indeed.

LS: And it's a very foreign experience.

CA: Yes, indeed. Up 'til 1970, no African would go to hair cut in black barber shop. No African woman will ever have anything to do with a black American. Up to 1970. This is a true fact. But after that time --- poof! --- everything went down, so down. Students, women who came from Africa, they are hunted down and so forth. Our clothes --- in those days, culturally speaking, you can't see all ( ) and clothes, African clothes, ( ), you can't see them anywhere. Whenever you see it, it's African man wearing it. But 1970, you can buy it on the subway. You can buy it everywhere. [LS laughs] So everybody ---

LS: Yeah, there's much more African feel on the streets.

CA: Mmm-hmm. And the problem so far I do always encounter is, for example, in 1996, I wrote a project here about trying to get five historians from five African countries to come down to some school clusters here --- black --- and teach them really the black history, which don't learn in school. Now, UPS was going to fund me for fifty thousand dollars. UPS told me --- I went to gas company, I went to electric company, I went to telephone company to get additional ten thousand dollars. Then I went to Temple University to a guy, they call him called Ashante ---

LS: Yeah, I know who you are ---

CA: Okay. I sat with him and told him and gave him a synopsis, just some --- what do you call it? --- mission statement of what I want to do. That I want to bring these people who are historians, who can tell the history of black person in this country, what we call and what we learnt here as slavery and slave trade, they are two things. Because some of these children growing, they don't learn the real history. And we see something like Kwanzaa and all those things, they are not typical African in a sense. So when I talk with Ashante, he say he's going to think about it. And he asked me --- which I was dumb, stupid to tell him --- he asked me who is going to fund this. I told him that I am getting fifty thousand dollars from UPS and I intend to get ten thousand from these companies: telephone company, gas company, and electric company. The next thing I heard was Ashante called me up that why do I think that I'm going to come here and give his talk, black history, to black people, I mean, black kids in school.

LS: Did he mean that he should do it instead of you?

CA: Well, apparently, that's what he meant and that was the end of that program. I still have the write-up here, but almost twenty-four page.

LS: And, you know, there is in the school district, there is a division of African and African American Studies and there's a woman with a PhD from Ashante's department who is the head of that. Her name is Carolyn Holmes.

CA: But is American woman?

LS: She's American ---

CA: Okay. Now, you tell me, there is an old saying in African adage, that the mice inside knows where you put the butter, than the mice outside.

LS: [laughs]

CA: It is the mice inside who will go out and get the mice outside and say, come on, let's go down there, she puts the butter. Tell me how the African American in this country, in the United States, would teach us, or teach history of Africans when they are authentic Africans who definitely we have and say, "here is the whole thing." But we are not given the opportunity, regardless where you study, wherever you go in African country, it is the African who will tell you what is this, what is that, and what this represents and so forth. You cannot come here and say that the people who should know don't know and therefore you should know. It is just like Kwanzaa is one of the examples.

LS: What year was that?

CA: This was 1996.

LS: It was recently.

CA: Yeah, recently. I have the papers here.

LS: I am sorry to hear that.

CA: Yeah, it happened. So, we take it. We take it like that. And, like I say, sometimes I become a little, uhhh, I don't know, whether emotional, or reactionary. Sometimes, I look at those people. That's why in this election when I go all the places that I went to ( ) I am so strong. I am just out there because I know that election was a little, you know, not diversified ( ) for whites, they raise to 32 people, or blacks. I know very well that I know the city of Philadelphia very well. And, like just one of those people in the city for 34 years ago, so I can tell something about the city and know where we are coming from, know some problems, and particularly problems of African immigrants here.

LS: How do you think that immigration has transformed you as a person?

CA: What is your question?

LS: How has immigration transformed you as a person? How are you different now than you would have been if you'd stayed in Nigeria?

CA: Immigration?

LS: The fact that you came here, how has that made you different that if you had never came to the United States?

