

**The Project in Interpreting the Texas Past  
Dr. Martha Norkunas, Project Director**

**African American Texans  
Oral History Project**

**Unedited Transcript**

**Interviewee:** Gary L. Bledsoe

**Interviewer:** Naoko Kato

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[Tape 1, Side A starts]

NK: I wanted to start with perhaps just talking about your parents: where they came from and what their experiences were like?

GB: Oh, my parents are from a small town in Texas or small towns really, from Lott and Marlin and that's in Falls County. It's an extremely--it's one of the two big poorest counties in Texas. The Brazos River runs through there. They grew up in farming families or what have you. And of course, they did as most African Americans did, they picked cotton and chopped cotton, and did all kinds of odd jobs and things to make a living. You know, my dad had to drop out in the seventh grade to help his family to make ends meet, and to work every day to help bring in revenue. My mom was fortunate enough to go through high school and go to college and become a nurse, though she worked just as hard, didn't have the same kind of experiences with her family. But they both came from very large families.

NK: How many for example?

GB: Thirteen in my mom's side and nine on my dad's. Large families.

NK: And they came from the same area?

GB: Yes, both from Falls County.

NK: And that's where they met. Interesting. So when they tell family stories to you, what kind of family stories have you heard growing up?

GB: Oh there are a lot of stories that they tell--some good stories, stories about character, stories about conviction, stories about, "Whatever you do hold your head up and be proud of yourself." Mom would tell the story about how her dad would not allow them to slump after working a full day and chopping cotton and working for fourteen hours and leaving the fields to take his family home. Maybe the kids would slump or stoop or have bad posture. He would scold them, and he made sure that they always acted like they were somebody. I thought that was really a kind of a very good story. My dad liked to tell a story about how honest his dad was, and how there was a neighbor lady that had lost, that had said she lost her chickens. She asked could he come over and help her catch her chickens. When he got over to her home, she came to the door with no clothes on, and said, "I think they're in here Mr. AC." He said, "No thank you ma'am. I'll look for them out here." But [laughs] you know, some of the good stories like that.

NK: So when they were passing on some values, do you think they were through these kinds of stories? Or through their action or?

GB: Both. There were a lot of things. They would tell some of the horrors. My dad talked about how when they had terrible time during the Depression. His dad was pretty good at maintaining things and that a white landowner just came in one day and just took all their cattle. And the authorities would do nothing and all that to help them get them back. They just took them, and the man owned them and they knew where they were and the whole thing, but not having any rights. They both would talk about the law enforcement in the community, and how many people were beaten or things of that nature. How when they first hired a Black deputy he could only arrest Blacks. He couldn't arrest whites or what have you, they didn't allow him to carry a gun and things of that nature. So there're a lot of interesting stories. There are even stories like the hanging of the Black man in Waco, and a few years later when the tornado follows the same path as the mob that took the man and hung him, the last one to be hung, I guess in Waco. So, there are a lot of stories like that. My mom tells the story about how an aunt of hers just had her land taken away by a white male, whose family owns the property today. That's one thing I've thought of, of different ways one could prove this, to be able to, to try to get the family's land back.

NK: When you were born, were you, were you born where your parents grew up?

GB: No, I was born out in West Texas. My parents went out there because of the, that's where the jobs were. That's where the oil boom was taking place, so they moved out there.

NK: So what, what was your childhood like? I mean that's a very broad question but, but the neighborhood you grew up in, and memories of school?

GB: Of course my original neighborhood was a segregated neighborhood with streets that were not paved, living on the south side of the railroad tracks, and what you'll find is everywhere except Austin, I think, in Texas, the dividing line between the Black community and the other community is the railroad track. Here it's I-35.

NK: We don't have a railway. [laughs]

GB: We have a freeway, but we have a freeway. And so, you know, you see that you know. When I was a golfer but I couldn't play golf. I could bus tables and work at the golf course. The first Black to integrate the bowling alley, that was my good friend Jean Collins out there. But, you know we grew up in serious segregation days where you couldn't eat in restaurants, you had to sit upstairs in movie theaters. You couldn't try on clothes or what have you. I remember that we used to have, with the big Afros, the picks, there was such, people were so frightened in the 60s that you'd walk into a store with the comb in your back pocket and the retail staff wouldn't wait on you unless you pulled the thing out of your pocket to show them that it was only a comb. But you had that kind of tension. And you know West Texas is not nearly as tense as other places you know. West Texas, people I know, some people may not like me, but I don't worry about being found dead on the side of the road somewhere like when I go to East Texas, I'd be very concerned about that. So Texas is very different.