CA: Oh, there are a lot of difference, absolutely. It's a lot of difference. I mean, if I were to be in Nigeria, up to today, I would not have accomplished one third of what I have accomplished in this country. There's no doubt about it. Apart from the monetary part of it, but the intellectual part of it, the aspiration, the sociological. You see, we learn from Britain but we don't put our learning into real practice. It's only this country where you could be a Ph.D. education and you work in the Post Office, you work anywhere, dignity for life and work, you know? Which, back home, if you finish secondary school, you got to be a pen-pusher, you got to work in an office. You can't possible go and work in a Post Office, otherwise you are bringing down the --- being a school certificate.

LS: So that's sort of the idea of status, that people are sort of ---

CA: Yes.

LS: Trapped by this idea that they have to ---

CA: Absolutely. That is British life, British life. But this is a country where, if you die you killed yourself. If you suffer, you suffered yourself. That's the truth.

LS: When you go back to Nigeria, how do people there view you?

CA: It is unbelievable. I am like a king, but I am not king. My father is a king, back then, but I am not. Wherever I go, as I said, in Nigerian government, anything, they hold me with very high respect because I

did bring American life into Nigeria, during my time working in the government. For example, I copied from New Jersey, if cars are coming from Jersey passing the Ben Franklin Bridge in the morning, knowing that all people are coming to work here, they open four lanes and constrain only the two lanes going ---

LS: Right, and vice-versa.

CA: I opened it up for Nigerian people. I opened up inspection, odd number, even number, that odd number, people who have odd number will inspect their cars at certain time. I copied that from Jersey, I open in Nigeria. I brought Ashland Oil Company to Nigeria in 1974. I brought Panoccaionic Oil Company in 19 --- Ashland is a big driller of oil in that country today. I brought Panoccaionic Oil Company. I brought Occidental Oil Company. All these are companies that I brought during my tenure as an envoy to Nigerian Mission in UN. I tried to bring petrochemical with Lumus Company in Bloomingfield, New Jersey, down in North Jersey. ( ) bourgeois, New Jersey, North Jersey, is really big people, you know, wealthy people live there. I tried to bring the company there to open up petrochemical, because my experience as a chemist is that Nigeria was flowing in a lot of natural gas, which we can constrain and synthesize that and bring it to be a fertilizer. In fact, one of papers, in the newspaper that they quote me in the press conference, I said Nigerian oil boom in 1974 will be a Nigerian oil *doom* in 1994. And it turned out to be that way, because we were selling our crude oil higher, but by 1994 the crude oil went down, so our money went down. All this were in legendaries, all published in Nigeria newspapers. I can bring you all the newspapers that were published, newspapers that I do get into.

LS: What was your experience like in Mexico compared to the United States? How did the Mexicans react to you?

CA: Mexicans were very friendly, absolutely more friendly than this country, let me say that.

LS: That doesn't surprise me. [laughs]

CA: Okay. I mean, especially if you go to hinterlands, not Mexico City. When you go to hinterland, especially for us who are Africans. Oh my, they just react so closely and very friendly. It was so friendly, definitely.

LS: Your social circle here. Do you associate with a lot of Nigerians? Do you know a lot of Nigerians here?

CA: Well, they call me every time and I try to call once in a while. I call them my boys, you know, according to African culture, my son, you know? And they call me back, a lot of them. A lot of them, absolutely.

LS: So the people that you socialize most, are they Nigerians?

CA: No, in fact my friends are more, umm --- In African circle, my friends are more in Sierra Leoneans, people from Sierra Leone, and next to that are Ethiopians. [text deleted at request of interviewee]

LS: So you really are a Pan African?

CA: Yeah.

LS: Vera, do you want to say something? [Vera laughs] Vera lived in Sierra Leone for eight years.

VW: Many, many years.

CA: Oh, is that right?

VW: The next time I come by, I'll bring up some of the work that I did while I was there. I was working as a photographer. I miss my Freetown. My heart breaks every time ---

CA: How about that!

LS: How many Nigerians do you estimate they are in the Delaware Valley? Do you have any estimates?

CA: I would say we are over fifty-four thousand.

LS: *Over* fifty-four thousand Nigerians?

CA: Absolutely, Nigerians in this city.

LS: In the *city*?

CA: In the Delaware Valley.

LS: That's a lot more than I thought.

CA: Yes.

LS: And most of them have been here for a long time?

CA: I think the longest have been here maybe twenty-five years, about twenty-five years down. There are very few that have been here for thirty years. Like I said myself , I have been here for thirty-five years.

LS: But do you think Nigerians are still coming?

CA: Yes, they coming, absolutely. Because of political situation .

LS: But they can't get refugee status, usually?

CA: No, they will never. I mean, Nigeria is a wealthy nation.

LS: Well, sometimes if it is a question of persecution, but I don't think the US is very open to categorizing Nigerians that way.

CA: Absolutely. They will not. Nigeria is the mother of African nations, African countries. Nigerians has more money --- forget about South Africa with their gold and so forth, Nigeria is a virgin country but we just happen to be politically messed up. [LS laughs] That's the problem. Nigeria has wealth, unpacked wealth, but unfortunately we don't have the people to handle us.

LS: What happens among Nigerians in the Delaware Valley or Washington or New York or whatever? What are their interethnic relations?

CA: We have a lot of that going on and in fact I am the chairman of the ---

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[START OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

LS: So you were saying that there is a pan-Nigerian association, the Organization of Nigerian Professionals?

CA: Right.

LS: What are your activities and how old is this organization?

CA: It has been around for about ten years or more.

LS: And what are your activities?

CA: Just to bring our Nigerian professionals together, to plan for conferences. We plan for conference every year. And it is not necessarily for those who have Bachelors or Masters, we have criteria, anyway. But we do bring any qualified Nigerian who has vision and who can contribute to the development of that particular organization.

LS: Do the Igbos have something like the Yorubas do, the Yoruba Cultural and Development Organization?

CA: We used to have that, but not anymore.

LS: And why is that?

CA: Because of lack of unity. We used to have two cultural group dances, we call Atalogu, we call Aiwu(?), but since 1970, everything went down to drain, really. All these were functional here, throughout the time I was here. I was social secretary for Nigerian Students Union when immediately I came here. And then came the Biafran War, I became the president of Biafra Association here. But since things have went so badly with no unity, as I said. In those days, we can get people from school, we circulated things from school. Nowadays, you can get them at a taxi stand. They are fighting for money.

LS: The Igbos?

CA: Yeah.

LS: So you think it is more of lack of unity and not the idea that they don't need it anymore?

CA: Yes, it's lack of unity, exactly. If you threw a dance today, they will all come to socialize and dance and that is the end of that. During the time I was running for election, we had two dances we threw to raise fund. They came. Nigerians, they came, put on their nice clothes, came for dance, and after that you don't see them anymore. [both laugh]

LS: I understand. Do you sense that most Nigerians maintain pretty close contact with their relatives at home?

CA: Oh yes, they do. One thing that is unique about Africans, and particularly Nigerians, is that extended family systems is very, very important. If you make one thousand dollars this month, I bet any of them, we try to send five hundred home.

LS: Do you think everybody sends money home?

CA: Oh many. Many of them send money to their parents, absolutely.

LS: And how do they do that? They can wire it back or ---

CA: Uhh, you can wire it --- uhh, we've been having trouble. One of the things that I would have tackled, two things I was going to work on till I die or leave this nation. One is airfare to African continents. If I had the opportunity to be in City Council, I would fight for them to reduce airfare. Just like they have airfare to England or any other place. They should reduce airfare going to African continent.

LS: How much is it to go to Lagos?

CA: It is very exorbitant.

LS: Fifteen hundred dollars?

CA: Fifteen hundred dollars roundtrip or more. During the peak times, it's like two thousand something.

LS: Ooof!

CA: Absolutely.

LS: I lived in Senegal for many years, and from New York to Senegal, is only about nine hundred dollars roundtrip.

CA: Okay, in those days, but now it's still very high. One thing I would do is that airfare. The next thing is communication, telecommunication. And that's one thing again, during my tenure, I took John Debuts --- John Debuts is the chairman of AT&T here in 1975 --- I took a group of American people to Nigeria to study the telephone system, which is killing us. Do you know how much I --- let me show you here --- [paper rustling] this is all telephone calls to Nigeria here.

LS: Uh oh. Do I even want to know?