NK: So this, this--you're describing the 60s when you grew up? This segregated society which is...

GB: Yeah, 50s, 60s.

NK: 50s, 60s.

GB: I graduated high school in the 70s, early 70s.

NK: So how about your school? Was it, was it basically the same experience or?

GB: Things have changed. I don't think it'd be the same nowadays, but I actually

thought I got an extremely good education, providing the circumstances. We had hand-me-down books. In other words, when I got a book, it was the first time our school would get a book, frequently. But there would no signature plates for me, for my name in front of the book, because it was a "hand-me-down" from one of the white schools across town. So we usually had hand me down books. Our lab equipment was just incredibly, or woefully inferior to the labs across town. So in science and things like that, we didn't have the things to learn. We had a great ROTC program. We had a great shop where you could learn, if you wanted to do body work or mechanic work, we had better than across town. But anything that was academic, we didn't have. We didn't have a debate team, so we couldn't debate.

We had a spelling bee and I won the spelling bee in my school, but they wouldn't allow me to compete because the teachers in my school were afraid that I would win. I actually could spell very well. And so, that always left a real lasting impression on me, that people were that afraid that a Black guy was likely to win. My sister had won the science competition a year or two before me, and she was given second place. So we were all really upset over that. Because it was obvious--if you saw her display and the other girl's display--she was far superior. It was the same general theme, but my sister's was put together much better and was a much tighter presentation. But anyway, she got second place.

So it was just one of these things, when you grew up in that era, you could not give accolades to the African American. I had some really good teachers. I don't like the fact that many were afraid, they didn't want me to go forward, like with the spelling bee. But I had some really good teachers that taught good values, that were concerned about you. Teachers that, when they used corporal punishment, except you know maybe one was not, but usually they all did it with your best interests at heart. And so, we had teachers that were concerned about you becoming a good citizen. That was all good, and you know things were a lot different because we knew who the bad actors were, and though we didn't talk down to folks or what have you, you knew who not to hang with and things of that nature. Everyone knew who the bad actors were. It wasn't--bad actors were not exalted the way that many bad actors are today.

NK: So from that West Texas place where you grew up, to UT, what was the transition like for you?

GB: It was not a big transition for me you know, I mean, it was more of a transition, the transition I guess was that my high school wasn't as good even though I had good teachers, we didn't quite have the amenities and the exposure to some things. I had to work real hard my freshman year to make sure I did well, and you know it was strained. Like I went out for football my freshman year.

And they'd had one African American before me, and you know, it was like, I felt like E. F. Hutton, when I walked into the locker room, there'd be silence. And so during my two or three months no one ever spoke to me. No one called me a name or said anything like that. It was really bizarre because I'd had white players on my high school team, when they finally, they desegregated, they really didn't desegregate, they joined the Black school and the brown school together when I was in high school. And there were a few whites that were generally poor whites that lived on the south side of town. They were in our school, and we were all friends and all that so it was not the kind of issue you get here. I guess a lot of students had never seen a White, a Black person before. I had a friend of mine in law school to tell me that I was the first--I went to law school at UT as well--that I was the first Black person he'd ever spoken to. It really took me aback, and he was from Lubbock, and that really took me aback.

NK: Officially, the Voting Rights Act was in 1965.

GB: That's correct.

NK: Schools had been desegregated.

GB: No they hadn't.

NK: Officially.

GB: The laws were there.

NK: The laws were there.