CA: Three thousand, four hundred and something for two months bill, three thousand something. Here it is, for all Nigerian calls. But we still have to do it.

LS: What about email?

CA: Email is something. It is a good thing, nowadays, but it is nothing like talking to your person, you know?

LS: I know, and especially your mom. [laughs]

CA: Yeah. ( ). My mother is there and she was supposed to come back to Los Angeles to meet my brother there. She was supposed to leave Saturday. I tried, I've been trying. This is the card I am using to --- which is, when you make a call with this card, if you can't speak to anybody, from just not talking to anybody, it drop four dollars. And by the time you think --- your money drop but you haven't spoken to anybody. And you can't fight it.

LS: Ohhh, is that right? Ohhh.

VW: Because we saw these cards all over the place. I've seen them in the market.

LS: And it is only for one continuous call, I think.

CA: This card here, this I bought for last night. I made a call to check with my mum this morning. I did not talk to anybody. The line even didn't ring. It dropped from twenty dollars to fourteen dollars, but I didn't talk. What can you do? And if I make another call, I may not talk to anybody. It will drop by ( ) dollars. By the time you see, twenty dollars is gone, you haven't spoken to anyone. But you still have to buy it. That's things I would change, things I would work on, if I continue to have aspiration in political life. I would definitely go to any length.

LS: The Nigerian community here, even if they're not cohesive, how do they view themselves here? Where do they see that they fit into Philadelphia or American society? Do they think they're part of it? Do they still feel like they are on the outside? How would they like to be seen?

CA: They would like to play active roles, there is no doubt about it. They would love to play active roles. But they are afraid. They are afraid and timid. I can give you an example of being afraid and timid. When I ---

VW: It's very hard to believe of any Nigerian I know. [LS laughs]

CA: Yes, indeed, but they might be very open and very extrovert but when it comes to question, they are afraid that ---

LS: I can understand.

VW: I can understand that. I was teasing you a little bit, because Nigerians are the most competent Africans I have ever met.

CA: They tend to be, they are, but I am telling you from my experience so far. Even though they are not the majority of people who drive cabs here, one of the things I was going, a project I was going to do was the medallions, they pay for cabs, I was going to make the foreigners to be the cab owners in the city of Philadelphia. That's one of my project for foreigners. And I would get Nigerians to handle that and I would just fight it to the state, to federal government to make sure that the medallions is handled by the foreigners because foreigners have been very helpful in car driving in the city.

LS: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

CA: This is one of the things. But a lot of them are coming and saying that "What are we going to do? What are we going to do?" Even going out to get houses, free houses that have been renovated. They are capable of doing that, but they are afraid to go. And the worst thing is that the black people are very antagonistic to all of us now, than they used to be.

LS: Why is that? Why is there an antagonism when there didn't used to be?

CA: Because they feel that we are --- For those who are illiterate, they think that we're demanding too much, we are getting too much. They really wish that we were not here to begin with, there is no doubt about it, because I mingle with judges and lawyers and doctors every time. For ordinary people, mediocre people, they would like to say "Brother, how is it over there? When are you going back?"

LS: You mean the people who are in the street? But why are they antagonistic? Because ---?

CA: Because they think that we are taking their jobs and that we are taking, we are decreasing, diminishing what they would get. In fact ---

LS: I see. And so it's competition for scarce resources?

CA: Absolutely. Absolutely. [LS laughs]

LS: But in reality, I don't think, in a way, Africans and African Americans really are competing for the same resources.

CA: No, they are not.

LS: I mean, how many people want to be selling on the street?

VW: Right.

LS: How many people want to be doing --- this is something that --- Africans have found their niche.

CA: Because Nigerians, particular, are so proud to do these kinds of things --- that we do anything to survive. Like I said, things have fallen apart since fifteen years because Nigerians who could not really put their hands on good jobs, to go to school, they resort to driving cabs, and subject to gunshots ---

LS: They all have Master's degrees.

CA: A lot of them! A lot of them!

LS: What about expectations that you as Africans participate in racial struggle here? Do you feel kind of a pressure to have a certain political stance?

CA: The Africans, particularly, are very open to fighting racial issues here. They are open because we are not partial, we are very objective. Many Africans I know are very objective in looking at racial issues. For example, a lot of them do not believe that someone is turned down because he is black or white. They are going to look at it sometimes, "Does he have the degree? Does he have the qualification? Does he have this?" They're going to look at it, in fact they do. And ( ) they will recognize the one that is racially motivated and they will comment on that. When we meet, we talk about that. But they are there to make sure that there is racial disparity, I mean equality, in everything that goes on in the city of Philadelphia, here, where we are. And whenever that comes, we discuss it, we call ourselves ( ). Like this situation that happened this other day. At least more than three people, Nigerians, within the locality here have called me, "Doctor, you see what is happening? What is going to happen? Why are these people doing this?" We still believe that there is laziness among many people and that laziness is because they think somebody owe them everything. Therefore, they can get it, by all means, they don't have to work for it. And in attempt to stop that kind of attitude, it results into something as, which in this case here is police brutality of which everybody have eliminated racial motivation. But those kinds of things can be eliminated from the beginning if people just have to know that they have to respect themselves and do what they are to do, to live, to make a good living, and not to keep creating some kind of pandemonium outside there every time.

LS: My own impression --- just from years of seeing Africans in the United States, and also from what people have said --- my impression is that Nigerians seem to have been very successful in integrating into the American society, in some ways more than other groups, other nationalities. Do you agree?

CA: That is true. Absolutely.

LS: How do you explain that?

CA: Because, number one, British. We can attribute that to British philosophy.

LS: Interesting. [laughs]

CA: Because mostly Nigerians are British-brought-up-people. School is British-oriented. We speak --- I remember in college, in 1964, the dean of our school says, "Cyprian, you are the best speaking, uh spoken, African student that I've ever had. I have a letter he wrote today. I have that letter. So, we try to communicate to the people here, we try to understand, we are critical thinkers, we try to understand people, and in fact, we don't judge. Immediately, rationally, we try to digest this before. That's one characteristic of Nigerian people. You see them, they look like they're not going to act or do something, but they really are ( ). When I entered the college here, there was a textbook they recommended us for literature. And all the poems in that textbook, in college, is what I did in high school. That was in 1965. Did that in 1962, '61.

LS: The British system was ahead of the American system.

CA: Talking about ( ), talking about Shakespearean --- I don't know how many Shakespearean books we read. Right? How many poems of Shakespeare we crammed up on the head and ( )? [LS laughs] These are the things that built us up. When we come here, we really have the ability to assimilate ourselves immediately. And that's what I can attribute that. And we are humble. It's a Christian-oriented nation, even though they call us diabolical, we are Christian-oriented, we humble our olders, we respect the person who is older that we are. If we see someone who is a police officer, we respect him for the job he is doing. We do that. We don't snob --- not snobbish people, that's a fact.

LS: Do a lot of Nigerians marry Americans?

CA: Yes, nowadays, because of visa issues.

LS: Oh, to get visas?

CA: Yes.

LS: But before, in the 1960s?

CA: Before it wasn't ---

LS: Not that common?

CA: Americans?

LS: Mmmh.

CA: It depends, it depends.

LS: White or black, whatever.

CA: Not too many of whites, I mean, not too many of blacks.

LS: More whites?

CA: More whites. up to 1970s.

LS: But that must have helped in overall adaptation of the entire community to Americans?

CA: To broaden their horizon and know what is going on, yes.

LS: I know that you have your own Pan African or African Congress. I want to ask a couple of questions about that and if I can have your mission statement, that would be wonderful. When was the African Congress formed?

CA: It was actually formed in 1995.

LS: And how many members? What is the most members you have ever had?

CA: I would say we are recording --- there are many, many of them. Active members, we may come up to about forty active members. But, you know, they come ( ) and say they gotta go, driving their cab, or they doing this ---

LS: Yeah, I understand. And their national background --- all over the place?

CA: We have Sierra Leoneans, we have Liberians, we have Guineans, we have Ethiopians, we have Tanzanians, we have Mali, Ghana.

LS: And English is the language you speak for the meetings?