GB: The laws were there, but in Texas they didn't even try to comply with the law. In 1966, they shut down the Black school in my hometown, and merged it with the brown school. The white schools you could go to by choice. They'd all implemented a choice program. Like in Austin, they did something similar and minor to that in 1971. Austin didn't get full desegregation until 1979. My old school district didn't get full desegregation until I believe it was 1983. Most of the South fought desegregation. So, when we had Brown v. Board to come down, you had this flurry of new school districts to be created, school districts that were created where there were no Blacks living within the geographical boundaries, or no Hispanics living within the geographical boundaries, so they wouldn't be forced to have their kids go to school with minorities. So in Texas now, we have what, 254 counties and about 1200 school districts or so? It's pretty enormous, the number of school districts. But that's why we have the school districts, you look in some counties like Gray County, their county just has innumerable school districts that they don't need to have, and that's really the reason why many of

them were born, was for reasons of race. So I won't concede that point--that may have been, *Brown v. Board* may have been handed down in '54, but we did not have desegregation at all, in Texas.

NK: I remember in your previous interview that you mentioned the phrase, "making a difference," or "contributing to change," something along those lines. What does that exactly mean?

(time: 14:05)

GB: Well, a lot of different things. The world has changed, the state has changed, things are improved in some ways for the better and in some ways we're moving backwards. But the whole idea, and I don't mean to talk clichés or all these phrases, but when Martin Luther King talks about people being able to walk hand in hand no matter what your race, your ethnicity, your religion and to say that we learn and we must learn how to live together as brother or brothers will learn to perish as fools. And that's really true, and you get to an environment, and one thing I'll say, a university environment is really good for that. You know, where you get to meet people all different walks of life, all different countries around the world, that speak all different kinds of languages from all different communities, and it's eye-opening from me just like it'll be for somebody from Baylor Texas. You know, if you go and allow yourself to be part of the experience, then that's good but you need to take that experience out in the real world, and then try to make a difference. Because there are still those little fiefdoms out there of racism, discrimination, bias that exist, and so when you get your education, your obligation should be to try and enlighten people. It's not political correctness like the right wing will do and they'll try to demagogue and make you--my thing is people can co-exist. You don't have to be conservative, you don't have to be liberal, you don't have to be Democratic, you don't have to be Republican. You can be whatever you choose, but some things should be beyond the pale, like hate and things of that nature just have no basis, in my opinion, in a modern day society that has the educational foundation that we do in this country. You shouldn't hate somebody because they're different. We're trying to move beyond and set an example for others. So when you say making a difference in what small way that you can to help open up and change some of the biases and stereotypes and things of that nature. If many people do it on the lower level, this will magnify and become much more significant.

NK: So when you probably strived to become a lawyer, I think you had that in mind, did you?

GB: Yes. I didn't become a lawyer to get rich. I probably should have, but I didn't. [laughs]

NK: But, that image that you had, had that changed over time, or do you think it's as you said--

GB: No the image hasn't changed although I will say, it's probably more realistic to look at things in a different way from me. If I had advice [to give] to a young person today, it would be "don't give up your conviction," and, "always have a heart." But you also should have a head, and take care of yourself. Because, I'm one that wanted to change the world, and not really look out at some of those other basic needs, thinking well, those really aren't important. They really are. There's something about history and experience and the need to go out there financially to get a stable foundation and things of that nature before you can do other things. So I would advise people to try to go get a stable financial foundation, not forget where you came from. And when you get that foundation, then you go out you don't forget where you came from. Don't get to be caught up in the almighty dollar and then to try to really give something back at the right point in time. Whether that means you quit a thriving law practice with some defense firm where you're making a half million a year, and then decide, "Well I'm fifty years old. I'm going to go out there, the next fifteen years, I'm just going to help the little people, and do what I can, because I'm blessed. I'm thankful for what the Lord has provided to me in terms of having this education, having good health, having an opportunity to do things. I'm taken care of financially now, so let me try to give something back." And say, "I'm thankful for the University for giving me a good education," or what have you because all those things factor in.

NK: So being thankful is the core of your conviction. You said you should remember where you come from, and be thankful. Where does that idea come from?

GB: It probably comes from my mom, I mean really and truly. She probably raised me to do certain things and to believe in certain ways. And so in turn she would ask me questions, "Are you going to defend people, or are you going to put them in jail? Or are you going to do this, or are you going to do that?" She wouldn't try to volunteer an answer, but it was just different things, because I could see so many things happen that were wrong. And you would just shake your head.