CA: Yes, English in the meetings.

LS: Do members pay dues?

CA: Yes, they pay ten dollars.

LS: Ten dollars a year?

CA: Any meeting, anytime we meet.

LS: Okay, ten dollars per meeting. What were sort of your primary goals in the African Congress?

CA: Primary goals is to get Africans to --- you know what I had in mind, what made me to take ( ) is Chinatown.

LS: They are very organized and across national lines.

CA: Yes, and I have felt --- in Logan area part of the city, there is a place they feel very condemned.

VW: But the Chinese have it taken over. Is that the one I am thinking of?

CA: Logan.

VW: Okay.

CA: Near Olney station, around there. And Boulevard(?), north side of Boulevard(?), ( ). That place has been in my mind. For five years, they condemn that place. Since I been --- because that place is also my

area I represent, Mayor's Office of Community Services. This area code 19141. That place has been where I say that I was going to make work hard that Africans get that place. It is almost twenty-four blocks, a very big deep area, and what I intend that we were going to do is to create African community there, get mortgages, and make sure that everyone has mortgage that would be within his own means, and at least not too much deposit, maybe five hundred dollars and so forth, but we would lobby so that they get mortgages. And we designed that neighborhood in the way we want to design it. In accordance with the code and so forth, just like Chinatown. This was my intention. That's why I started African Congress, that's one reason why. So that we can form our own community, we can come here and we can name the street, the street is there but we can name Liberian Street, Nigerian Street, Sierra Leone Street, all the countries, we name them, call somewhere around, and we get permission from the city to rename those things.

LS: You really need to talk to the guy --- his name is Modi Diagne. He is Senegalese and he is the one who has a radio program in French every morning at 6.30 and another call-in program from 6.30 to 7.30 on Saturday, WHHT. Because he has an idea of also creating an Africatown, also where people would sell their goods and everything.

CA: Mmm-hmm.

LS: So you might have a very interesting conversation with him. Certainly, you don't want to be working at cross purposes.

CA: Mmm-hmm. And WHAT you say he works? WHAT?

LS: Well, he just does a program there. He actually has a shop in town that is African art and he has a web site and he does a lot of wholesale things and he's an importer.

CA: What's his name, you say?

LS: Modi Diagne.

CA: Yeah, yeah, okay. I tell you a little bit about WHAT.

LS: Okay.

CA: In 1998, January, and I have all this in my diary here, January I call Cody Anderson. I told him, I made appointment and said I want to see you. He told me to come and gave me appointment. That was January 10th. I went to his office. I told him that, "Cody, I want to run for City Council." I know many people in WDAS, but I don't know many people in WHAT. I told him I want to run for the City Council in 1999. He says "Are you sure you want to do this?" He tried to discourage me but, however, he told me okay, but there is a man there from Nigeria which I know, Olu, and Harry Masad. That he will get them together, then why would I call, when he he's going to get them together. I have come down a month from that. I said okay. February 10th I went back again. When I went back, Olu was there, Harry Masad was there and Cody Anderson was there. Four of us, four of us, including myself. I brought my mission again to them, that I want to run for City Council. Olu, my own man from Nigeria, blast at me and say, "What in the world do you think you are going to pass election here? This City Council is made for black people. How do you think from Africa you can come and run for City Council?" This is what my own man told me. Then the other man from Ethiopia, Harry Masad, he says, "Well, if Doctor has money, we will vote him in, we will help him, because in Ohio there is a Nigerian who is a mayor there. If that man could be a mayor, why can't he be a councilman here?" This is from Ethiopian man. All in Cody's place. Plus, Cody's in a low, uhh, umm, you know, discouragement about it. February 10th is gone. By April, what I have is Cody Anderson wants to run for Congress. He decided to run for Congress, Cody himself. And, of course, in between the way he failed, he dropped out. Ten months later, the Olu from Nigeria, who says I can't run for the City Council because I am not black American, he started to run for judgeship, because he's a lawyer.

LS: [laughs] They all took your idea.