When I was in the sixth grade, I was walking to school and I get picked up for stealing a car. And I was young, I was, I guess I may have been ten years old at the time, because I was a year ahead. I couldn't even think about driving a car at that time. But you know, the police officer [said], "Whatch you boys doing?" and my cousin was in the class with me, he was a year older than I was. Put us in the car, took our names and did reports and all that. "We had a car stolen from those

old green apartments last night." That leaves a lasting impression with you. Because I'm walking to school, I would get there an hour or so late, two hours late. I was late, I don't remember how late, but I was late. And couldn't even think about driving a car at that point in time, didn't know how to turn, didn't know how to put a key in an ignition. But I get picked up and held for no reason.

You see things like that happen throughout, and it just leaves an impression on you because it happened to my friends. It happened to family members. And at some point you say, "Look, there ought to be a better way." And it isn't about being political correct. It isn't about having someone ascribe to your view. There are some things that are fundamental, that go beyond me or my religion, or my background. Some things like you said are fundamental human rights. There are some things that are just fundamental, and right and justice are fundamental. We don't have the right to take another person's life. So if a police officer does that, they're wrong. Unless they're trying to defend their life or the life of a third person, it's legitimate. But you can't say just because somebody's Black or they're Brown or whatever that you can take their life. And that's essentially the current state of what we have in the State today because a minority life is just not worth the same as a White life.

I remember one time driving, not driving but I [was] on the bus, sharing a charter bus one time, going to a convention in Houston, and an old white gentleman who had headed up the probation department here, I was on the bus with him. I was opining how a jury in the Rodney King case could walk someone when it was on videotape, and how in this case in Fort Worth it was on videotape where a police officer cracks the guy's head open, they can no bill this guy, a grand jury. He said "Well Gary," and this was a good man, so he wasn't talking about himself. "We talk about these higher beliefs like the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and the things that you can't do to another person because of their rights. Most folk would say or believe that that does not apply to you, and that's what you need to understand." Because how can you go to church on Sunday and say that you are a Christian person, and say that you believe in scripture and all that and sit there on the grand jury or jury, and there's compelling evidence and just allow somebody to get away with it?

I know I lost a case in East Texas one time. But the DA's argument there was so compelling. As always it left a lasting impression on me. Because it looked like we were going to win, and it was a real uphill battle. But the DA told the jury, he said: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, your deliberations are private, but I want you to know that your verdict is public. It'll be etched into the folklore of this community forever. You, your children, and your children's children have to live in this community, and don't you forget it." So it was true jury nullification. It was truly telling them that your neighbors are what's important. What's right

is not what's important. What God would want is not important. That you have to live in this community, and your children--see, he knows a lot of people will say, "Well I'm courageous and so I don't mind. I may suffer some pressures. I'm going to go ahead and do this," and "you, your children and your children's children." So everybody's going to say, "Well, I mean, I couldn't do this to my grandkids." So it's true jury nullification. Saying, "Yeah, you can go back there and it's private. When you come out here, your verdict is public." And the thing is, if the verdict is unanimous and they know it's unanimous if it's on our side. So it took them a few days, but they finally came out in his favor.  
(minute 23:40)

NK: You talk a little bit about community or people who are around you that made a difference. Where does your identity lie or, did you have a strong community?

GB: I think my identity, obviously, lies in a lot of ways in the community I grew up in, the friends that I had, parents that I had, the people that you meet in your life, the professors that you had in college. The route that you take, and you know, I think, I wouldn't change any of those things about the route that I took. Like for example, in school I had some very good professors. Some of them were great individuals and human beings. I know that, for example, Barbara Aldave, I was able to get my class at the Law School to give her an award at our graduation ceremony for personal and professional excellence because, not only was she just a brilliant professor, she was always just a great person. And you know it's good to see that kind of blend in one person. I look at people like Dean Aldave, and she and people like that are people that I look at and admire and whatever and I think they helped me in terms of my worldview, my vision. I don't try to copy them, you know, but I do try to learn from them. Everyone's different, so my belief set is not going to be coterminous with hers. There may be a strong overlap, but I look at people like her or Larry Dodd, who was an undergraduate, or Neil Richardson, some of the folks that I think that helped me, that, you know, made a lasting, a lasting impression on me and helped me develop different sets of skills along the way. So it's been good and then so many good friends and folks.

NK: So that's what you identify as your community, how you were shaped through people you interacted with?

GB: Well yes, you know, that, and then those who really, that I interact with today because I'm still evolving like anyone should be and so yeah.