CA: And another one year from there, all of a sudden Harry Masad, the one who said that if the other Nigerian could be a mayor, why can't I? He decided to challenge me to run for City Council himself. So you see, the African community the problem we have. So when you talk about WHAT, right now the

director of programs there is a good friend of mine, Tara Martin Connolly, she's a very good --- she have had me W( ) many, many, many times, and introduce me to Power 99, so I have been in those areas, talking about the program, women, and so forth. And she is the director there. So, the man you talking about maybe I haven't --- you know, there are so many of them there who are just kind of, maybe I haven't seen him. And there is another guy who just started a program --- David Barnes. David Barnes. In fact he is the one who made something here about where you went before, Senegal. He wanted to make a trip to Senegal but he didn't make it. So I know him there. And the whole thing is that whatever, if people can understand that we can work together, there will come an end, you know?

LS: Yes, that's a big stumbling block.

CA: That's it.

LS: Does the African Congress ever assist any arrived new immigrants or do any kind of work with newcomers?

CA: We are not organized to that point. We would love to.

LS: Are you a member of any other kind of associations? African, national, ethnic, anything?

CA: No, we don't have --- there is a Liberian Tegloma. The old boys ---

LS: Oh Tegloma, I know that.

CA: I contribute whenever they have the affair. They write me, I go down and give them fifteen dollars plus my fee to get in. And that's about ( ) ethnic group I --- and also there are also some other part of Africans, I mean Nigerians, the Ibibios, the Efiks. They also invite me and I go down, give money.

LS: So they have association?

CA: Yeah, they have association.

LS: What are their association called? I don't know about this.

CA: The Ibibio, I'm not sure, I know their president and so forth.

LS: We're going to print this directory, but this is the first edition. But between now and a year and a half, I'm sure we'll discover lots of new things. Are you a member of a particular church?

CA: I'm a Catholic, but I belong to all churches. I swear, I go to all --- yesterday I went to three churches. I went to my colleague church, which is Our Lady of Hope, and then I went to morning Mass, from 10.30 to 11.30. Then I came down to Zion Baptist Church here and worship with them. Sometimes I go to Christian Tabernacle.

LS: Are there Africans who go to any of those churches?

CA: Yes, a lot of them.

LS: Are they churches that have both African Americans and Africans?

CA: Yeah, umm-hmm.

LS: Do you cook Nigerian here? What do you eat?

CA: I cook African. You want to see something?

LS: I am just curious.

CA: Yeah, it's mostly African food like soup and okra and egusi.

LS: Egusi soup? So you cook this yourself?

CA: Yeah, I don't have a wife to do it for me.

LS: Well, I'm just curious. [both laugh]

LS: When you came in the 1960s, could you get all the ingredients?

CA: Absolutely.

LS: Even in 1960s?

CA: Yeah, in 60s, we still got it that time.

LS: Where? Who was selling it?

CA: We had improvised things. Everything is improvised in those days, to be honest. We try very hard. Everything is improvised, that time. If I manage to find a way to make farina, make okra. Okra was around. Egusi we take something, uhhh, almond ---

VW: And grind it?

CA: And grind it.

LS: Interesting.

CA: But nowadays we don't use almond, we get it ---

VW: The Sierra Leoneans used to use Bisquik for fufu.

CA: Yeah, that's it. There you go. [laughs] That's the truth.

LS: One thing that's --- because we are going to be having an exhibit. What would you like to communicate about Nigeria through an exhibit to the American public? What are the essential things about Nigeria that you would like to see communicated?

CA: If I can sum up everything which everyone have said, I don't know what are the phrase or sentence that I can use. I would say that, "United we stand and divided we always fail, we fall.". That's what I would say. And also I can put in that also that, "Forward ever and backward never."

LS: Mmm-hmm.

CA: Those, they can understand. And like I said the problem has been petty jealousy, petty jealousy. "Who is --- you're going to get this. You'll be better" and those kind of things. They don't think about young people, the people who we answer to only, women we bring here, our mothers and our parents which are now coming in. They don't think about that.

LS: When you see your Nigerian friends who have children, do you see any problems with the way their children are being brought up here? Do you think your friends are able to communicate traditional values, to transmit certain values?

CA: Yes, yes, they are. I think Nigerians are doing very well to teach our kids the language.

LS: They're doing well?

CA: Oh yes, children learn their language and ( ). Many Nigerian families, you can go down and see child who is ten years old who cannot speak their language as well as English, which is a tremendous achievement. I owe that to the mothers who really very much close to the kids.

LS: And the children aren't as fluent as they ( ) would be in Nigeria?

CA: Yes.

VW: How about the idea of the extended family? The American Nigerian children --- are they able to relate and sustain the significance of that extended family?

CA: One of the problems we have face with mixed cultural marriage is been difficult, is been very tough.

VW: Because whether it is white or black, an American doesn't understand extended family.

CA: They don't, they don't.

VW: They're threatened by it.

CA: They don't, yes.

LS: They think that all the relatives will arrive on the next plane.

VW: And you know I am from European immigrants and that was one of the fears that they had. Because they were having such a struggle themselves to survive. They were always worried that the burden of everybody else ---

CA: It is going to be ---

VW: It is very cultural. Where as in African would go, "I would want them to be here."

CA: Absolutely.

LS: Do you feel accepted here, in general?

CA: That's a question I have. In fact there is a book that I have written now is in press. I call "Philosophical America: Silent Holocaust." That is the title of the book. And in one portion of the book, I felt I accepted it personally and the other part I felt completely discriminated. But in the general, if I may just say what it is, is that we have a saying in African adage that if you are smoking cigarette and the spark of the fire and you are carrying your girlfriend's son or child, you 're ( ) children, you are carrying a girlfriend's child and you are smoking a cigarette and all of a sudden the cigarette blew up in fire and spark on you and the child, you will first get your own out before you reach for your own child, for your own girlfriend's child, naturally. You will just try to put out the fire in your hand before you reach out for the child that you have or anybody else. Based on that, the acceptance of African people and particularly many people in those days are not what they are ---

[END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

[START OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO]

CA: The American confusions, I have to realize and recognize the fact, in the past fifteen years, that we the foreigners, we are like the children of the girlfriend. And the black Americans here are the original people. So if the fire is burning these two people, they going to put out the fire on the African American before they reach out to put out fire on the African person. They have realized that. So ---

LS: Do you feel less acceptance from the Caucasians than from the blacks?

CA: We feel less accepted by the blacks and the Caucasians who originally accepted us feel now that why do we have to ex tend ourselves to these people, when we have these people here? You understand what I'm talking about?

LS: But before Caucasians have been more accepting?

CA: Absolutely, well accepting. We can go to the bank and get money, we can go to job and get hired immediately, but nowadays it does not happen that way. If I apply for a job now and another black American applies for the job with the same qualification or even the person with lesser qualification, they give it to the black American than they give it to African, that's the truth.

LS: Now what do you think made that change?

CA: Because of the condition, like I said before, about Martin Luther King.

LS: They have to take care of their own.

C: Yeah, take care of their own. That's what it is, they have to take care of their own.

LS: Would you recommend immigration to the US to other Africans?

CA: Absolutely, yeah, there's no doubt about it.

LS: Okay.

CA: Immigration is always fair. The quota system that they have --- Of course, I'm not really, since I know they have quota system, the Africans will have a number of people to bring in a year, and I suppose Britain will bring in a year, and Poland will bring in a year, and so forth. I won't even look into that. But I do still respect that they are fair, there's no doubt about it, ( ) they respect you immigrants and immigration, I mean immigrant people coming to this country.

[LS asks VW if she has any other questions. VW says no, but discusses taking photographs of CA for the exhibit, particularly with the African American clients of his rehab center.]

LS: Do you think you'll retire in Nigeria or you think you'll stay here?

CA: Yes, I retire in Nigeria, no doubt about it. [LS laughs]

LS: Have you built your home there?

VW: Yes, where is your home? Did you build your house yet?

CA: I have a 6.4 million naira home, twenty-two rooms.

VW: And where will that be?

CA: It's already in ---

VW: In your village.

CA: Yeah, in my father's compound.

VW: Again, where is your father's compound?

CA: I am from Ugiri in Okegwi.

LS: So that is Eastern Nigeria?

CA: Yes.

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]