NK: I wanted to just ask you about Bill Clinton. Because I think in the previous interview, you mentioned he was the person who you wanted to interview

yourself. And I wondered why, and what you would want to ask him.

GB: I don't know, I've been with him a couple of times.

NK: Oh, you've already met him?

GB: Photographs in the White House all that. Well he's a brilliant man, because I think that, and personal life and all that aside, you have to look at what made other people fear him so much. And you couldn't really pigeon hole him. He did some things I didn't agree with, that I still would say I did not agree with. But you couldn't say that he was all environmental versus business, or that he was all business versus environmental. You couldn't say he was all minority versus southern white. You couldn't say that. He tried to ingest information, understand the dynamics that were involved, and the likely impact on different constituencies, and tried to come up and shape something that was wise for everyone. So it may not be exactly what someone wanted. Because I guess that's one thing, if you really look at the things he pushed through, except for his health care proposal, his ability to compromise did show. And so he would always listen to the right, or listen to the left because he was really a centrist. And he'd come out with something that may not make anyone feel great, but it was the best thing with all in the hodgepodge. And that's what it's about you know, instead of having someone say, "Well I'm on the left, it's all going to be about the left." "I'm on the right, it's all going to be about what's on the right." Because really the answer is not necessarily on the left or the right. Sometimes it might be, sometimes it may not be. But most people are in the center. So he's probably the one human being that I can think of that has been able to do that. There are some other presidents and folks that I admire, but in terms of melding that or what have you, and having a true genius for that, he's really the one. He's really a genius in that regard.

NK: So you've had several role models but he's one of them.

GB: Well, he's somebody that I admire in terms of his politics and his ability to work with others. He had Republicans in his cabinet as well as Democrats. He worked with moderate Republicans and he worked with the Conservative ones, and ones that were not the most extreme. And I think that's good because I think that people need to learn how to work across the aisle. So I think, I really think he's a great example. And so he is somebody, I would think is somebody that I would like to take to a page from in that regard And you just could not pigeon hole him and say he's on the left or,(GB: "Excuse me?" [He is briefly interrupted])

NK: I had the impression initially that you wanted to go to law school to change the law and maybe, you know when people are young you have these great

dreams.

GB: And I was wrong--

NK: You think you were wrong?

GB: about what I could accomplish.

NK: Right.

GB: The world has changed.

NK: Right.

GB: It's gotten [to be] a very conservative, very hostile world that we live in right now. The opinions that are coming out of the courts are really bad and sad, and I'm not a good enough lawyer to change the things the way that I'd want to, because right now the courts are result oriented. And it takes someone who's really a genius or whatever to pull the fat out of the fire here, because it doesn't matter, from what I have seen, how good your scholarship [is] or whatever. It depends on what side you're on or what have you.

I can give you an example. I was reading this Court of Appeals opinion the other day and a woman was sexually harassed nine times in fourteen days. They said it was not sufficiently pervasive to constitute sexual harassment. So I'm thinking, "Well, do you want her to bring a gun to work and blow the guy away?" You know, what kind of a social policy is it just because you want to support the employer? You come out with this thing and say that nine times in fourteen is not enough? It's absurd. There's nothing I can do about it because they're putting these result oriented judges on the courts, and people who look like me, and think like me, are people they're going to decide against. It's the bottom line.

So I made a big mistake. I was thinking that, the courts even before, you know, one of the big ironies, the great strides that we made were strides that the courts allowed us to make, and even very conservative judges looked at the law and just implemented the law, whether *Sweatt v. Painter*, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Where people just looked at the law and said, "This is what the law says." Johnny Cochran told me once that what a lot of these judges are doing now, and particularly the judges in this circuit, "They're engaging in intellectual mischief." And that's really true, because you find some fiction not to follow the law. If you're going to confine me and limit me to some very bad law to begin with [small interruption] if you're going to confine me and limit me to some very bad law to begin with, at least be able to live up to it and not just come up with

some fiction or technicality why I can't avail myself of the law. Because years ago like with what the NAACP did is it took the separate but equal doctrine and decided, "Well we're not going to change it right now. Let's just enforce it." So when you put the Thurgood Marshall Old Texas Southern Law School and compared it to the University of Texas Law School, there's no way you can compare the two. You just had to be honest about it.

I'm afraid if *Sweatt v. Painter* were heard today, that the judges would say that it's an equal law school or that even Texas Southern would be greater because of low class student faculty, or faculty student ratio or whatever. They would come up with some fiction to justify the decision. And so that's one of the big differences that we have, you know. There were a lot of judges, and ironically Republican judges in the 50s and 60s, Minor Wisdom and people like that, that were the ones that were the real champions of minorities here in the 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit and throughout the country. That they could see the real ills of the South, and so they were the ones who stood up and implemented affirmative action and things like that, and which has now become a buzz word or a divisive word. And it's really ironic that it was the Republican Party back then that was really the biggest supporter of the African American community in the South there in that regard.

NK: So you see today's society as more segregated or color blind?

GB: It's still very segregated. It's not color blind by any stretch of the imagination. It's color conscious. When you see the judges write their opinions, it makes me want to throw up because judges say that, and that's one of the most dishonest things that you could write. All I got to do is walk outside and you'll see it's not color blind. Because African Americans endure discrimination every day of their lives almost, whether you've been profiled in retail establishment, whether you are being stopped or harassed by police, whether you don't get the proper service at a restaurant. There's just so many ways and different things that happen on your job, promotions that you're denied and this undercurrent about well you just really don't have the ability or what have you. So it's something that you face every day, and we're nowhere near a colorblind society. We're very much a color conscious society. And we have to become more color conscious to bring about a remedy before we can become color blind. That's one thing Martin Luther King said and these courts and these judges have been misusing his words for their own benefit.

NK: But wouldn't you say it's less openly, at least racist?

GB: Yes, in many places, in many places. Not in all places. You know you have to look at James Byrd Junior and how he was murdered. And think, as reckless

as that murder was, they must have felt a certain level of comfort in doing what they did in that community. H.W. Walker in Rains County was murdered in the very same way, tied to a tree with barbed wire, gasoline thrown on him and burned to death alive. You start looking at some of the things like that that happen and, and people still use the "N" word, and employers and folks don't, don't enforce rules of the workplace.

NK: So in this current society, you suggest, how would you suggest making a difference?

GB: Well, I think it's going to have to be, you know, they've even gone and gotten to the religious community and they've made them bastardize scripture and religion. You know, we're about to embark on a religious war and that's really sad, but, you know, I think that the only true hope that we have is to have people of faith that say, "Look, there are certain things we need to carve out here." And not some things where there might be some debate about in scripture, but certain things like, you know treating human beings. That if somebody happens to be gay or lesbian you can't go beat him up, you know. I mean, you just can't! I mean you know. And for people to say the scripture would say that if we have a hate crime law that protects somebody that's gay or lesbian, is absurd, you know. It's a fundamental thing, just fundamental rules of the world, even we're back in days of the caveman [laughs] and you know, if there were one. You just don't go and beat up somebody, for no reason except for what they look like or whatever. You just can't do that.

So I think that's really important, that we acknowledge that and that we do that. I think that'll make a difference if the religious community were to come to the fore. Because people go to church or synagogues or mosques, [siren] and those institutions really need to teach people how to be tolerant and coexist and not teach that because someone is of another religion or whatever that they're going to hell. You know, I don't or I don't happen to believe that that's what the scripture says. I think those kinds of things are divisive but you know, but until those folks step up when you find demagogues and you find false prophets that are in the ministry, which you have so many of them today.

And they can bastardize scripture, like some of the hate groups are infusing various religions so that they can co-opt people in their thinking and their beliefs and they're out justifying hate crimes or murders of Black folks or what have you. It's amazing you know, like you look at some of the teachings of some organizations and you just, you really shudder. And how some church groups are trying to consolidate the hate movement and the hate groups. One umbrella would be religion where they teach you know, all people that have any non-white blood are evil folks and so if you're Jewish or if you're Black or part Black

or if you're Asian or if you're Hispanic, they've got an obligation to purge this country of people like that and return it to, to Whites. It's really, it's really kind of a frightening thing. And you know, you'd think that people of good will would just stand up and say, "Enough is enough," because it doesn't take a genius to know what's right and what's wrong. It just doesn't. It doesn't, but you get wrapped in to, "Well, people at my church want this," or "People at my church want that." It's one thing to say you don't want to see a gay person marry. It's another thing to say you don't want to see a gay person beaten up or a gay person denied a job because of their sexual inclinations. You know, so they always say, "Well we do this over here, support, oppose discrimination against gays here. That means we've got to go along with this." "No, we can always segregate that. If you don't choose to support this, you don't have to." But people always use the extreme demagogue intimidation tactics and they have this real fear. You know, it's kind of like you do preemptive strike before anything has happened, you know. And so it's like a preemptive strike: "We do this here and then we're going to have to give gays marriage rights so I can never vote for this, even though it may be the right thing to do." It's ridiculous.

NK: So how would you see your, so this is the same question as how would you see work going in the future?

GB: It's very frustrating. I happen to live in a very difficult time to choose to do what I do, because the winds of time are not with me. And the winds of time are with the other side of people who want to divide, who want to hate. Justice Jackson once said one thing that's so profound. He said, "We don't live in a pure democracy because if we did the majority would run roughshod over the minority." And that has been the beauty of the American system, that there is protections built in for minorities that you don't have elsewhere. So you can go and be a different religion, different racial group or ethnic group and coexist, and be under the same flag and support the same institutions. But we just have not, you know we've not lived up to what the possibilities are, and we're moving away from how far we're going. I think we were closer in the 70s than we are now, because I think people know--one of the biggest problems we have is individual ambition. Because of individual ambition, politicians can't ever do the right thing.

And it may be kind of a contradiction to what I just said about Clinton earlier but I don't think so. Because I think that Clinton really didn't please the left when he did welfare reform, or when he said mend affirmative action, but don't end it. I don't think it got him a lot of support. What I'm saying is that it's a whole melting pot, we have to all live together and coexist together. You know an old friend of mine, Joe Crews said that he was--I asked him who he was supporting for student body president after the student body bar association president was

removed at the law school. He said, "I'm supporting David Smith. He's a good white guy like me." I said, "Oh okay." So I hadn't really thought about that. We had minorities running and winning, and I supported a couple of minorities. And I said, "Well, you're right." I supported the same guy, because it made sense. You just can't have, 'this is not all me and you get nothing over here because you happen to be a white male.'

But everybody has to give and to meet each other somewhere, somewhere in between. That's where the genius is. If you can get people to see that, where it's just not fundamental like we're back in caveman days. Well, you know, you look a certain way so you're my enemy. So all you have to do is see somebody who looks different, and they're your enemy. And that's where you are. What we're trying to do is set an example for the world and say, "Look over in the Middle East, you can live, you can coexist together. You don't have to hate each other." There is a way to do that and it's really up to us to do that or we're going to end up, especially with the sophistication of weaponry and all that, we can see where we're going now with terrorism and things like that.

Martin Luther King's words are just so, so omnipresent in my mind. Because if we don't learn how to live together as brothers, we are really going to perish as fools, because these kinds of weapons are getting on the black market and none of us are going to be safe. People can use airplanes for weapons and just kill people indiscriminately without regard to who they are or their families or whatever, innocent people. You know it's a sad time that we live in, that people would do that, and thinking that they're doing something to honor God. And it's just going to get worse right now. Unless we really grab the bull by the horns and somebody that's really got the true conviction and the belief of what it's going to take to bring about humanity within humanity, we're not going to be around another year.

NK: Do you think that there is a question that you think I should be asking you or if you want to add something?

GB: No, just in terms of Voting Rights Act it's just, there's still a need for it to be here in Texas. There's still rampant discrimination against African American voters. Just look at what just happened with the Prairie View A&M students and the intimidation tactics against them to try to prevent them from voting. The State NAACP has just done hearings around the State, and found out, discovered hate crimes, and all kinds of unscrupulous activities to deny African Americans the right to vote in their proper proportions. And that's sad. And, you know, I just wish that both parties would compete for the vote and they wouldn't say, well one party wouldn't say, "Well it's our vote so we'll take it for granted," and the other party wouldn't say, "Well they're not with us so therefore we're going

to come at them and do harm to them in any way that we can." That's just not a good thing. It's just currently the way it is.

NK: Thank you very much.

GB: Sure, thank you.